

# Journey to Southlake: The Baptist Lonesome Dove

June 29, 2016

During the two decades when Texas won its independence, declared itself a nation and eventually joined the United States, Baptists played a large role in all of these actions.



Worshippers gather at Lonesome Dove Baptist Church, circa 1860. Mexico won its Independence from Spain in 1821 and stipulated by law that new settlers in its Tejas territory were to be good Catholic citizens. Nevertheless, of the 300 families who migrated to the colony with Stephen F. Austin, 11 were known to be Baptists. They survived unspeakably harsh conditions, helped settle huge tracts of land and began the work of ministry, as we have seen with the Houston, Parker and Spark families in recent road trips.

The 1840s was a decade of tremendous growth for Baptists. The first Baptist associations were formed—Union (1840); Sabine (1843); Regular Predestinarian (1844); Colorado and Eastern Missionary (1847); Trinity, Soda Lake and Red River (1848); and Central and Elm Fork (1849). Baptists received missionary James Huckins from the American Home Mission Society in 1840 and established a Texas Baptist Home Mission Society in 1841. They also organized the Texas Baptist Education Society, which led in 1845 to the founding of the first college—Baylor at Independence.

In 1848, Baptists in Texas organized their first convention in Anderson to support missions. Texas Baptists—black, white and Latino, slaves and freedmen alike—supported missions in China and Africa. By mid-century, 29 Baptist pastors and congregations had established churches, schools, associations and mission stations. They even sent out five missionaries, Noah T. Byars among them. Baptist work slowly began in the north, west, east and south, as settlers continued to pour into Texas.



In February, Lonesome Dove celebrated 170 years of continuous existence and rejoiced in its rich heritage. Joshua Hodges organized the earliest Baptist church in North Texas on Feb. 21, 1846, called Lonesome Dove, near Grapevine in Southlake, still the oldest Baptist church in Tarrant County. The charter members left their homes in Platt County, Mo., in the spring of 1844 and traveled together several months by wagon until they reached the Cross Timbers area, now the Grapevine-Southlake vicinity. The trip was fraught with flooded streams, Indian attacks and the hazards of traveling without cover in severe weather.

Once they arrived in the northern Texas territory, they began to fell trees, build log cabins, plow the rich earth and plant crops. They met in different cabins for worship, and soon, more settlers from Missouri and other states joined them. On the third Saturday of February 1846, the dozen Baptist believers met at the log cabin home of Charles Throop to constitute the

## Lonesome Dove Baptist Church.

At the time of its organization, there were no other churches within many miles, and no other evangelical church between Lonesome Dove and the Pacific Ocean. The names of the charter members were Moderator John A. Freeman; Hall Medlin, clerk; Nancy (Harris) Freeman, Mary (Medlin) Anderson, Susanah (Medlin) Foster, Lucinda (Foster) Throop, Mary Ann (Foster) Leonard, Felix Mullikan, Rachel (Foster) Mullikan, Henry Suggs, Saleta (Foster) Suggs and Henry Atkinson, almost all of them related by family ties.

The next day, Sunday, the church received 10 new members and, by the end of 1846, Lonesome Dove Baptist Church had a membership of 40. The same week the church was organized, the flag of the Republic of Texas was lowered from the capital, where it had flown for a decade in Austin, and Texas officially became the 28th state in the Union.

For a time, the church met in what is now Grapevine. In the fall of 1847, members erected a building at its present site. Some time later, this building was replaced with another, which burned in March 1930, and a building of the same dimensions and on the same ground was rebuilt. This tiny chapel now serves as the church youth building. This year, in February, Lonesome Dove celebrated 170 years of continuous existence and rejoiced in its rich heritage. The church continues to reach its community with the gospel of Jesus Christ and supports missions, denominational work and ministries around the world.

Visit the Lonesome Dove Baptist Church and cemetery. Look for grave markers with the names of the earliest Baptist pioneers who settled this region.



Union Baptist Church was founded three months after Lonesome Dove. In nearby Farmer's Branch, Union Baptist Church was founded three months after Lonesome Dove. Pastor David Myers, a co-pastor of Lonesome Dove, organized a church in Sarah and John Keenan's pioneer cabin, about two miles east of the present church location, on May 10, 1846, in Farmer's Branch. This is the earliest Baptist church in Dallas County. Charter members were Franklin Bowles, J. B. and Margaret Ann Lee, Leticia Myers and John Miller Myers. Soon afterward, Sarah and Thomas Keenan and Narcissus Wilburn joined. This church moved to nearby Carrollton and, in 1870, 12 members moved back to establish the Farmer's Branch Missionary Baptist Church. It changed its name again in 1951 to First Baptist Church of Farmer's Branch.

**For more information:**

- Author Larry McMurtry saw the Lonesome Dove Baptist Church van parked outside a restaurant in Oklahoma, where he was eating breakfast. It inspired the name of his Pulitzer Prize-winning [novel](#).
- Read *Lonesome Dove Baptist Church* by Pearl Foster O'Donnell (Fort Worth, Lonesome Baptist Church, 1968).
- Learn more about the Union Baptist Church, now First Baptist Church in Farmer's Branch [here](#).

**Directions to Lonesome Dove Baptist Church and Cemetery**

2380 Lonesome Dove Road, Southlake, TX 76092

(817) 488-9568

**From Fort Worth:**

Travel TX-121 N.

Take TX-121 N to W State Hwy 114.

Take the exit toward Kimball Ave from TX-114 W/Hwy 114 W.

Take N Kimball Ave and E Dove Rd to Lonesome Dove Rd. in Southlake.

**From Houston:**

Travel I-45 N.

Take Hardy Toll Rd. and I-45 N to W State Hwy. 114 in Tarrant County.

Take the exit toward Kimball Ave. from TX-114 W.

Take N Kimball Ave. and E Dove Rd. to Lonesome Dove Rd. in Southlake.