

City of Bastrop Agenda Information Sheet:



**Historic Landmark Commission Meeting Date:
Designation of a Historic Landmark**

**January 18, 2017
Agenda Item #5**

Project:

Historic Landmark designation of the First United Methodist Church, including The Memorial Bell Tower located at 1201 Main Street

Description and Background:

The 1925 the First United Methodist Church building was built during an architectural period after the First World War when so many public buildings borrowed from Neoclassical and Romanesque details. The flat (no pitch) roof (parapet) and modified arch Romanesque window openings were designed to accommodate stained glass. There are fifteen windows in the sanctuary, and all are associated with members who contributed to major events in Bastrop's past.

Public Hearings were held before the Historic Landmark Commission on September 21, 2016, Planning and Zoning Commission on September 29, 2016 and City Council on October 11, 2016 to designate 1201 Main Street as a Significant Landmark. The Sanctuary structure met 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 and The Memorial Bell Tower met 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 of the criteria listed below:

1. Possesses significance in history, architecture, archeology or culture.
2. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, region, state or national history.
3. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in Bastrop's past.
4. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.
5. Represents the work of a master designer, builder or craftsman.
6. Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the city.
7. Is designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark or State Archeological Landmark, or is included on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Historic Landmark designation entitles the owner to a rebate on a portion of the ad valorem taxes and an official City of Bastrop Historic Landmark plaque to designate the structure.

The historic designation requires a Certificate of Appropriateness, approved by the Historic Landmark Commission, for any construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, rehabilitation or relocation of any Historic Landmark. Any material change to fences or other exterior elements visible from the public right-of-way which affect the appearance and cohesiveness requires an approved Certificate of Appropriateness.

City Contact:

Launa Eckert, Planning Technician

Attachments:

Agreement for Historic Landmark Designation, History and pictures

Narrative for the Application to the Historic Landmark Commission for
Significant Landmark Designation for the
First United Methodist Church & Memorial Bell Tower
1201 Main Street, Bastrop, Texas

In 1923, lightning struck the belfry of the old Methodist Episcopal (M. E.) Church, South, setting fire to the tower. The fire was extinguished before it spread, but the congregation soon determined that their old frame building on Church Street, built in 1851, needed to be replaced.

The congregation had been organized in 1835 while Bastrop was still a colony under Mexican law; before the Battle of San Jacinto and before the era of the Republic of Texas. After Statehood in 1845, the congregation continued to expand and by 1851 they built the first church in Bastrop, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. (1) Those families who descended from that historic congregation were among those who made the painful decision to abandon their old church and replace it with a new one in another location.

The site for a new building was on Farm Lot #1, East of Main, at the northeast corner of the intersection of Main and Farm Streets. Previously on the site, had been the Lone Star Mill, built in 1857, established to produce cloth and yarn from locally produced cotton, when "cotton was king." The mill was renamed in 1864 as the Bastrop Cotton and Wool Manufacturing Company. After the Civil War the business expanded to include a blacksmith shop and grist mill.

In 1870 the factory was purchased by Fawcett & Co. By 1875 the mill had 26 looms, 1,250 spindles, 4 cotton carders and 2 wool carders. It was able to turn out about 1,200 yards of various weaves daily and required 40 people to operate it. In 1879, the Mill was converted into a cotton gin but eventually failed due to "want of skilled labor" and trouble marketing its product. (2)

The site was purchased by church member, William A. McCord, and the old buildings were torn down in 1924 to make way for the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South. McCord was President of the First National Bank, and his wife, Sally, had been the church organist for 40 years. (3)

Construction for the new brick, one-story-with-basement, structure began in 1924 and was completed in 1925 at a cost just over \$50,000. A current church member (2016), Marvin E. Beck, AIA, Emeritus, describes the building's architecture:

The 1925 United Methodist Church building was built during an architectural period after the First World War when so many public buildings borrowed from Neo-classical and Romanesque details, all of which are an integral part of the structure. Note the flat (no pitch) roof (parapet) and modified arch Romanesque window openings designed to accommodate the stained glass from the original wooden church. It is truly an eclectic architectural style which very well could have been a library, courthouse, or a public building, state or federal – all "imposing" structures to express "authority."

It is clear that the Venetian stained-glass windows had a significant influence over the design and architecture of the building. All of the stained-glass windows from the little wooden church were removed and re-used, and new-stained glass windows were purchased to complete the symmetrical design of the building.

There are 15 windows in the sanctuary, and all are associated with members who contributed to major events in Bastrop's past. Within each window, is a small area that identifies the name of the donor or honoree. Among the names written on the windows from the old church are the Robert Gill family who lived near Gills Branch and for whom Gills Branch is named; Mrs. Campbell Taylor who came to Bastrop when it was still a colony in Mexico and owned the historic "San Jacinto House" at 1005 Hill Street; Margaret Chambers whose first husband was famous settler Josiah Wilbarger who was scalped by Indians - yet lived to tell his tale; and Battle of San Jacinto Veteran Abram Wiley Hill. (4)

Names of donors or honorees written within the windows purchased in 1925 are, among others, Mollie McDowall (1843-1931) who played the organ for both the Methodist Church and the Calvary Episcopal Church. Her book, *Memoirs of Mollie McDowall*, remains an important resource for writers and historians who study Bastrop history. Also honored in the 1925 windows is Caroline Eilers who is associated with one of the major events in the history of the town. Caroline, with her husband, Louis Eilers, owned the Eilers Building where a fire began that destroyed every building in the 900 block of Main in July, 1862. (5)

On March 15, 1924, the corner stone was dedicated. It reads:

M. E. Church, South	
Organized 1838	Erected 1924
Building Committee	
Mrs. B. D. Orgain	W. E. Maynard
W. B. Ransome	E. S. Orgain
E. C. Erhard	J. B. Price
W. J. Miley	M. C. Booth

Those listed on the Building Committee were members of Bastrop's banking, social, political, and merchant community. The dedication remarks were delivered by Building Committee member, **Mrs. Benjamin Darby Orgain**. Her legacy includes the founding of the Ladies Reading Circle which later sponsored the Bastrop County Historical Society, the establishment of the Fairview Cemetery Association (an organization that lasted well over 100 years), and her home, the B. D. Orgain House, a Texas Historical Medallion home located at 1508 Church Street.

Others listed on the cornerstone are: **William B. Ransome**, a trustee and treasurer for the church and president of the First National Bank of Bastrop from 1930 to 1951; **Earl C. Erhard**, a director and the future president of First National Bank (1951 - 1965); **Will Miley**, owner and operator of Miley Drug Store on Main Street from 1905 until his death in 1947 – his family continued the business until 1967; **William Edward Maynard**, called “W.E.” who was elected for five consecutive terms as Bastrop City Attorney; **E. S. Orgain** who operated one of several coal mines north of Bastrop – the mines were Bastrop County’s financial engine after the decline of the cotton industry; **Joseph B. Price**, a lawyer, District Judge and Bastrop County Judge for 10 years from 1894 to 1904; and **M. C. Booth**, a prominent merchant and co-owner of Percy and Booth mercantile store located at 1022 & 1024 Main Streets. Like those names identified in the stained-glass windows, all those who are listed on the corner stone made important contributions to the social, financial, and political life of Bastrop. (6)

In 1928, a memorial bell-tower was constructed behind the church to house the old bell which once hung at the 1851 church and also at the Bastrop Academy, a premier educational facility located across the street from the old church. The dedication remarks for the tower were delivered by Bastrop native, Robert Lynn Batts (1846 – 1935). Batts was raised in the Bastrop Methodist Church.

A portion of his remarks reads:

There is a legend that tells us the bell came to Bastrop up the Colorado River on the riverboat “The Moccasin” during the time the river was navigable...The bell looks upon an era that is past. An era that has seen pioneers come from the north and the old south across the prairies to settle on the Colorado in the beautiful valley surrounded by pine clad hills.

When the new Methodist Church was built, there was no place provided for the old bell. Bells were out-dated and not used in the modern edifices... Now the bell has a permanent home so it can continue its service of calling the people of Bastrop of today, as it did our forefathers, for the purpose of worship, prayer, and rendering of thanks to our Divine Father, the maker and giver of all the blessings of this life. (7)

The bell-tower became a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1966.

Batts is among many in the church who made an impact on national and state events. He was a United States Federal judge 1917-1919 and Assistant State Attorney General of Texas 1891- 1893. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives, and was a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin where Batts Hall is named in his honor. A stained glass window in the church sanctuary was purchased in memory of his parents, A. J. and Julia Batts.

However, there are those in the congregation who were not in the public eye, yet made a lasting imprint on our community. James H. Perkins graduated from Bastrop High School in 1928 and married Mary Cook in 1934. The popular couple sang in the church choir - James being a soloist. During World War II, Sgt. James H. Perkins was killed in action in Italy, September, 1944. The Bastrop American Legion was named in his honor, and on August 20, 2016, the James H. Perkins American Legion will be hosting a celebration to commemorate its 70th year.

The imposing architectural style of the First United Methodist Church was built on the site of the old Lone Star Cotton Mill. Since that time, the church building has become a familiar feature on Main Street; the church for 91 years - the Bell Tower for 88 years. Even longer, since 1835, the congregation has participated in the important history and events in our community, state, and nation.

Footnotes

1. *Bastrop Advertiser*, "Bastrop's Historic Methodist Congregation," Bastrop, October 16, 1980.
2. Lone Star Mills, Bastrop County Historical Society archives, 904 Main St. Bastrop, Texas.
3. Pape, Allan, *150 Years of Methodism in Bastrop, 1835 – 1985*, "The Organ" by Mrs. E. F. Pearcy, April, 1985.
4. Family Files, Bastrop County Historical Society archives, 904 Main St., Bastrop Texas.
5. *Bastrop Advertiser*, March 4, 1889
6. Various sources including: Kesselus, Kenneth, *The First National Bank, A Century of Progress and Service in the Bastrop Community 1889-1989*, and Standifer, R. E. and Amy, and R. E. Standifer, Jr., "Cultural Organization of Early Bastrop," *In the Shadow of the Lost Pines*, 1955, and Family Files, Bastrop County Historical Society archives, 904 Main St. Bastrop, Texas.
7. Haynie, Mrs. Fred, "The Historical Methodist Church Bell," a paper presented at a meeting of the Bastrop Historical Society in which she wrote *...the material in this article was taken verbatim from a talk made by Judge R. L. Batts at the dedication of the Memorial Tower...*, Bastrop County Historical Society archives, 904 Main St. Bastrop, Texas.

Note: In 1784 Methodism was organized in America. In 1844 a division within the church resulted in the Methodist Episcopal Church South/North. The first church building in Bastrop in 1851 was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Then, in 1939, the North and South churches joined together and named themselves the Methodist Church. In 1968, the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church and changed its name to the United Methodist Church.



