

EARLY CHURCHES IN THE ABA

Texas Churches

Texas Churches Organized During the Texas Republic, 1836-1845

There are seven Baptist churches, all in East Texas, that were organized during the years of the Republic of Texas, still preaching the Gospel and serving the Lord in ministering to the spiritual needs of the communities in which they are located.

1838. Union (Old North Church), Nacogdoches, is the oldest Missionary Baptist church now in Texas. This is the site of the first prayer meeting in Texas, led by Mrs. Massie Millard. She had longed for and prayed for a church to be organized there, but died shortly before her prayers were answered.

On Saturday before the first Lord's Day in May, 1838, Isaac Reed, assisted by Rev. R. G. Green, who had just arrived in Texas, organized the first church in East Texas, to be known in later years as a *missionary* Baptist church. Nine members went into the organization--all from Tennessee except one from Missouri. Two of them were colored slaves.^[1]

The church cooperates with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

UNION-OLD NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH (Nacogdoches, Texas)



The oldest Baptist church in Texas to meet on a continuing basis is believed to be the Old North (Union) Baptist Church, located in Nacogdoches, Texas.

The church was the result of prayer meetings held by Mrs. Massie Millard. She put together a good number of *people* interested in invoking the name of God. Isaac Reed organized the church in May, 1838, but Mrs. Millard died shortly before the date. Z. N. Morrell visited the young group and preached to them.

J. M. Carroll states, "On Saturday before the first Lord's Day in May, 1838, Isaac Reed, assisted by Rev. R. G. Green, who had just arrived in Texas, organized the first church in East Texas, to be known in later years as a *missionary*

Baptist Church. Nine members went into the organization — all from Tennessee except one from Missouri. Two of them were colored slaves." The church cooperates with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Recent figures revealed that the church averaged about 9 in Sunday School and church attendance but it is supported by the Convention as a Historical Site.

The prayer meetings were held under a small oak tree which grew to be very large. Damage to the tree about 1950 was corrected by a forestry student at Stephen F. Austin College trying an experiment never tried before. The tree stood until recently, as can be seen, it is in pieces on the ground now.

There is a very large cemetery located adjacent to the church and contains the remains of settlers of the period of the 1840's to the present.



**State Historical Marker Old North Church
Erected 1936**



**The condition of the 1838 Oak Tree
Old North Baptist Church**

1839. Fellowship Church, Joaquin, located just off FM Road 139, began with early immigrants to East Texas in the 1830s. The church has a recorded history back to 1839. It was established and pastored by Wyatt S. Childress, who had arrived in the community in 1836. Fellowship is the oldest Baptist church in Shelby County, and the oldest living Baptist church in Texas in association with the American Baptist Association.

**FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH
(Joaquin, Texas)**



It is understood by common reason that most of the new settlers that came into the territory of Texas crossed either at an Arkansas border or a Louisiana border. Since many of the new people come from Alabama and Georgia that meant crossing the Sabine River from Louisiana. There were ferries that provided safe crossings for families and livestock.

There are indications that a few settlers had arrived as early as 1818, but they were scattered so that it was not really a community and no church was started. However, the area of Logan's Ferry had many springs of water and families found this to be a good place to settle. It was across the river at the Logan Ferry landing that the community of Joaquin was established. Many families just barely got across into Texas and settled near the many springs. While there are no records available to give the exact date of the organization of Fellowship Baptist Church, there is proof of full operation by 1839.

One of the pioneer families was the Childress family. They had at least two sons, George C. and Wyatt S. Childress. George C. Childress is credited with being the main author of the Texas Declaration of Independence. There is a larger than life statue of his likeness at the main entrance to the Five Star Museum at Washington-on-the-Brazos historical site.

The earliest reliable records indicate that Wyatt S. Childress was the first pastor and even as late as 1879, he is listed in associational records as the pastor.

The early buildings were hewn logs, dirt floor, eight foot fire place, and split log benches with peg legs. After saw mills were brought into the community a new building, even with plank flooring and benches with backs were erected.

The Fellowship Baptist Church of Joaquin, Texas, is the oldest, continually active church fellowshipping with Missionary Baptist Association of Texas. The list of pastors who have served the church looks like a Who's-who list. the church now worships in a very nice comfortable building. The current pastor is Brother Mike Fodge.

1840. Isaac Reed assisted by Lemuel Herrin, led in the organization of Bethel Church at Reed Settlement, about two miles west of Clayton. The church membership was composed of the white settlers and their black slaves. After the Civil War, the white members abandoned the church house at Reed Settlement and built a new one at Clayton. They continued under the name of Bethel. The church fellowships in the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas.

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH (Clayton, Texas)



Isaac Reed, assisted by Lemuel Herrin, led in the organization of Bethel Baptist Church, located in the Reed Settlement, about two miles west of Clayton, Texas in 1840. The church membership consisted of white settlers and their black slaves.

After the Civil War many people did not like the idea of the blacks worshipping with whites. Some church houses and homes were burned because of this.

The whites decided that they would build a new building near the new highway in Clayton but the blacks continued to worship at the original site. They continue to worship there and still call the church Bethel Baptist Church.

The white church associates with the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas.



Bethel Baptist Church Black Congregation

The black members of the original Bethel Church continued to worship at the original site, and retained the name, Bethel. The present members claim theirs is the original Bethel Church. It would be hard to disprove their claim.

1843. On Saturday before the first Sunday in April, Lemuel Herrin and Isaac Reed organized Macedonia Church, about five miles west of the present city of Carthage. The church still meets for worship near the original location on U. S. Highway 79. The church cooperates in the fellowship of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

MACEDONIA BAPTIST CHURCH (Carthage, Texas)



On Saturday before the first Sunday in April, Lemuel Herrin and Isaac Reed organized the Macedonia Church, on present County Road 255. The old church house was burned by some arsonists in the the day after the Reconstruction following the Civil War, perhaps by residents unhappy about blacks who were allowed to attend the services there.

Either out of superstition or enough respect for God's Word, the arsonists removed the pulpit Bible from the church house placed it on a tree stump out front, then burned the building. There were not afraid to burn the church house, but were afraid to burn the Bible.

They rebuilt the church on U.S. Highway 79 about five miles west of Carthage, Texas. Martin Callahan was very instrumental to getting the new building erected. Callahan was one of the earliest missionaries of the local Mt. Zion Baptist Association. He also led in the organization of several other churches, including Hopewell, in 1980; Long Branch, 1874.

Lemuel Herrin and Martin Callahan are buried in the old Macedonia Cemetery. Macedonia Baptist Church cooperates in the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

1843. In this year Reed and Herrin organized Eight Mile Church, in Harrison County. The members still worship at a site near the original location, but the name has been changed to Friendship. They associate in the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

EIGHT MILE BAPTIST CHURCH (Marshall, Texas)



In 1843, two men had arrived in the still rough territory called "Texas." These two men were Isaac Reed and Lemuel Herrin. Reed came to Texas in 1834 and settled in the community of Clayton, near Carthage. Herrin probably did not arrive until 1838. The two men could not agree on how to do mission work and eventually split up.

They organized Eight Mile Baptist Church south of Marshall, Texas, in 1843. The church is still active in the same area and today is known as Friendship Baptist Church. It cooperates in the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

1844. Isaac Reed's concern for the spiritual welfare of his family brought into existence another East Texas church.

Old Palestine Baptist Church [near Alto] was founded in 1844 by the pioneer preacher, the Rev. **Isaac Reed**, . . . "To minister the Gospel to his daughter and her family who lived in the Linwood area."

Old Palestine church has continued to minister the Gospel to families in this area since then. . . .The church is considered the second oldest Baptist congregation in Texas.

No other church in the East Texas region and perhaps in the entire state has a history of uninterrupted Gospel preaching equal to Old Palestine.^[2]

Old Palestine Church fellowships in the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The reader will note that according to available records, Old North Church, Nacogdoches; Bethel Church, Clayton; Fellowship Church, Joaquin; Macedonia Church, Carthage; and Friendship Church, Marshall, were all organized prior to Old Palestine.

OLD PALESTINE BAPTIST CHURCH Linwood (Alton/Nacogdoches), Texas



Because of the concern of a father for the spiritual welfare of his daughter and her family the Old Palestine Baptist Church came into existence in 1844.

Marie Murphy, editor of "Religion Scene," Tyler Morning Telegraph, wrote in her column June 6, 1997:

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Old Palestine fellowships in the Baptist General Convention.

1845. Corinth Baptist Church, FM Road 1970, Timpson, was organized sometime in 1845 as Wedgeworth Church. The old records were lost to a fire in 1910. The church cooperates with the Shelby County Association, the Missionary Baptist Association, and the American Baptist Association.

CORINTH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH (Timpson, Texas)



Since the early records of the church were destroyed in a fire in 1910 there is some question as to the organizational date. Some maintain the correct date should not be until 1851. However, others claim proof that the church began in 1845. It was first known as the Wedgeworth Church. Information has been handed down from generation to generation of families in the community.

This church, located on FM 1970, Timpson, Texas, has historically been a very mission minded church and has always associated with Missionary Baptist churches. In 1963, Brother Clyde Clark was recommended as an Interstate Missionary on Designated Funds to minister in the state of Massachusetts. In 1987, Brother Harold Bayle was endorsed as a missionary to Lansing, Michigan. He was recommended as a missionary on Designated Funds to the American Baptist Association churches.

First Church Associations

1840. The first association of Baptist churches was formed October 9, 1840, as Union Association. It was composed of Independence, LaGrange, and Travis churches. They were located in what are today Washington, Fayette, and Falls counties. By 1853 there were eleven local associations and 150 churches in Texas.

1843. The first Baptist association organized in East Texas was the Sabine Association. Lemuel Herrin led in the organization. The Sabine Association dissolved after six years due to a strong anti-missionary element. The missionary party then organized the Soda Lake Association. Out of this association were subsequently formed the Mt. Zion and the Shelby County associations, loyal to the Missionary Baptist Association and the American Baptist Association.

1857. Mt. Zion Association was organized October 30, 1857, at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, located at what is now Camp Ground Cemetery, County Road 3185, Mt. Enterprise. Mt. Zion Church no longer exists, but the Mt. Zion Association History and Archives Committee has erected a Historical Plaque at the site in commemoration of the organization of the association.

1881. Most of the Shelby County churches had fellowshipped in the Mt. Zion Association, but in 1881, with the blessing of the Mt. Zion Association churches, the Shelby County Association was organized.

When the split came in the Baptist Missionary Association, 1949, several churches left the Mt. Zion and Shelby County associations and organized the Mt. Olive Association, in the fellowship of the BMA.

The Mt. Zion and Shelby County associations have been loyal supporters of the Missionary Baptist cause in Texas, and the American Baptist Association.

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- [1] Carroll, J. M., **A History of Texas Baptists**; Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1923, p. 118.
[2] Murphy, Marie, "Religion Scene", **Tyler Morning Telegraph**, June 6, 1997.