

## Presbyterian History

The first protestant church service was held on October 13, 1839, at Bullock's hotel, called by a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend William Y. Allen. That was two and a half months before the city of Austin was chartered on December 27, 1839. The would-be congregation was dispersed by fear of Indian raids, which caused many citizens to flee to Washington on the Brazos.

In the fall of 1848 Dr. Daniel Baker, who had been sent to Texas by the General Assembly and the Presbytery of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, "rode into Austin on horseback from San Antonio, through country inhabited by Indians. Arriving safely, he began his evangelistic services in Austin. To quote Dr. Baker, 'In due time, I arrived safely in Austin, the Capital of Texas: and here, besides preaching some fifteen sermons to promiscuous assemblies, I made special talks to heads of families, to young men, ladies and children, not forgetting the children of Ham,' Dr. Baker goes on to say that many would have joined the Presbyterian Church had there been one. He mentions the fact that there was an admirably conducted Sabbath School in Austin at that time."<sup>1</sup>

It was Dr. Baker's son, the Reverend William Mumford Baker, who established the first Presbyterian Church in Austin. The first service was held in the old capital building on May 26, 1850. Reverend Baker served the congregation for the next fifteen years and saw it through the tumultuous times of the Civil War, but in December 1865 he resigned and returned north.

With the civil strife following the war, in 1866 "a small group of eleven members who withdrew from the church, which stayed with the Presbytery of Central Texas, and organized the Southern Presbyterian Church of Austin. This Presbytery had seceded from the General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church, but the First Presbyterian Church remained loyal to this Assembly."<sup>2</sup>

It seems in the pain of those days, God sent a special emissary from the north. First Presbyterian called the Reverend Edward Bingham Wright, D.D., of Stillwater, Minnesota, to the pastorate. On November 3, 1872, he preached his first sermon in the First Presbyterian Church of Austin. This was the beginning of a relationship, which lasted until his death forty-two years later.

The ministry of Dr. Wright left its imprint on Austin's citizenry. He came at the close of the Civil War, at a time of confusion and hatred, but he soon made friends of those who traditionally should have been enemies. Dr. Wright was so beloved by the Confederate soldiers that he was made an honorary member of the John B. Hood Camp of Confederate Veterans, a unique honor for a Union soldier.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.acswebnetworks.com/fpcaustin/article215793.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.