

Terrell County Memorial September, 2018 Sanderson, Texas Museum News



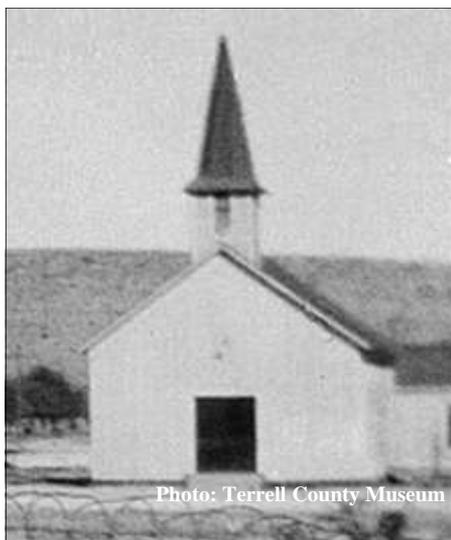
Photo: Bill Smith

First United Methodist Church of Sanderson,

Methodist work in Sanderson probably pre-dates 1900 when the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was very active in West Texas. Circuit-riding preachers ministered to several congregations and work all along the

Rio Grande began in earnest in 1859 with the founding of the Rio Grande Mission.

Methodist work in Texas during the Spanish and Mexican colonial period was hampered by rules from the



First Methodist Church, first church building constructed in Sanderson in 1905

host countries that allowed only Catholics to conduct services. But after the Texas Revolution missionary work in Texas exploded, with many ministers being sent from surrounding Southern states. At one point Methodists became the state's largest denomination.

Mexican Methodist work began in 1874 with founding of Hispanic congregations and organized in 1885 as a conference. Most certainly circuit-riding preachers passed through the new town of Sanderson but not enough Methodists were present to build a church.

In 1900, Charlie Wilson, founder of Sanderson and principal landowner of the town site, donated lots at the corner of Pine and Persimmon to folks wanting to build a structure for the church. Work was not completed until 1905, just about the time when Terrell County came into existence. As with

other church buildings in Sanderson, labor and materials were donated or paid for as bought until the building was completed and debt-free.

The first pastor of the church was a Reverend Cox, who probably was a circuit-rider who also served other congregations. For several years the new building was used by other denominations until their buildings could be completed. A union Sunday school was conducted in Sanderson for years among the Protestant churches as they pooled funding and expertise to instruct their members. As buildings and congregations were completed the union Sunday school was disbanded and each denomination had its own Sunday school.

For several years the small church building had no steeple or bell. In 1910, building contractor Mr. Shirley Martin built a steeple and furnished the top of the spire with a croquet ball, donated by a young Willie Banner as he knocked the ball down the street in front of the building.

For many years the Methodists had a very active congregation with men's and women's societies, missionary unions, Epworth Leagues for young people and children's Sunday schools and groups. The churches in Sanderson, including the Methodist Church, were the center of life for young people.

In 1945 the bustling congregation removed the old building and built a new one of native stone with beautiful stained glass windows. A fellowship hall was joined to the rear of this building and the parsonage was remodeled. Today, this building still serves its congregation as the church has moved into the 21st Century.



El Buen Pastor Mexican Methodist Church

In the very early 20th Century Hispanic families continued their migration into the Sanderson area to work on the railroad and area ranches. With them came a few families of the Methodist faith. Much missionary work was done by the Methodists along the border with indigenous Hispanics beginning in 1874 and met with much success.

Among the Sanderson Hispanics were the Zepeda and Rodriguez families. Very devout in their beliefs, they felt the need to have a church to meet their spiritual needs and for the training of their children.

The Zepedas had arrived in Sanderson in 1904 and soon sought out other families for Christian fellowship. The Zepedas and the Vicente Rodriguez family met in each other's homes for prayer and services when a preacher was available.

By 1908 enough families had been gathered and it was decided to construct their own church building. They called their first regular pastor, the Rev. Melchor Chaparo, and work on the church was begun. With about 20 members, they began to make adobe and gather lumber as funds became available. All



The new El Buen Pastor, opened in 1974

the furniture...pews, pulpit, altar table... was hand-made and the adobes were laid by the parishioners. The church was christened El Buen Pastor Mexican Methodist Church and it became the spiritual home for Hispanic Methodists in Sanderson, the center of their religious and family life. The building served for many years.

In 1959 the congregation decided it was time for a new building. They had outgrown the venerable old building. With funding from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and contributions from local friends they created a fund for the new building, which, as with all Methodist properties, belongs to the area Methodist organization, the New Mexico Conference, El Paso District. However, problems arose and the congregation decided to invest the money in a rental property to raise more funding.

The flood of 1965 caused much damage to their rental property so the church decided to continue with plans to build a new sanctuary and include Sunday school classrooms and a fellowship hall. Lots were secured adjacent to the old building and a groundbreaking ceremony was held in April of 1968. With O. J. Cresswell as the contractor, the building was completed by October and began to be used for special services in November of 1968. The building was officially dedicated and used full-time in May of 1974 after it became debt-free. For many years the congregation moved forward, but as the population of Sanderson began to dwindle, so did the membership. By the year 2000 very few services were being held as a visiting minister came infrequently.

In 2015 the church was closed and the property was disposed of by the New Mexico Conference of the Methodist Church, with the new building, the old building and the parsonage going into private hands. Hispanic Methodist work in Sanderson at the moment is on hiatus.

