

Church History

The first Baptist services in this community were held in the log cabin belonging to Calvin Spencer, but no Baptist Society was organized until December 30, 1840. Rev. Isaac Martin, a Harvard University graduate, was sent by the Baptist Home Missionary Society into this region. Rev. Martin and family, traveling with horse and buggy, broke down between Coral and Marengo. Upon being told that several of the settlers were of Baptist faith, he and his wife remained a few days to call upon the families. They found these families were anxious to form a church. On December 30, 1840, the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church was organized. Rev. Martin served as the first pastor. The church originally met at the Moses Spencer house and then in a log school house where the current Coral Cemetery is located. In 1851, the church changed its name to "The Coral Baptist Church". It had 80 members and was well attended by folks from as far as five (5) to eight (8) miles.

Early in the 1850's the railroad was built in Marengo and people generally recognized the fact that the coming years would see a larger settlement in Marengo

than at Coral, On August 28, 1852 a meeting was held and "The Marengo Baptist Church" was formed.

The first meeting was held on September 11, 1852 at the Calvin Spencer home, where 23 attendees presented their certificates of baptism. In 1853, five hundred dollar was borrowed from the Home Mission Society to construct a building. By 1854, the building was enclosed, but funds ran out and the building came to a halt.

During that winter, any remaining materials were stolen.

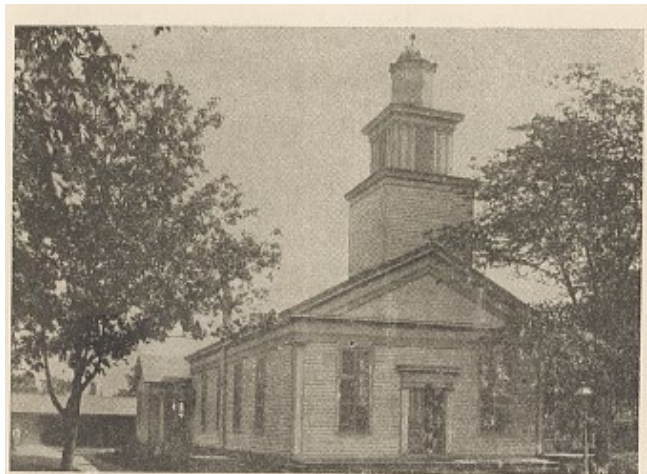
On June 2, 1855 the Coral Church and Marengo Church officially merged. Between 1852 and 1857 Rev.

Lawrence supplied the pulpit during which tenure

the church building was completed and dedicated in 1857. In 1857, church membership grew due to many evangelism meetings that were held during the winter. In 1859, two women were appointed to help with finances and in 1863 it was reported that the church's indebtedness (\$600.00) was cleared up.

In 1865, a building campaign was started in order to build a parsonage. Over \$1500.00 was raised and building began at once. By July 1866, the parsonage was completed at a total cost of \$2,236.56. An interesting fact was shared that the pastor's salary in 1870 was increased from \$600.00 to \$1,000.00 a year.

In 1870, the church bought an organ. As this was such a joyous occasion, the Methodists and Presbyterians helped to celebrate, but it was noted that some members of the Baptist Church felt that their presence desecrated the house of God, but the objections were overcome and soon everyone was enjoying the beautiful



The picture above shows the first house of worship of the Baptist Church. It was dedicated July 22, 1857, and abandoned January 3, 1897.

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In 1895, the church was thriving and a new building needed to be considered. In the spring of 1896, a committee was selected to see if \$8000.00 could be raised. In a week and a day, \$8.852.00 was subscribed. Member J.H. Patterson supplied the lumber to build the church. The new church was dedicated on January 24, 1897 for a total cost of \$11,779.32. On the day of dedication, additional subscriptions of \$2,000.00 were raised and the church was paid for in full with a balance left.

In March of 1900 an evangelistic meeting was held with Billy Sunday doing the preaching. These meetings were sponsored by all three churches (Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians). Over 40 new members joined the Baptist Church as a result of this evangelism. The church continued to thrive. In 1911, the church sponsored the first Boy Scout Troop and in 1918, a WWI Service Banner was dedicated. Due to a lack of coal, all three churches joined together for Sunday services. In 1926, the parsonage was rebuilt.

The first classroom was dug out under the existing church in 1936. In 1939, the church was repainted and the hardwood maple floor in the Fellowship Hall and the Primary Room. In 1940, the outdoor bulletin board was donated by the Young People Society. More improvements occurred to the church and in 1956 the entire basement of the church was dug out by hand and with the help of wheel barrels to form the current Sunday School rooms. In 1958, the large stained glass windows were reinforced.

In 1970, the organ and choir were moved from the loft to the main floor of the sanctuary. In 1977, the parsonage was sided and new carpeting was put into the sanctuary. In 1982 the Prayer Chapel was opened and in 1986, the aluminum siding was placed on the church. As the church moved into the 1990's and 21st century, many more improvements have occurred which included air conditioning, new hot water heaters, new furnaces, new roofs, remodeling the Fellowship Hall, painting the Sanctuary, repairing the Bell Tower, new kitchen and bathroom in the Parsonage, a new playground, reinforcing the amazing stained-glassed windows, and most recently an update to the sound system.

As one can tell from this amazing tale, First Baptist Church began as a light to the community. We are in our 182nd year of serving the Lord and reaching the unsaved. We look forward to continuing to be the light to this ever darkening world.

