

# *First Baptist Church NBC History*



Old First Baptist Church - 1908

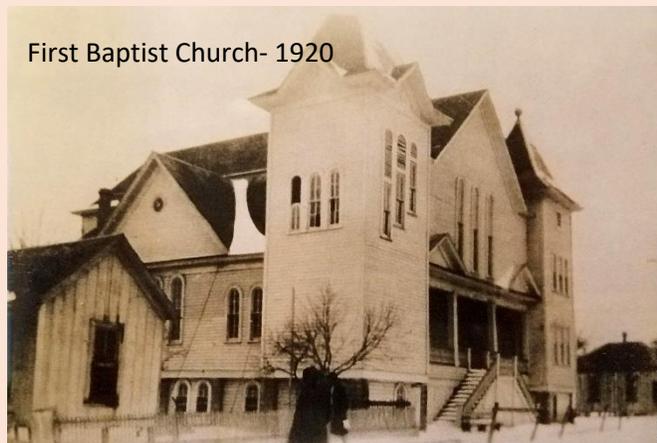
Deut. 32:7 says  
“Remember the days  
of old, consider the  
years of many  
generations: ask thy  
father, and he will  
show thee; thy  
elders, and they will  
tell thee.”

When freedom came in 1865, former slaves quickly established two important institutions: churches and schools. Reverend Moses Johns and a small group of believers organized the Colored Baptist Church Zion in 1866 and erected a sanctuary on property located on Guadalupe Street where Tuttle Lumber Company now stands. Rev. Johns was born in Tennessee in (ca1814 –ca1890). His wife Nancy was born in 1824 or 1825 in Tennessee, also. The 1870 and 1880 Federal Census records show Rev. Johns and his wife living in Guadalupe County. Rev. Johns and his wife had three sons: Isaiah, Aaron, and Abraham. In the late 1860s and 1870s, Moses Johns performed a number of marriage ceremonies, uniting newly freed slaves in Guadalupe County. He signed the marriage licenses as follows: “Moses Johns Minister ordained Baptist C.”. Rev. Johns served the congregation until 1873 when Rev. L. Stephens was called to lead the church. According to oral history accounts, the local Ku Klux Klan burned the sanctuary on Guadalupe Street in ca1873 in an attempt to capture a black man who was thought to have been hiding in the church. Oral history accounts suggest that the nineteenth century pulpit still used in the present sanctuary was rescued from that fire.

Because early records for Hays County were destroyed in a fire, we do not know when or from whom the Colored Baptist Church Zion purchased its first land on which to erect a house of worship. The Hays County Deeds book indicates that trustees E. Brown, Ketch McQueen, and Jack Gray purchased a lot on Purgatory Channel from Squire Rucker on the 15th day of June 1878. The selling price was “fifty dollars in hand” and a Promissory note at ten- percent interest due on December 1, 1878. In 1881, the congregation purchased the lot at 219 Comal Street where Old First Baptist still stands. The Hays County Deeds book indicates that trustees of the Colored Missionary Baptist Church, Ola Burleson, Dora Dusta, Lucky McQueen, and John Thomas, purchased a lot from Mrs. Julia Ann Travis for the sum of fifty cash and three promissory notes of fifty dollars each “payable respectively—October the 4th 1881, April 4th 1882 and October 4th 1882.”(Deed Book). By 1881, the church had changed its name from Colored Baptist Church Zion to Colored Missionary Church

Around the turn of the century, the congregation changed its name to First Missionary Baptist Church. In 1908, Rev. G. F. Curry led the congregation in the building of a large, impressive, Victorian-styled house of worship that is now known as the Historic Old First Baptist Church. The 1908 church with its elegant towers, spacious basement, gently sloping hardwood floors, beautiful windows, double entry steps, wide, airy porch, was designed by an architect whose name has been lost. Originally, the basement floor was dirt, but Bro. Tom Steen, a rock mason, installed a rock floor around 1918. A concrete floor was installed on top of the rock floor, probably in 1936. First Baptist was established by former slaves, and many of them were still alive in 1908 when the Comal Street edifice was built. Thus, Old First Baptist, even in its sadly altered state, is historically significant because our slave ancestors called upon the Lord within those consecrated walls. Rev. Curry served the congregation until 1920.

The records of the Guadalupe Baptist District Association reveal the important role that First Baptist San Marcos has played in its growth and development. For example, records indicate that the Guadalupe Baptist District Association was organized in 1872 with First Baptist San Marcos as a charter member. Moreover, our founding pastor, Rev. Moses Johns served as a moderator of the District Association. Other pastors of First Baptist who served as moderator of the Association include Rev. L. Stephens, (1878-79), Rev. G.F.C. Curry, (1897 & 1908), and Rev. P. J. Mays (1890). Rev. H. L. Newman served as Vice Moderator in 1899. Rev. Charles Connally and Rev. J. W. Wesley served as pastors of First Baptist and board members for the District Association. The Guadalupe Association met at First Baptist San Marcos in 1903 and again in 1908. The 95th annual session of the District Association was held at First Baptist San Marcos in 1967. The theme was "The Heritage of the Negro Church." Clearly, First Baptist has a long and distinguished history of service in the Guadalupe Baptist District Association.



First Baptist Church- 1920

The Guadalupe District Association met at First Baptist in 1924. An announcement in the San Marcos newspaper for August 22, 1924 reads:

***100 Voices To Be Heard at Colored Baptist Church***

***The Guadalupe Baptist Association, beginning August 25 to 31 inclusive, will hold its 51st annual session with the First Baptist Church (colored), in San Marcos, on the school campus in the beautiful shade of the banks of Purgatory creek.***

***One hundred voices are being trained to sing for the association, by Mrs. Florence G. Chretien, a specialist who received three years training in Boston.***

***These one hundred voices of jubilee and folk songs will render a special musical program Friday night, Aug. 22, at the First Baptist Church (col.).***

***We have arranged special accommodations for white people.***

***The singing is excellent, consisting of our best local talent, and is sure to please all who hear the program. Tickets, 25 cents and 35 cents.***

***J. W. Wesley, Pastor***

First Baptist has a long tradition of service to the Association and the local community. The one hundred-voice choir trained by Mrs. Chretien must have been a highlight of the Association, bringing blacks and whites together for an evening of sacred music.

Another announcement in the San Marcos Record dated January 4, 1924 suggests First Baptist's musical outreach ministry. The title of the announcement is "***Colored People to Bring Glee Club Here***". It reads as follows:

***To the San Marcos Record***

***Dear Sirs: This is to inform the people in and around San Marcos that the Mt. Ararat Glee Club (colored) of San Antonio, Texas will render a musical concert at the First Baptist Church (colored) at San Marcos, Saturday night, January 12, beginning at 8:15 p.m. The music will largely consist of the old-time jubilee melodies sure to please everybody.***

***Special seats for white people reserved.***

***The club is the best in San Antonio and among the best in the state. It comes highly recommended by Dr. I. R. Gates, pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, and others.***

***An admission of 25 cents will be charged. Places for the sale of tickets will be announced later.***

According to Deacon William Barnett (1911-2003), First Baptist was known throughout the area for musical events such as the glee club performance announced above. In the 1920s, First Baptist sponsored popular religious dramas, also.

Deacon William Barnett shared some of his memories of growing up in First Baptist. When he was a boy of seven or eight years old, he walked to church with his mother and grandmother. He did not have any shoes, so he would bring some lard grease in a piece of paper. When he got within sight of the church, he would stop and grease his dusty feet. Deacon Barnett also recalled how his mother and grandmother would walk faster when they were close enough to hear the congregation singing. Deacon Barnett remembered how he and other little boys would throw rocks at the pigeons that roosted in the church belfry. Also, Deacon Barnett said that he and the other boys would run to meet Rev. Parks who came to church in a horse drawn buggy. The boys competed for the chance to take Rev. Parks' horse to a nearby field to let him graze. Also, according to Deacon Barnett, First Baptist was known as the "silk stockings" church in the 1920s because many of the women in First Baptist wore silk stockings instead of the cheaper cotton stockings that less affluent women wore. Deacon Barnett was active in the Shepherd Boys League, and he recalled a teacher who lost his eyesight, but because he had memorized a large portion of scripture, he continued to lead the Shepherd Boys League, even though he was blind.

Although the church bell is rarely heard today, in years past, the bell was an important means of communicating with the community. According to Sis. Willie Bureson, Bro. J. S. Myers rang the bell for Sunday school in the 1920s. Bro. W. G. Bureson rang the bell after Bro. Myers's term ended. The bell was often rung when a member of the church died. Each bell has a distinctive tone that allowed careful listeners to distinguish among the various bells. For example, the practiced ear would not confuse Wesley Chapel's bell with First Baptist's bell. Nor would he or she confuse Jackson Chapel's bell with

Greater Bethel's bell. The exact age of our bell has not been determined, but it is well over a hundred years old.

Two of the most historically significant members of First Baptist were Martha Ann Benny Hawkins Lawshe and Ulysses Cephas. Sis. Lawshe was born a slave in Water Valley, Mississippi. James Madison Hawkins, Martha Benny's father, gave her to his niece, Georgia Hawkins Woods. Janice Woods Windle, a descendant of Georgia and Peter Woods, wrote a historical novel about the Lawshe and Woods families. In Windle's novel, *True Women*, Martha Benny is a character. Sis. Lawshe died in 1933, and her funeral was held in Old First Baptist. Mr. Ulysses Cephas (1884-1952) was a highly regarded blacksmith, civic leader, bandleader, deacon and choir member at First Baptist. In 1907, Bro. Cephas married Cora Willie Brady who was a granddaughter of Martha Benny Lawshe. Sis. Cephas was a choir member and soloist at First Baptist. She also sang with the Citywide Chorus directed by Sis. Grace Sanders. Sis. Cephas died on January 13, 1975, and her funeral was also held in Old First Baptist Church. Rev. Laval Singleton delivered the eulogy.

In 1936, Rev. J. C. Connally remodeled the 1908 building. The roof was lowered and the front steps were moved. The balcony was probably added during that period. Rev. Connally was active in the Guadalupe District Association, and he was a strong supporter of Guadalupe College, Seguin, Texas. Rev. Connally lived on his farm in Kyle, Texas until his death.

During Rev. Connally's tenure as pastor of First Baptist and for many years thereafter, the church served as a religious and cultural center in the community. For example, graduation programs and baccalaureate services for the San Marcos Colored School were held in the old church. Vacation Bible School and revivals were well-attended activities open to the community.

One of the most successful fundraising activities that First Baptist has ever launched was the Sunday Luncheons. Although it is difficult to determine the precise date that the luncheons began, we know that they were being served at least as early as the mid- 1940s when Rev. F.P. Robinson was pastor of First Baptist. The individuals who are credited with starting the Sunday Luncheons include Sis. Dora Lee Brady, Sis. Mollie Barnett, Sis. Peggy Greenwood, Sis. Hattie Nell Mack, Sis. Frances Myers, Sis. Ophelia Johns, Sis. Cordelia Majors, Sis. Velma Ramsey, and Bro. William Barnett. When the originators of the luncheons retired from the kitchen, the following women continued the tradition: Sis. Josie Mack, Sis. Helen Franks, Sis. Josie Sayles, and Sis. Ora Jean Young.

At a time when segregation was the rule, First Baptist served delicious, home cooked meals to an integrated group of patrons on Sundays after morning worship. Black and white patrons dined together in the church basement where fifty or sixty people could be seated. For about \$1.50, patrons could get a hot meal served buffet style on glass plates with real flatware. The popular luncheons were held on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. A typical menu featured turkey and dressing with the trimmings, ham, chicken and dumplings with homemade rolls and desserts. Deacon William Barnett's Cabrito (barbecued goat) was a favorite dish. The First Baptist Sunday Luncheons are an important part of the cultural history of San Marcos.

Rev. Milton C. Arnold was called to be the shepherd of First Baptist in 1948. On November 3, 1952, Rev. Arnold appointed a building fund committee consisting of the following members: Rev. Jessie Major, chairman, Sis. Iola Smith, secretary, Brother Raymond Reeder, treasurer; Sis. Clara Stiles, Sis. Willie Burleson, Sis. Willie Cephas, Brother Robert C. Thomas, Brother Tom Wilson; Brother L. E. Crenshaw, Brother Willie E. Freeman, and Brother George W. Kerr. On July 18, 1953, Brother Anthony Giles, Brother Tom Wilson, and Brother Leslie Traywick, Trustees for the First Missionary Baptist Church (as it was then called) applied to the First National Bank of San Marcos for a loan to remodel the sanctuary.

The trustees determined that the remodeling work could be accomplished for \$3,500.00. The bank agreed to loan the church that amount.



First Baptist Church- 1953 to present

On August 10, 1953, the remodeling work began with \$1,718.03 in the building fund. Brother Tom Wilson, chairman of the trustees, and three other trustees oversaw the project. However, after about two months into the project, the trustees realized that more work would be needed than they originally planned. The First National Bank agreed to loan the church the additional funds. The Smith

Brothers, George and James, were contractors for the work. The remodeling job was finished in December 1953 at a cost of \$10,728.77. The church borrowed \$9,000 from the bank and paid off the loan in eighteen months. Several women in the congregation commissioned a mural that was painted on a wall behind the baptistery. This excellent example of public art painted by Mrs. Marian Kyle can still be seen in the Old Church.

Rev. Arnold was a much beloved pastor of First Baptist. He was also highly respected in the community. Men sharing drinks on the corner would hide their beer bottles and put away their gambling paraphernalia when they saw Rev. Arnold approaching. He is also remembered for his compassionate and caring spirit. When a neighbor needed someone to bathe his body lesions, Rev. Arnold took on the task, making daily visits to the man's home to administer aid until the man recovered. At his funeral, which was held in the St. John's Tabernacle, a dove entered the sanctuary and alighted on his coffin, as a token of divine favor. Rev. Laval Singleton was called to lead First Baptist in 1958 and served until Rev. Mack Robinson.



First Baptist Church (NBC) - Circa 1950's

In 1980, Rev. Alphonso Washington was called to serve as pastor of First Baptist (NBC). He came to San Marcos in 1942 as a soldier stationed at the Gary Airfield. In 1943, he married Miss Rosa Mae Johns who was a member of First Baptist. He was called to pastor of Mason Lone Oak Baptist Church in 1956 where he served until he accepted the call from First Baptist (NBC). Rev. Washington added (NBC) to distinguish our church from the other First Baptist Church on Hutchinson Street. The NBC refers to our affiliation with the National Baptist Convention. By the early 1980s, First Baptist (NBC) needed major repairs; the roof was leaking, and the heating and cooling systems were outdated. Church trustees attempted to secure a permit from the City to do the repairs, but their request for a permit was denied. Apparently, the City wanted to encourage First Baptist to relocate in order to relieve the parking congestion on MLK Drive (formerly Comal Street) and Comanche. Under the able leadership of Rev. Washington, First Baptist voted to purchase land and build a new church.

In April 1985, the property at 420 S. Mitchell was purchased and construction began in October 1985. Deacons Robert Burleson (deceased), Wallace Cheatham, Israel Anderson, Johnny Bratton, Robert Bratton, Sam Nichols, worked with the contractor to make sure the work was done properly. They also coordinated the move furnishings from the Old Church to the new building. One of their most challenging tasks was moving the bell from the Old Church. The new church was dedicated on October 12, 1986 with Rev. John Hall, Vice Moderator of the Guadalupe District Association, as the speaker.

Rev. Washington is widely known for his commitment to community service. He served on the San Marcos school board for twelve years, and he served on many other boards and commissions. Rev. Washington is a charter member of the local ministerial alliance. A master plumber, he operated Washington's Plumbing service for many years. He was pastor of First Baptist (NBC) until 1989.

Around the time that the new church was built, a new tradition, the Taste Tea, was instituted at First Baptist. Sis. Helen Franks and Sis. Nelvia Burleson started the Taste Tea as a fundraiser for the deacons and trustees. Over the years, it evolved into a major fundraiser for the church. The Taste Tea is a gastronomic delight that features the best soul food imaginable. Held once a year in February as a Black History Month function as well as a fundraiser, the Taste Tea attracts people from as far away as Bay City. For \$12, patrons can sample a wide variety of soul food dishes. It is an occasion for good eating and community outreach.

On February 25, 1990, Rev. James B. Moyer was called to serve as Pastor of First Baptist (NBC). Rev. Moyer came to First Baptist (NBC) from Greater Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Austin, TX where he was an associate minister. A native of Jasper, TX, Rev. Moyer was noted for his outstanding singing voice. Under Rev. Moyer's leadership, First Baptist (NBC) joined the St. John's Landmark District Association where he served as recording secretary for the district annual session in 1990. Rev. Moyer's motto for the church, "Growing richer in grace, together," was a hallmark of his ministry. Sis. Brenda Pleasant was choir director during Rev. Moyer's tenure as pastor. Rev. Moyer served First Baptist (NBC) until 1992.

In February 1993, Rev. Glen Dale Franklin was called to pastor First Baptist Church (NBC). A Native of Monticello, Arkansas, Rev. Franklin came to First Baptist (NBC) from Killeen, Texas where he was a personnel/administrator supervisor with the United States Army stationed at Fort Hood. After 22 years in the United States Army, Rev. Franklin retired with an honorable discharge in March 1993. Also, he served as a deacon and associate minister in the Simmonsville Missionary Baptist Church in Killeen. Rev. Franklin, his wife, Doris, and their daughter, Tamisha, moved into the parsonage located at 743 MLK Drive. Before his health began to fail, Rev. Franklin could be seen jogging along MLK Drive. He maintained a high level of physical fitness which complemented his energetic preaching style. Caught up in the Spirit, Rev. Franklin would leave the pulpit and dash into the center aisle, fervently challenging the unsaved to accept Christ as their personal Savior. Deacons would jump up and rush to untangle the

microphone cord to allow him freedom to move up and down the aisle. Eventually, he acquired a cordless microphone which liberated him from the pulpit area. Rev. Franklin and Sis. Doris Franklin were outstanding soloists who were frequently asked to sing by special request.

During Rev. Franklin's tenure as pastor, many new members were added to the church roll and Elder Dennis Jones announced his call to the ministry. The pastor's study was moved to what was originally the choir room. Also, the pulpit area was enlarged and fitted with new carpet. Because Rev. Franklin was taller than average, the historic nineteenth century pulpit was too low for him. Therefore, a pedestal for the pulpit was built to accommodate Rev. Franklin's height. A new church van was purchased during Rev. Franklin's tenure. The Hammond C-3 organ was donated to the church in December 1995. Evangelist Jean Jones was the church organist and minister of music.

After an extended illness, Rev. Franklin passed away on October 21, 2001, holding onto his faith.

On September 1, 2002, Rev. Almond D. Dillard was installed as the twenty-second pastor of the historic First Baptist Church (NBC). Born in Meridian, Mississippi, Rev. Dillard was reared in Burlington, IA, Inglewood, CA, and Saint Louis, MO. He is married to Brenda Walker of Texarkana, Texas, and they have four children. Rev. Dillard holds degrees from the Community College of the Air Force and Wayland Baptist University (San Antonio Center). He retired from the United States Air Force after serving more than twenty years. Rev. Dillard has served several congregations in ministerial positions, including Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church, Saint Louis, MO, Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, Long Beach, CA, and West End Missionary Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas. He came to First Baptist (NBC) from the New Birth Baptist Church, Kingsbury, TX where he served as pastor for five and a half years.

Since assuming the pastorate of First Baptist (NBC), Rev. Dillard has baptized many new members. He has led the congregation in reaching important financial goals; for example, the note on the church van and the debt on the adjoining property, as well as the Church Mortgage was been paid off during his tenure. He has also led the church in acquiring approximately 4 acres of land directly across the street from the church from the city of San Marcos. The land was acquired for use with a 30 dollar per year lease for 5 years and renewable for 5 more years. The agreement stated that the church will assume ownership of the land after that time for the cost of improvements made to it. The vision is to build a parking lot, children's playground and outdoor fellowship pavilion.

Pastor Dillard organized a new women's ministry called The Pacesetters with Sister Shannon Carr as the ministry leader. Rev. Dillard established the Helps Ministry that collects and distributes food and clothing for the needy. The Helps Ministry donates food regularly to the local food bank and every fourth Saturday the homeless are fed at the San Marcos Southside Homeless Shelter. Currently the Helps Ministry has partnered with WIC (Women's Infants and Children) to provide a hot meal and offer service. Under his leadership the Deacon's ministry now visits and ministers at local Assisted living facilities. Pastor Dillard has also established the Hospitality Ministry with First-lady, Sis. Brenda Dillard, as the Ministry Leader. This ministry is responsible for ensuring visitors are made welcome and Christian centered outreach takes place during our worship services. He appointed Rev. James Mathews to serve as our first Minister of Christian Education. Rev. James Mathews served in that position from 2003-2005 and from 2010-2012 and then accepted a Senior Pastor position at Center Union Baptist Church in Creedmoor, TX. Pastor Michael White II was appointed the First Assistant Pastor in 2003 and served in that capacity until leaving to become a full-time senior pastor. Ordained under the leadership of Pastor Dillard was Rev. Alaric Roberson and he licensed Rev. Michael White, Jr., Rev. Steven Nolan., Rev. Ronald Rector, Rev. Colby Cotton, and Rev. Alicia Cotton.

Pastor Dillard has led the church in many Facility improvements. A new sound system was installed in 2008 and the parsonage was renovated and sold in 2018. In 2010 the Church purchased a new State of the art Keyboard and retired the beautiful Baby Grand piano which was transported from the historical 'Old First Baptist' to the current address. The Baby Grand piano played and inspired spiritual music for over 60 years and has withstood the times and musicians to still gracefully bring out beautiful music. Other improvements to date include re-carpeting of the sanctuary, ceramic tiling of the fellowship hall, back hallway, Pastor's Restroom, and Finance office; as well as re-carpeting of the Pastor's study and a major technology over-haul. The stage and pulpit area were also re-built and expanded. Rev. Dillard recruited Rev. Alaric Robertson in 2002, a gifted musician and songwriter, who served as minister of music for 8 years before being ordained in 2012 and appointed Pastor of Worship. Minister Brendan Hunt then began serving as Minister of Music in 2012 when Reverend Robertson was made Pastor of Worship.



Pastor Dillard believes in the Ranch-hand model of leadership and established a Church Council consisting of the First Baptist Ministry Leaders in 2008. With his leadership the council proceeded to modify the Church Constitution and produce a set of comprehensive Church bylaws. When Pastor Dillard came to First Baptist in 2001 he initiated the first documented annual budget complete with budget codes for income and expenditures, allowing for tracking of all of the Churches financial matters. The Church Council reviews and recommends the annual budget to the congregation for ratification and implementation. In 2010 Pastor Dillard established the first Website for the Church "firstbaptistnbc.org" and "firstbaptistnbc.com" giving the church an on-line presence and bringing us into the 21st century. Currently the website has been revised and a new website "fbtnbc.org" was developed along with creating a Facebook page, building a phone application and on-line giving options for the convenience of those who are not able to attend church services and want to stay involved with church activity. Rev. Dillard, an outstanding preacher, teacher, administrator, counselor, and soloist continues to lead First Baptist (NBC) in the "paths of righteousness."



Tech Booth- Circa 2010



Tech Booth Construction- May 2017



In the words of the songwriter, First Baptist (NBC) has "come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord." We pray that our Father in heaven will continue to bless and keep First Baptist in His care.

***Dr. Elvin Holt, Church Historian with updates by Pastor A.D. Dillard and Sis. Shannon Carr***

***Sources: Information for this revised history of First Baptist (NBC) comes from U.S. Census records, deeds, death certificates, interviews and conversations with Bro. William Barnett, Sis. Mollie Barnett, Sis. Willie Burleson, Sis. Katherine Steen Hardeman, Sis. Elberta P. Williams (all deceased), Sis. Helen Franks, Sis. Johnnie Armstead, Sis. Josie Nell Mack, and Sis. Nelvia Burleson. For information on Rev. Moses Johns, I am indebted to Ms. Jamie Harris. I am also indebted to Sis. Susie Thomas (deceased) who recorded the first "History of First Baptist." Rev. Alphonso Washington is an invaluable source of information on the history of First Baptist (NBC).***