

Journey to Dallas: George Truett and R.C. Buckner

July 14, 2016

In 1856, only an occasional log cabin dotted the vast and unbroken landscape of prairies and timberlands in the region now called Dallas. About 775 inhabitants lived there when the city incorporated that year. Within the next dozen years, however, more than 10,000 new settlers flooded into the territory. They felled trees and built distilleries, gambling establishments, houses of prostitution, and blacksmith and mercantile shops. They built newspaper and law offices, banks, cotton gins, grist mills and manufacturing plants along its new and bustling dirt streets and plank sidewalks.



First Baptist Church of Dallas in 1903
Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and Roman Catholics started churches in these early years. But Baptists did not establish a permanent presence in Dallas until July 30, 1868. Through the faithful efforts and encouragement of W. L. and Lucinda Williams, 11 Baptists met on the ground floor of the Masonic Lodge building on Lamar Street, near its intersection with Ross Avenue, on that day to organize First Baptist Church. Lucinda Williams also served as president of the Baptist Women

Missionary Workers from 1895-1906, and she designed the original landscaping plans for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. The church called W.W. Harris to become the first pastor, and he ministered there together with other ordained preachers J.F. Pinson (great-grandfather of Bill Pinson, executive director emeritus of the Baptist General Convention of Texas), W.B. Long and W.J. Brown.

This church planted many daughter churches across the city:

- Rock College Mission (1883), which became the mother congregation of East Dallas, Washington Avenue, Gaston Avenue and Gaston Oaks Baptist churches.
- Second Baptist (1888), which became Westglen Baptist Church in 1958 when it moved to East Dallas.
- Lake Avenue (1891), which became McKinney Avenue, Oak Lawn and Highland Baptist churches.
- Ross Avenue (1894), which became Haskell Avenue and then Ross Avenue again when it moved a third time in 1917.

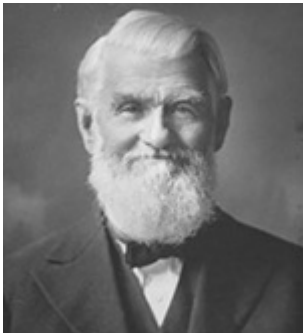


George W. Truett in 1905 In the next 50 years, denominational work progressed admirably. First Baptist Church pioneered a ministry to the deaf in 1919 and led the way in early radio (1921) and television (1951) broadcasting. Under George W. Truett's tenure as pastor (1897-1944), the church's membership grew from 797 to 7,804. While

Wally Amos Criswell (1944-semi-retirement in 1995) was pastor, the church grew to more than 28,000. First Baptist has remained in downtown Dallas throughout its history. For decades, it was known as the largest church in the United States, and Billy Graham was a beloved member.

By 1950, Dallas was home to 134 Baptist churches with a total membership of about 100,000 people. Almost 70,000 were enrolled in Sunday schools alone, and churches had active Baptist Young People's Unions, Training Unions, Woman's Missionary Unions, Vacation Bible Schools and Brotherhood organizations.

The city's largest churches' pastors were respected across the denomination for their capable leadership and lengthy tenures. Along with the tenures of Truett and Criswell at First Baptist, Wallace Bassett was pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church from 1918 to 1966, and Marshall Craig was the pastor of Gaston Avenue Baptist Church from 1927 to 1953. Park Cities Baptist was established in 1939, and Wilshire Baptist began in 1952.



R.C. Buckner Dallas is the site of numerous early Texas Baptist events and ministries. At the corner of Junius and Haskell streets was a cottage where, in 1879, R.C. Buckner took in three small orphan children. The next year, at what is now 5200 S. Buckner Blvd., Buckner opened Buckner Orphans Home for children—now Buckner International.



Buckner's Orphan's Home in about 1910. The home for orphaned children R.C. Buckner founded has grown to include multiple campuses and client assistance centers throughout Texas for the care of families, seniors and children, and assists in foster care, adoptions and other ministries worldwide.



Charles Rosser Baylor Scott & White Health began with a 14-room house at Junius and College streets in East Dallas, purchased by Dr. Charles M. Rosser in 1901, who named it the Good Samaritan Hospital.



Texas Baptist Memorial Sanitarium
In 1903, the BGCT purchased the building and opened the Texas Baptist Memorial Sanitarium. George W. Truett, R.C. Buckner and C.C. Slaughter,

all Baptists, rallied the city of Dallas and Texas Baptists to support the new ministry. Slaughter gave the first large gift of \$50,000 to open its doors.

In 1921, the name was changed to Baylor Hospital, which has been greatly expanded in the century since. Now the Baylor University Medical Center—part of Baylor Scott & White Health—occupies much of the Washington & Ross district, north of Fair Park in Dallas.

The McKinney Avenue Baptist Church building, at 2601 McKinney Avenue, which members raised in 1907 while J. Frank Norris was pastor between 1905 and 1908, became the Hard Rock Cafe of Dallas in 1986. In January of 2008, it was torn down and replaced with another building on the same pad.

The Dallas area provides dozens of historical sites of Baptist interest. These few are just samples of the variety of ways Baptists cooperated to do the work of Christ together in the early years of Texas life.

Call for more information and for tours to visit the following sites:

- Visit [First Baptist Church](#), 1707 San Jacinto, in downtown Dallas. Phone for appointments: (214) 969-0111
- Read more about the history of FBC Dallas in Leon McBeth's [The First Baptist Church of Dallas: Centennial History, 1868-1968](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1968
- Learn about [Buckner International](#), 700 North Pearl Street, Suite 1200, Dallas, Texas, 75201. Phone Sarah Jones, Ministry Engagement Coordinator, at (214) 328-3141 for tours, or email her at sejones@Buckner.org. The site of the original orphans' home is located at 5200 S. Buckner Blvd., in East Dallas.
- Read more about Buckner Home and its history in Karen Bullock's

[Homeward Bound: The Heart and Heritage of Buckner](#). Dallas, TX: Buckner Home, 2009

- Visit the [Baylor University Medical Center](#) in Dallas, 3500 Gaston Avenue, Dallas, Texas, 75246. Contact Director of Guest and Support Services, Joe Valenzuela, for scheduling group tours at 214-820-2833, or visit the lobby to experience the permanent historical exhibit commemorating the hospital's centennial, which is free and open to the public.