



First Presbyterian Church

By Maxine Page



First Presbyterian Church and Manse

I count it a great privilege to be able to share with you the exciting history of the First Presbyterian Church of Eldorado of which I have been a member since 1931. At that time the church was well organized and thriving, and had a distinct "family" atmosphere which has continued to permeate its life through the years. Upon searching the records and visiting with early members I find that there is valid reason for this situation, since the present church is the result of the union of two churches, both of which had their beginnings on ranches in Schleicher County shortly after the turn of the century.

In 1903 a group of West Texas pioneers met in the ranch home of Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Holland and organized the first Presbyterian church in the county. The Holland ranch was located northwest of Eldorado near the old Vermont headquarters, and was referred to as the Vermont Presbyterian church. The county had not been organized long, and the scattered people were hungry for preaching as well as fellowship with one another.

The Reverend J. C. Tanner (who was in West Texas for his health) was the organizing minister, and it began with eleven members. Although the records and minutes have been lost, Mr. and Mrs. Holland recall the following charter members: Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Holland, Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Barbee (parents of Mrs. Holland), Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Holland, Bertha Holland (now Mrs. Sam Oglesby of Eldorado), Bessie Holland (Mrs. O. M. Smith, Brownwood), Mr. Griggs, and Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Barbee of Eldorado.

Reverend Tanner continued to preach once each month for some time and was followed by the Reverend J. F. Floyd of Mertzon, who was still pastor of the church in 1911. He was preaching the second Sunday of each month at the Methodist church in Eldorado, and at the Holland ranch home the afternoon of the same day. Mrs. Holland recalls that preparation for church began on Saturday, with the women baking pies and cakes for the dinner. Neighbors came with well filled lunch baskets and the

community shared in an all day meeting. There was great interest in the religious services; for a time they conducted a Sunday School which boasted about 35 members. The Holland home was very proud of owning a piano, and since it had to be hauled from San Angelo by wagon, it was quite a luxury. Miss Bessie Holland was the pianist, and it is safe to say the piano music was no small drawing card for the ranchmen and their families. Some of the families represented as recalled by Mrs. Holland were those of M. P. Evans, Ed Jones, Green Chaney, O. K. Enochs, Capt. Smith, A. J. Roach, John Roach, and the Calcotes.

About 1912 the Holland family moved into the town of Eldorado and carried their church organization with them. By courtesy of the Methodist people, services were held once a month in their building.

In 1912 another group of Presbyterians, headed by Mr. Sam E. Jones, organized a church in the eastern part of the county, and I quote from the original minutes of the Mayer church, as it was called: "On the 20th day of October, 1912, at the Middle Valley School house, Reverend J. F. Lloyd, acting evangelist of Brownwood Presbytery organized the Mayer Presbyterian Church according to the Book of Church Order with the following members: Mrs. Delia Crosby, Mr. John T. Jones, and wife Ann Jones, Mr. Sam E. Jones and wife Martha Jones, Mrs. Emma Nix, Mrs. Johnnie Page and Mrs. Mary Yoas. The first three by Letter from the Presbyterian church of Eldorado, Mr. Sam Jones, Mrs. Johnnie Page and Mrs. Mary Yoas from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and Mrs. Martha Jones and Mrs. Emma Nix from the Christian church. Mr. Sam E. Jones and Mr. John T. Jones were duly elected, ordained, and installed, the former as elder and the latter as deacon of the Mayer Church." J. F. Lloyd.

This church continued as an organization for several years with only occasional preaching services. The community maintained a Sunday School which reached a membership of about 77, but the church membership was never large, due principally to the fact that people were so scattered.

Finally Mr. Sam Jones and family moved to Eldorado; the Mayer church was discontinued, and the members united with the Eldorado church that had been started on the Holland ranch.

Thus the Presbyterian Church of Eldorado, as it is today, began with the union of these two ranch family churches. For some time the membership remained small, with services being held once a month still in the Methodist church. During these years the church was served by the Reverend W. L. Downing, and in 1923 by the Reverend W. A. Nash, who drove down from Sterling City. During his pastorate some new members were added, among them Bert Page, H. T. Finley, Jim Williams, five Isaacs children, and Elizabeth and Margaret Bradley.

In 1924 the Reverend Guy Davis was made Superintendent Evangelist of Brownwood Presbytery and stationed in San Angelo. Mr. Davis preached at least once a month and his ministry was indeed fruitful, as in 1925 a beautiful modern church was built at a cost of \$12,500 and dedicated free of debt. Although the structure has been renovated and modernized several times, it remains the place of worship for the congregation to this date. The building must have been constructed with a minimum of problems. I noted in referring to the minutes as recorded

by clerk of the session Sam E. Jones on August 2, 1925, the session reviewed the blue prints submitted by Rev. Guy Davis and a congregational meeting was called for August 7, to name committees to see to the erection of the building. The next mention of the building in the recorded minutes was April 4, 1926, when services were held in the new church!

Apparently the planning and building of their own church home was the signal of a growing period, as the membership increased from 23 to 119 in 1932. Another contributing factor was the erection of the attractive brick manse in 1930 which was given by Mr. and Mrs. Tom K. Jones. When the manse was completed the Reverend W. B. Gray came as stated supply and he and Mrs. Gray were its first occupants. Dr. Gray only served the church for two years, but it grew rapidly during his ministry. In addition to regular services he conducted services on Sunday afternoons out at Station A, as it was called. I can remember going with him out there to play the piano when I was just a child.

After Dr. Gray left, there was not a pastor for about a year; then a young man named Allen Holley was called, but due to ill health only remained a few months. The first resident pastor was Reverend Noel P. Wilkinson, who came with his wife Sarah in a model T ford in 1930. As Noel and Sarah recall, they came with only a few household belongings and a "car full of cats", and left eleven years later with a new car, a house full of furniture, and daughters! The years were busy ones for the Wilkinsons and the congregation as it spread its wings and reached out to the budding community. Snapshots of officers of the church during this time as recorded in the church history include: Elders Sam E. Jones, F. B. Gunn, R. D. Holt, Joe B. Edens, Tom K. Jones, and Edwin M. Jackson. Deacons pictured were: Elton Ellis, H. T. Finley, Frank Bradley, Jim Williams, and Leslie Baker.



*Noel P. Wilkinson
First Pastor*

The Woman's Auxiliary was very active and growing through these years, having been organized back in the days of the Mayer church, although the present group was organized in 1925 with the following officers: Mrs. R. A. King, president, Mrs. S. W. Holland, vice-president, Mrs. Will Isaacs, treasurer, and Mrs. Bert Page, secretary. The outstanding accomplishment of the women that year was placing a floor in the basement of the church, equipping the kitchen, and installation of plumbing. With such ambitious goals at its inception, it is easy to see why the 'Women of the Church', as it is called now, has always been a very vibrant part of the church's work and worship.

The Wilkinsons moved to Fort Stockton in 1941 and five



Church Gathering at Presbyterian Church

men were selected to procure a new pastor. They were: Edwin Jackson, Jim Williams, Joe Edens, Leslie Baker, and W. M. Patterson. Their selection was Reverend Kelly Neal, who arrived from Kilgore Jan. 2, 1942 at a salary of \$125 a month plus the Minister's Annuity Fund. Kelly's ministry was fruitful even though the war was on and many young men were away, and it was with regret that he and Elizabeth and their young son accepted a call from the church at San Marcos in 1943.

The Reverend John A. Carriker came to the church from Marion, Ohio, arriving August 3, 1944 with his wife, Betsy and their son Donald. This too was a war ministry, and the Carrikers were devoted to the cause of praying for and aiding our boys in the service, which by now numbered about 34. During the Carriker years the church had a homecoming for all former ministers and members to the congregation who had moved away. It was an exciting day, featuring the regular Sunday School and morning worship services, dinner in the basement, and an afternoon devotional service. The Carrikers left in July 1946 to go to a church in North Carolina, and it was not until July of 1947 that the Reverend and Mrs. F. E. King came from Edinburg. An interesting side light from the church history relating to the week of preaching by Mr. King before he arrived as pastor: "We were pleasantly surprised at the good crowds attending, since the Baptist people had a revival in progress at the same time".

For some years there had been a rather active youth

program in the church, one of the more "famous" groups being Winnie Jackson's crusaders. This group of junior age met on Wednesday afternoons after school, and many young people were reached for Christ through Winnie's unique ministry.

There were other signs of progress: Men of the church, organized by Noel Wilkinson continued to be active, and music assumed a more prominent role with the beginning of regular choir practice and the addition of choir robes for the first time. Also in 1947, under the direction of Edwin Jackson, Jack Ratliff, and W. M. Patterson an extensive remodeling program was carried out; the sanctuary was redecorated and refurnished, including the removal of the old theatre style seats and the installation of beautiful wooden pews and pulpit furniture, and the addition to the rear of the building of thirty feet, the added space being utilized for educational space, pastor's study, and choir room. To complete the project Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Jackson presented the church with a Hammond organ and carillon chimes system. All these things added to the life of the church; by 1949 there were 135 communicants, and the pastor's salary was \$3500 per year, with the total budget being \$6000. The renovation project came to about \$10,000, but many donations held the cost down — fixtures, furniture, labor, etc.

Reverend King left the pastorate here in 1950, and the elders of the church were elected to secure a new pastor. During the interim period the manse was remodeled by

adding a bedroom and bath to the rear of the house and making other needed improvements in the present structure. Thus all was in order when the church extended a call to Reverend Charles G. Bruce of Kennedy, Texas on May 13, 1951. "Charlie" as he was affectionately called, arrived in the summer with his wife Lucile and their two sons. They were a delightful family, and in addition to being a talented organist, Lucile organized a group of the young women of the church into a circle, which became a strong supportive part of the women's work. Women were quite active during these years, buying furniture which otherwise could not have been provided, making curtains for the basement and new addition to the building, as well as the traditional activities. Two of the traditions beginning in the fifties have continued until the present time, although with some changes. Young people are still honored with a gift party or shower when they marry, and high school seniors are honored with a breakfast in the spring. The very first breakfast was held at the ranch home of Mr. and Mrs. John Williams, and although no one seems to remember the date, some recall that the group went swimming! Later the breakfast was moved to the roadside park on the old San Angelo highway and a less hearty sport emerged — that of exploring the rock quarry on the site. However, the event still required some hardy souls, as the men left before daylight to build a fire, and were followed by energetic ladies who put together a breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast, and coffee, all cooked over the open fire. The children who were awake and came along played in the rock quarry while their parents cooked, and by the time the sleepy eyed seniors arrived, the hosts felt like it was at least mid-day. When the early generation of cooks retired from active duty the breakfast was moved to the church basement, where it is still an annual event.

A quote from Mrs. Bert Pages's history of church activities for 1953 is as follows: Rev. Bruce has completed his second year as pastor of the Eldorado church. We have seen quite a substantial growth in the Church. Our choir is full. Our deacons, young men in the church, are active in their duties. All obligations of the church have been met in full and on time. We have an active circle of young married women and our Sunday School enrollment has doubled during the pastor's stay. Junior High or Pioneers, as they were called then included Nancy Jackson, Moneta Bradshaw, Becky McAngus, Cecil Mack Walston, Johnnie Ohlenburg, and Willie Luedecke, while Mrs. Jackson's Crusaders included Linda Jones, Jim Lindsey, Sandra Hall, Sammie Mayo, Judy Hext, Judy McGregor, John McGregor, Dorritt Cox, George Draper, David Hixson, Sylvia Thompson, Patricia Enochs, Pamela Walston, and Maudie Mitchell.

The Bruces left Eldorado to go to St. Stephens Church in Fort Worth in April of 1954, and a pulpit committee composed of the following was appointed: W. M. Patterson, James Page, Lum Burk, Mrs. A. G. McCormack, Mrs. Edwin Jackson, and Mrs. Joe Edens. Reverend James L. Spencer of Houston was the committee's choice and he and Minnie came to us May 1, 1954, which will be remembered by many as being during the big drought. Although it was a difficult time for the church, Mr. Spencer moved right ahead and helped us through depressed finances and consoled us when so many of our young couples moved to the urban areas.

In compiling this history I have relied heavily on the his-

tory as recorded by Mrs. Bert Page and typed by Elizabeth Ballew, as well as the official church records. Due to Mrs. Page's illness and death in April of 1955 the history was continued by Billie (Mrs. Joe) Edens who added her own special touch to the record. Although Mrs. Page's history was largely narrative, with an occasional picture thrown in, Billie chose to have a pictorial history, with only the essential information under the pictures. Most of us remember Billie with her camera — she never seemed to be without it, and used it with almost "reckless abandon." However, it does make for interesting reminiscence, and, I understand, created a stir at Montreat, where each church's history is on file.

This pictorial history began about the time the Spencers came, and there seemed to be a lot going on. Mr. Spencer was a great organizer, and all sorts of activities came into being — the youth program was upgraded, with emphasis on work in the church as well as attendance at camps and conferences. The women continued their varied activities and the men began to work as a group again. Some new traditions had their beginning also. The elders and their wives served turkey dinner in the late fall honoring members of the congregation who had united with the church during the year. Also the rotary system of officers was instituted and a very active adult Sunday School class for couples was organized, which has continued to be popular through the years. Since no age limits are enforced, there is a wide range of interests among the group. "Papa Tom", as Mr. Tom Jones was affectionally called, continued to attend the couple's class until he moved to the nursing home!

Another tradition which began while the Spencers were here was the church-wide Easter Egg hunt, which was first held at the Lewis Whitten ranch in 1957, and since 1958 has been at the big oak tree on the Wilson Page ranch. The Sunday School superintendent is in charge of the event — eggs are hidden by older boys in the church for all age groups and families flock to the scene with blankets, wraps if the weather demands, and a picnic supper. After the egg hunt, supper is spread, and the evening closes near sunset with a vesper service. It truly is a great climax to an already triumphant day.

About this time a church pianist was added to the music staff. The pianist was selected from able young girls to play the hymns with the organ on Sunday mornings. Judy Hext was the first church pianist, and continued to serve the church throughout her high school days, as others have done since.

In 1959 the Spencers decided to retire from the active ministry and moved to Del Rio where they owned an interest in a motel. They now live in Tucson, Arizona, where they continue to be very busy people, and visit Eldorado on their trips back to Texas.

Before Mr. Spencer left he very carefully steered the pulpit committee in the direction of a seminary student for whom he had a very high regard. After hearing this young man preach the committee was convinced that "Dan was our man" and so Dan and Carol Sebesta came to us in the summer of 1959 for a happy seven years. It was "love at first sight" for both pastoral family and flock, and the years flew by as this unusual young man wove his way into the church and community life. Their sons, Mike and Tim were born here.

A few highlights of the year 1961 included: a bridal shower for Ann Ballew, bride-elect of Sherwood Barker,

and a surprise birthday party for Mrs. Ethel Gunn. At the congregational meeting in November, Lum Burk and Tom Jones Sammons were elected deacons and Ralph Preston, John Williams, and James Page elders. Caroline Case and Kyle McCormack were infants baptized, and Mrs. Emma Bradshaw was pictured at her post in the nursery with Carolyn Page and Mike Sebesta. Members of the communicants class were: Paul Page, Jr. Bob Page, Stan Love, Buddy Calk, Judy Lively, Allen Corbell, Mary Ann Draper, Dale Montgomery, Phillip Montgomery, and Johnny Mayo. New members also included the E. L. Dyer family, Miltia Hill, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Montgomery, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Cawley, Mrs. Fred Case, Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Calentine, Mrs. James Raibourn, Mrs. Frank Bradley, Jr. and Jo Helen Lively.

By 1962 the pastor's salary had grown to \$5200 and the total budget of the church to \$14,795. The church was moving forward, and in 1963 building time came again, as construction of a new educational building was begun, along with central air and heat for the original building. No more open windows and paper fans in summer or open gas heaters for winter worship.

Many young people and young couples began lives of service and commitment during this rather lengthy ministry; thus it was with great sadness that the congregation saw Dan accept a call to St. Paul Presbyterian Church in Big Spring, Texas in the fall of 1967.

In January of 1967 the church called Toney D. McMillan, who was a senior student at Austin seminary, and upon his graduation in the spring he moved to Eldorado with his wife, Jill and their baby son, Kevin. Before their arrival, an extensive remodeling of the manse was completed under the direction of Joe Ed Spencer, T. R. Spence, and Paul Page. Besides complete redecorating, a utility room and central heat and air were added.

During the fall of 1968 a rather large group of children joined the church after attending communicants class. They included: Leanne Cawley, Jimmy Cawley, Scott Montgomery, Dan McWhorter, Kathy Page, Debbie Page, Carolyn Page, Margaret Powell, and Suzan Thornton. The year also saw new adult members: Mrs. Ola Ruth Barbee, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Helmers, Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood Barker, Mr. and Mrs. John Pitts, Mrs. B. O. Bridgeman, and Mrs. Margaret Frost.

In the spring of 1969 Toney and Jill moved to Kingsville, Texas to pastor the First Presbyterian church there, and Gordon F. Garlington, Jr. and his wife Doris came from Pecos and remained for seven years, during which time the sanctuary was completely redecorated under the able direction of Mrs. Paul Page, Mrs. Jimmy Powell, and Mrs. Winnie Jackson. It was an ambitious project, including memorial stained glass windows. New Choir robes were ordered, and it was a proud congregation who gathered for the first worship service in the new sanctuary. This project proved as an incentive to clean up and paint the rest of the building, with members painting the basement and kitchen, and later finishing the nursery, choir room and pastor's study, so that at last the entire building was clean and lovely. Not only was the committee to be commended for a very long job well done, but the patience and cooperation of Gordon during long months of conducting worship in the basement and a study which was disrupted over quite a period of time.

In the spring of 1977 Gordon Garlington accepted a call to First Presbyterian church of Mangum, Oklahoma,

leaving before Easter, to assume his new duties there. Doris stayed to finish her year of teaching in the Eldorado schools, a position she had had for several years.

A vigilant pulpit committee consisting of Paul and Lucy Page, Jimmy and Nancy Powell, Bobby and Sandra Helmers, and Billie Jones reached out to Columbia Seminary in Atlanta, Ga. and chose Donald Lyman Mobley to be our new pastor. Lyman's wife, Myki, is also a seminary graduate, and they arrived in Eldorado in July, and were "off and running" immediately. Lyman was installed and ordained in late August, with family and friends from Georgia and Texarkana attending. Although Lyman's ministry is in its early stage, it promises to be another significant milestone in the history of First Presbyterian Church of Eldorado, of which I am both humble and proud to be a member.

Maxine Page, September 1977

Note: An unprecedented tragedy struck the Eldorado church on October 26, 1977, when their pastor Lyman and Myki Mobley and Lyman's father, Paul Mobely were killed in an automobile accident a few miles east of Eldorado while returning from a brief trip to San Antonio. Memorial services were held on October 29 in the Eldorado Church and at this writing the search for a new minister is in progress.

Although the search for a pastor was difficult following such a traumatic experience, the diligence of Paul and Lucy Page, Jimmy and Nancy Powell, Bobby and Sandra Helmers (Pulpit Committee), coupled with the faithfulness of the entire congregation proved fruitful and in July of 1978 we joyfully welcomed Ron Sutto, senior student at Austin Seminary as our prospective pastor. By the time Ron moved to Eldorado in December we felt strong ties to the former "farmer from Michigan", his wife Jean, and their three children, Debbie, Amy and Ronnie. Again the Lord has showered His blessings on First Presbyterian Church of Eldorado and history continues to happen.



Sam Jones, Supt. of Sunday School for more than fifty years.