

APPLICATION FORM FOR OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER

Texas Historical Commission
History Division
P.O. Box 12276, Austin, Texas 78711

8504

RECEIVED

FEB 18 1986

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Title of Marker (subject to revision by THC staff) ▶ FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH KILGORE, TEXAS	County ▶ GREGG	
Marker Location (from nearest town on state map) ▶ 501 E. North St. KILGORE, TEXAS		
Distance and direction of subject from marker site ▶ SAME	If not on post, type of surface to which marker will be attached (wood, stone, etc.) ▶	
Owner of Marker Site ▶ FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH	Address 501 EAST NORTH ST.	City, Zip KILGORE, TEXAS 75662
Sponsor of Marker ▶ FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH	Address 501 EAST NORTH ST.	City, Zip KILGORE, TEXAS 75662
Signature of County Chairman ▶ <i>Mrs. Paul Belding</i>	Address <i>602 Sycamore Ave</i>	City, Zip 75602
Person to whom marker is to be shipped* ▶	Address REV. O. D. OLIVER	City, Zip 501 EAST NORTH ST. KILGORE, TEXAS 75662

***NOTE:** Freight companies cannot ship to route or box numbers. If street address is unavailable, please provide a phone number. If marker is to be placed on highway right-of-way, it will be shipped to your district highway engineer.

Please consult the back of this page for specifications of the markers available. Check the items desired below. Approval of the application and narrative *must* be obtained from the county historical commission, as indicated by the county chairman's signature on this form, before forwarding the material to the Texas Historical Commission. Please *do not* send payment if ordering subject or building markers; funds will be requested once the application has been approved by the State Marker Committee. Sales tax of 6 1/4% must be added to the price, except if purchased by a tax-exempt organization. Applicants may order a marker with a socket to attach to their own post; however, the cost is the same as a marker furnished with a foundry post.

SUBJECT MARKERS

- | | With tax |
|---|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" grave marker (comes with mounting bar) ... | \$225 \$238.78 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 27" x 42" subject marker with post | \$650 \$689.81 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 27" x 42" subject marker without post | \$600 \$636.75 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18" x 28" subject marker with post | \$375 \$397.97 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18" x 28" subject marker without post | \$300 \$318.38 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I(We) request that RTHL designation be considered for this marker. | |

BUILDING MARKERS

- | | With tax |
|---|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building marker with post | \$350 \$371.45 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building marker without post | \$300 \$318.38 |
- Applications for building markers will automatically be considered for the RTHL designation. Please read carefully Texas Marker Policies 13 through 18, and indicate that you have done so by signing below.

Signature of owner _____

PAPERWEIGHTS

Please indicate quantity desired.

- | | With tax |
|---|--------------|
| ___ 3" x 4" plastic paperweight
mounted with replica of marker | \$90 \$95.51 |
| <i>Allow two months from completion of marker
for receipt of paperweight.</i> | |
| ___ Medallion paperweight | \$40 \$42.45 |
| <i>Allows four lines of engraving; please indicate desired wording.</i> | |

DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

Please indicate quantity desired and give location(s) on form above:

- | | With tax |
|---|--------------|
| 24" x 24" Historical Markers In City sign | \$80 \$84.90 |
| <i>These will be shipped to and placed on your town's city
limits signs by the District Highway Engineer.</i> | |
| ___ Black and White (for farm-to-market roads, state and U.S. highways) | |
| ___ Green and White (for interstate highways) | |
| 18" x 22" Historical Marker directional sign | \$80 \$84.90 |
| <i>In black and white only. For city and county roads.</i> | |
| <i>Applicant must supply post and be responsible for placement.</i> | |
| ___ With arrow pointing straight ahead | |
| ___ With arrow pointing left | |
| ___ With arrow pointing right | |

OTHER

- | | With tax |
|--|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> National Register plaque | \$ 50 \$ 53.06 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12" x 6" supplemental plate | \$110 \$116.74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building marker plate only
(see policy #15) | \$190 \$201.64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Replacement medallion (see policy #15) | \$110 \$116.74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze stars (for replacement on 1936
granite markers) | \$ 25 \$ 27.14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze wreaths (for replacement on
1936 granite markers) | \$ 25 \$ 27.14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze seals (for replacement on
1936 granite markers) | \$ 65 \$ 68.98 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze plates (for replacement on
1936 granite markers) | \$185 \$196.33 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Certificates of commendation | 50c each |

Texas Historical Commission Staff (FR), 7/15/86, revised 8/4/86

27" x 42" Official Texas Historical Marker with post
Gregg County (Job #8984)

Location: 501 E. North St., Kilgore

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH*
OF KILGORE***

ON OCTOBER 11, 1902, THE FIVE CHARTER MEMBERS OF THIS
CONGREGATION MET AND FORMED THE MISSIONARY BAPTIST
CHURCH OF KILGORE. THEY WERE MR. AND MRS. J. E. CHOICE,
MR. AND MRS. J. E. CHOICE, AND MISS LIZZIE CLINKSCALES. THE
REV. P. J. VERMILLION SERVED AS FIRST PASTOR.

THE CHURCH'S FIRST SANCTUARY WAS CONSTRUCTED
IN 1906, DURING THE PASTORATE OF THE REV. J. A. LEE. IT SERVED
THE SMALL VILLAGE CONGREGATION FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS,
UNTIL THE KILGORE OIL BOOM OF THE 1930s INCREASED
TREMENDOUSLY BOTH THE POPULATION OF THE TOWN AND
THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH. THE ORIGINAL
CHURCH BUILDING, LOCATED AT SOUTH MARTIN AND MAIN
STREETS, WAS SOLD IN 1931. THE CONGREGATION MET FOR
WORSHIP SERVICES AND SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE HOMES OF ITS
MEMBERS AND IN VARIOUS PUBLIC BUILDINGS UNTIL A NEW
BRICK STRUCTURE WAS COMPLETED AT THIS SITE IN 1933.

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF
KILGORE HAS ACTIVELY SUPPORTED HOME AND FOREIGN
MISSIONS, ASSISTING IN THE FORMATION OF SEVERAL OTHER
LOCAL BAPTIST FELLOWSHIPS. AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THIS
COMMUNITY, THE CONGREGATION HAS GROWN AND DEVELOPED
TO PROVIDE SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHANGING
NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE OF KILGORE.**

TEXAS SESQUICENTENNIAL 1836-1986***

*3/4 inch lettering
**1/2 inch lettering
***1/4 inch lettering

APPROVED

Frances Rickard

89841

A History of
THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
of Kilgore, Texas

Settlers, primarily from the lower states of the South, began moving into the south-central area of present Gregg County before the Civil War. The town of Kilgore was established in 1872, one year before the formal organization of Gregg County, when a line of the International and Great Northern Railroad reached the area. It was named for local landowner Constantine Buckley "Buck" Kilgore (1835-1897), a Confederate veteran who later served as a state and federal solon and as a federal judge.¹ As a center of commerce for the surrounding farms and plantations, the town of Kilgore soon outgrew the earlier settlement of Danville (also noted as New Danville), four miles southeast. Danville had been a prosperous community with a school, church, and Masonic lodge, but when bypassed by the railroad, most of its residents moved their families and businesses to Kilgore.²

Early Baptist settlers probably met in homes or, as was the custom in rural areas, attended the services of other congregations. At a special meeting on the evening of

October 11, 1902, five individuals met and formed the Missionary Baptist Church of Kilgore. The five charter members, all related, were Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Choice, Mr. and Mrs. J. I. Choice, and Miss Lizzie Clinkscales, a sister of Mrs. J. I. Choice.³ The following morning, a Sunday, the congregation held its first service, led by the Rev. P. J. Vermillion who had assisted in the church's organizational meeting. He was called as the first pastor, at a salary of \$50.00 for one sermon a month, and served in that capacity until January 11, 1903. He again served in 1904.⁴

The Rev. J. A. Lee became pastor in 1905. Although he served for less than one year, resigning in September 1906, he directed construction of the church's first sanctuary. The church minutes of January 14, 1906 show "the work on the church having begun, motion was made by Sister Lizzie Clinkscales that the work and money all be turned over to Bro. Lee and he was made a committee of one to take general supervision of the work. All were urged to assist in the work."⁵ Constructed at the intersection of South Martin and Main Streets, the church's first building was a small frame chapel with a steeply-pitched roof and a pronounced end gable that featured jig-cut bargeboard detailing. On the roof above the entry was an octagonal bell tower.

The early chapel proved to be symbolic of the dramatic transitional forces that shaped the second phase of development for the church and town. In its early years, the building housed a small village congregation. In just (over thirty years,) however, it became too small to serve the church's growing membership. With the discovery of oil in December, 1930, Kilgore became a boom town. Within months, the church was surrounded by business lots and faced with the realization that future expansion or relocation could be thwarted by the unchecked escalation of property values. The oil boom brought thousands of new residents, many of whom joined the First Baptist Church. Members discussed plans for enlarging their building or for relocating to a new site to serve the increased enrollment, but the influx of oil field workers proved to be too fast and too much for the congregation. In a town that could not provide enough housing for the increasing numbers of workers, those seeking shelter used any available structure, including the church sanctuaries. Locked doors and windows proved no hindrance to homeless workers. In the words of early church historian Mrs. J. E. Bagwell:

. . . we were forced to abandon the house as a place of worship; so very unsanitary, furniture demolished, stoves kicked to pieces, carpets torn into shreds, and the communion table a favorite place upon which to dance jigs. . . .

To eliminate utility bills, gas meter and stoves were removed, but connections were made by inner tubes by intruders and the jets thrown open, the blaze reaching almost to the ceiling; doors were locked, windows nailed down; one member had a blacksmith to fasten a large hasp on the door, but it was taken off; windows nailed with blocks, but the lights were broken out to gain entrance.⁶

Mrs. Bagwell also wrote of an incident which shows dramatically the frustration and anxiety of the members during the boom days. Recalling a conversation between her husband, a deacon, and a church visitor on what would prove to be the church's last service in the building, she noted the visitor said:

Brother, I didn't break out them windows or pull them doors down; I cussed the man out who walked over me right here in this aisle, with your fan, but don't lock 'er, Brother, for we are coming in.⁷

At a special called meeting on March 3, 1931, the members voted unanimously to sell the building. Although the decision was difficult to make, it proved to be a wise one for, on August 23, 1931, the two other church buildings in the town (belonging to the Methodist and Presbyterian congregations) were destroyed by fire. The fires were set in protest of Kilgore's occupation by Texas Rangers brought to restore order to the seemingly lawless boom town. The incendiary fires left Kilgore without a church building and prompted a Ranger commander to issue an order for his men to

"shoot at the waistline" in an effort to end the disturbance.⁹

Following the sale, the former church building served as a temporary hospital and as a holding cell for lawbreakers. While awaiting transfer to Longview, the county seat, prisoners were locked to a "trotline", a logging chain fastened to opposite corners of the building. Mrs. Bagwell, in an effort to find some good in the ignominy of the situation, wrote:

Religion is such a blessed remembrance of other days, who knows but that some prisoner thought of former days; and if it awakened in one soul the thought that sin is a terrible thing, its shackles fastened upon a human's life as binding as the locks holding them to that big chain, it did not serve in vain.⁹

The building was later relocated and served as a dance hall and bakery before it was destroyed by fire.

The story of the First Baptist Church's earliest building is told, not only because it reflects the "wild and woolly" atmosphere of a boom town, but because it represents the end of an era, a transition, and a new direction of service. The abandonment of the small frame chapel was marked by frustration, resentment, and confusion, but it led to the next period of development for the congregation. After 1931, the First Baptist Church of Kilgore was no longer a rural congregation serving a widespread

agricultural community; it was an active force in a developing town, instrumental in the preservation and evangelism of the Christian faith.

Kilgore, in 1930, boasted a population of 590. The following year it was incorporated and by 1940 the population increased to 6,708. In 1950 it was 9,693.¹⁰ The growth for the First Baptist Church was equally impressive. At the beginning of 1932, the church had a membership of 95; by the end of the decade, it was over 1200. After two decades, it was near 2000.¹¹

Following the sale of the first building, services were conducted in homes, the Kilgore Heights school, the Strand Theatre (at Main and Rusk), and in a tabernacle built by the congregation. A new brick structure was constructed at the present site in 1933. The building was later rehabilitated for use as an educational wing and replaced by a new sanctuary. Additional buildings were completed as the congregation continued to grow.

Throughout its history, the First Baptist Church of Kilgore has been active in mission work. A survey of the minutes shows a tradition of contributions to mission causes, including foreign missions, home missions, the Buckner Benevolences, and others. In addition, the church has taken an active role in the establishment of new

churches. Those local Baptist churches the congregation contributed to, sponsored, or otherwise assisted include: Eastview, Friendship, Highland Park, Memorial, Bethel, and Northside.¹²

Several prominent Baptist ministers have led the First Baptist Church. Dr. Howard C. Bennett, pastor from 1943 to 1960, was a trustee of East Texas Baptist College (now East Texas Baptist University) and served for nine years as a member of the Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The Rev. L. E. Holt was pastor from 1932 to 1943, during the transition and building periods of the church history. Over 2,500 additions were made to the membership rolls during his 11-year pastorate. The Rev. W. H. Anderson led the church in 1909 and 1910, but later returned to serve as missions pastor. During his latter service, he led the congregation in the organization of three mission churches. Dr. J. Wesley Smith, pastor from 1921 to 1926 and again from 1929 to 1931, also served as Dean of East Texas State University.¹³

The First Baptist Church of Kilgore has had an interesting history. As noted in the introduction of a special golden anniversary commemorative booklet, "the history of the First Baptist Church properly divides itself into two distinct periods."¹⁴ That it successfully made the

transition and developed as an instrumental force in the development of the community and in the growth of mission work is a testimony to the strength of the congregation. Largely because of its rich heritage, the church continues to grow and to serve.

Compiled by
Dan K. Utley (3802
Skipton Dr., Austin)
from materials
supplied by members
of the First Baptist
Church, Kilgore

January, 1986

ENDNOTES

¹Walter P. Webb, ed., The Handbook of Texas (Volume I) (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), pp. 733, 956.

²Al Eason, Boom Town: Kilgore, Texas (Kilgore: Kilgore Chamber of Commerce, undated), p. 54.

³Committee on Church History, Golden Anniversary: First Baptist Church (Kilgore: FBC, 1952), p. 3.

⁴Committee on Church History, pp. 3-4.

⁵Committee on Church History, p. 6.

⁶Committee on Church History, p. 8.

⁷Committee on Church History, p. 9.

⁸Eason, pp. 54-55.

⁹Committee on Church History, p. 10.

¹⁰Webb, p. 956.

¹¹Committee on Church History, p. 17.

¹²Committee on Church History, pp. 18-21.

¹³Committee on Church History, pp. 12-14.

¹⁴Committee on Church History, p. 3.

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County, Texas" (mimeographed and undated).
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FBC, 1977.
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Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952.