

## **Baptists Gather and Build**

(The information in this article is taken from the revised booklet entitled *A Persistent People* by James M. Sapp and revised by David W. Smith.)

### **Evangelism**

With the admission of Texas into the United States in 1845, Baptists entered the state with a missionary conquest. Evangelism has always been a hallmark of the Baptist Church. In his Historical Address at the Diamond Jubilee of the Austin Baptist Association in 1932, J. N. Marshall described the pioneer missionary of the early days of Austin Baptists:

“....The frontier missionary went on horseback with a pair of saddle bags strapped across the cantle of his saddle, with a Bible in one bag and Hymn Book in the other and the sparest amount of change in clothing. He says his tearful good-byes to loved ones, and starts his months’ journeys...He preached in private homes and little school houses, and when he finds a little encouragement, and the spirit seems to be moving among the people, he tarries for a few days’ meetings....”

It was not only the ministers on horseback that carried the message of Christ. Churches and pastors showed a burning passion for spreading the gospel with lost people. The growth of the Baptist work across the years is due largely to the enduring emphasis put on evangelism. Women formed missionary societies that spread the message of Christ’s love. In the early 1930’s the efforts of Austin women were focused on a Goodwill Center, established on East First Street. In 1965 the Goodwill Center began to work with Operation Brotherhood under the Association’s Social Services Ministry and provided family services, food and clothing distribution, worship services and other services to people in East Austin.

### **Education**

Another major contribution from the Baptists was in the area of Christian education. The Baptists were not the first to have Sunday School in Austin. That distinction belongs to the Methodists who had Sunday School as early as 1848. However, the Baptists organized a school in 1857 and by 1913 had a graded plan to present a viable program of Christian education. They have continued to keep the Bible as a central focus in educating their people.

### **Ethnic Groups**

Jacob Fontaine, one of the most powerful African Americans in Austin’s early history, took the black members of First Baptist Church (after emancipation) and formed the first black congregation in Austin. He went on to found five more churches and the Saint John Regular Missionary Baptist Association, which has been through history and still is an impacting presence in East Austin. For more of this story, go to <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffo30>.

In March, 1899 a building was obtained near the old Austex Chili Company, and the First Mexican Baptist Church was constituted. The first pastor was Santiago Musa who had been leading services for small groups. The struggles of Mexican Baptists in central and south Texas during the first century to provide education for its future leaders culminated in the Valley Baptist Academy in Harlingen and the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute in San Antonio.

Each particular Baptist Church has its own history. Many of those can be found on the churches' websites. Regardless of location in the city or color of the congregants' skin, where there is a Baptist congregation, there is a bent toward bring people to Jesus and training them in His word.