

Texas Historical Commission Staff (FR), 7/15/85

18" x 28" Official Texas Historical Marker with post
Gregg County (Order #8399)

Location: Take IH 20 west for 10 mi., then 4 mi. S on FM 2011, Longview

PEATOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH*

THIS CHURCH TRACES ITS HISTORY
TO A DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CONGRE-
GATION(CHRISTIAN UNION CHURCH)ORGA-
NIZED NEAR CAMBDEN IN 1852.WHEN
THAT CHURCH DISBANDED DURING THE
EARLY 1870s,ITS MEMBERS FORMED
NEW CONGREGATIONS IN OTHER
PLACES.THE PEATOWN CHRISTIAN
CHURCH WAS ORGANIZED IN 1871 WITH
TWELVE CHARTER MEMBERS.IT DREW
FAMILIES FROM THE ANTE BELLUM
SETTLEMENT OF EDWARDSVILLE,
COMMONLY KNOWN AS PEATOWN,AND
NEIGHBORING RURAL COMMUNITIES.
ITS MEMBERS WORSHIPED IN THE OLD
CHRISTIAN UNION CHURCH BUILDING
FOR OVER 50 YEARS AND HELD
BAPTISMS IN THE NEARBY SPRING.**

(1985)***

*1/2 inch lettering to contrast with text

**1/2 inch lettering

***1/4 inch lettering

APPROVED

Lynn A. Mason

Peatown Christian Church

By Helen McHaney Griffin

On the 10th day of November, 1855, Haden H. Edwards, administrator with the will annexed of Haden Edwards, deceased, executed a deed to Elbert Dickson and John Watson "in trust for school and church purposes, and for the use and benefit of those it may concern" a five-acre tract of land on the Henry Hoover Headright situated in Rusk County. The deed was filed for record October 18, 1869 and recorded in Volume "R", page 460, Deed Records of Rusk County, Texas. (It was filed also for record in Gregg County, September 1, 1953.) The land was used for purposes of school, church, and burial ground. Adjoining the land was a community settlement, but not a platted townsite, commonly called Edwardsville, according to tradition after Haden Edwards, empresario and colonizer of East Texas. "Peatown" was a popular name only, applied to "Edwardsville" and to the church and school nearby. The name "Pea Town" as used was applied in the year 1860, which was a very dry year, and only a very few of the then cultivated farms produced sufficient crops. A field near Edwardsville settlement happened to bring to full maturity a good crop of peas, and hence the saying "you can go to town for your peas" caused the name "Pea Town" to stick to the community.¹

The aforementioned deed, executed by Haden H. Edwards and witnessed by John Forbes in the County of Nacogdoches in November, 1855 sold and conveyed the five acres in consideration of Twelve and 50/100 dollars (\$12.50) and described as being adjacent and bordering property owned by George W. Gardenhire. In addition to the original five acres conveyed by Haden H. Edwards, Sophia Wade, a black woman whose land adjoined the church property, deeded three acres of land to the church August 5, 1904 and in 1909 an additional acre in exchange for a like number of acres given by Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Whittington.²

The earliest information of settlement in this area was in 1846 when Gardenhire joined his brother, Jord, there just east of the spring. John Watson and wife, Agnes Gardenhire Watson, departed Marion County, Tennessee in 1849 with their children and came by houseboat in 1850 from near Chattanooga, Tennessee, traveling both the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, to the mouth of the Arkansas River. At this point the group became aware of a cholera epidemic downriver. They sold the houseboat and boarded a steamboat to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Near there, they made a crop. The following year, they again started for Texas, arriving in November, 1850 in the Peatown community (Edwardsville at that time) of what was then Rusk County (now Gregg)*, about ten miles south of Longview. John Watson, born January 1, 1808, in Orange County, North Carolina, was a farmer. He also served as Rusk County Justice of the Peace and as agent for James H. Starr and Son, Bankers and Realtors of Marshall.³ Elbert Dickson, along with his family, had come to Texas and the Edwardsville community from Hancock County, Georgia in 1849.⁴ He died, 1863, at the Choctaw Indian Reservation in Oklahoma.

Just south of the present cemetery, once stood a small village consisting of a few business houses. The community never had a post office, but was served by the New Danville post office, which was a few miles northwest. The business houses were torn down and moved about 1860. Columbus Todd was the carpenter who dismantled the buildings. A resident of a neighboring community a few miles southwest, Cross Roads, he, his wife, and seven children, died of small pox in 1873.⁵

The first church building was of log construction and was a community or Union church used by different denominations as well as for a school. The building in which the church was organized stood west of the present building in what is now the cemetery. Records do not show when the first school was held at Peatown, however, B. F. Watson reported that school was in session in 1860 when the business houses were moved. Later the log structure was abandoned and a

* Gregg Co. organized in 1873
FR 6/4/85

Methodist church was organized. This congregation worshiped for a short time in a larger building that was never ceiled or completed. Following discontinuance of the Methodists' work, a Baptist church was organized for a short duration.⁶

Following the annexation of Texas as a part of the United States, many families migrated particularly from the South to the new state. In 1848, there came a group from Georgia. This caravan of travelers brought with them their slaves, some stock, and a few household effects. They were on the road for three months. It was a long, tedious trip, but the young people and children had jolly times along the way, and many interesting stories have become historical facts to be told and retold through the years. They arrived in the Camden Community, in East Texas, Rusk County, December 24, 1848. These families were soon living on their own farms, taking part in the social and religious life around them.

This little town of Camden was located on a bluff on the south side of the Sabine River, and as early as 1843 a license was granted John Walling to operate a Ferry Boat across the river at this point. It was made an official post office, Walling's Ferry, Texas. Later the name was changed to Camden and it was on what was called the old "North" Road going through Crockett, Palestine, Henderson, and on through Camden across this ferry to Shreveport and Jefferson. The Stage Coach traveled this route and the Stage Coach horses were changed at this point as well as the passengers were able to stop for food. Cotton was carried from all the surrounding counties over this road to the cotton markets at Shreveport and Jefferson. Agriculture was the main industry in the community, but the center of interest was the little town on the banks of the Sabine River.

A few miles west of Camden on the Sabine Road was the Christian Church known as "Christian Union", which was organized about 1852. This was a typical rural church where the members came from miles around to worship. It was housed in a simple, frame building, no doubt having been built by the men of the community, in order that they and their families might have a house in which to worship.

Here the families would enter and walk down the aisle together, and the men would sit on one side and the women on the other, as was the custom at that time. The slaves in the community were members of this same congregation. They sat in the rear where their seats were raised like steps and nailed against the back wall. They were all a part of the same service. Some of the members of the congregation were the Phillips, Cunyus, Holloways, Blakeleys, Hutchins, Fambroughs, Robertsons, Prothros, and a Tom Young, a single man and merchant at Camden. When the International Railroad came to Hallsville and Longview in 1870 and 1871, the people of Camden began to move to these railroad centers. They organized churches in their new communities and worship at Christian Union was discontinued. Some of the members of Christian Union, thus, became members at Peatown.

Camden grew into a village of some importance. There was a hotel, a blacksmith shop, a Presbyterian Church and graveyard, several stores, a Masonic Lodge, a number of residences and some saloons. There was a shop called a Chair Factory, where other furniture was also made, especially beds. The Masonic Lodge met in a two-story building and a store was beneath. This building was torn down, and it has been said that some of the timbers were carried to Peatown to be used as a Masonic building there. Later the Lodge was moved, and these same timbers were used in the Peatown Church on the site of the present building.⁷

As war clouds grew in July, 1861, eager young men from the small East Texas communities, including Edwardsville or Peatown, joined a company of men at Belleview, Rusk County, (some seven miles southwest) under the leadership of Captain J. M. Barton and at Henderson, Company C, 14th Cavalry under Captain Flem Garrison. A son of John Watson, James Monroe Watson, enlisted as a private in Captain J. M. Thompson's Mounted Company G at Quitman. Two other sons of Watson had previously enlisted in Mounted Companies in Rusk County.⁸ Others, including Billy Holloway, later to be a pastor of the Peatown Christian Church, joined the ranks of the Confederacy at Belleview. Several of the young Confederates lost their lives to

disease or conflict and did not return with the soldiers in 1865.

The Peatown community saw the end of the War Between the States with the surrender of the Confederacy, underwent the resultant economic and social changes brought about by the termination of slavery, and settled back into life as a part of an agrarian society.

The five-acre plot sold from the estate of Haden Edwards, deceased, in 1855 for church and school purposes had been used for the purpose stated as a community or union church, a Methodist and Baptist congregation, when in September, 1871, under the leadership of a Christian preacher, Brother Ed Stirman, with twelve charter members formed a congregation, the Peatown Christian Church. The charter members were: E. F. Major and wife, Sarah Ann Blakely; Nels Wood and wife, Ann; Sam Lee and wife, Sarah Robertson; John Watson; B. F. Watson; Amanda Watson; Sue Watson; Lydia Watson; and Bill Stanford. The organizing minister and District Evangelist, Ed Stirman, left the congregation in the leadership of Brother E. F. Major, who had secured him to hold a meeting and establish the church. He pastored the church until his death in 1882.⁹

Some families living in neighboring communities, such as Belleview, Rusk County (seven miles southwest, now Pirtle) where there was not a Christian Church went to Peatown to church every third Sunday. In addition, there was always a meeting during the summer, at which time some of the most noted preachers in Texas preached. The Peatown church was organized when the Christian Union Church (at Camden) was abandoned.¹⁰

Each summer the protracted meeting was the highlight of the year. The illustrious personalities of Brothers Randolph Clark and Chalmers McPherson dominate memories of those early meetings. Their powerful gospel sermons delivered in such eloquent simplicity drew hearers from Elderville, Danville, Cross Roads, Kilgore, Longview, Henderson and numerous other places. These

early meetings were characterized by supper on the ground each evening between afternoon and evening services. Some came in wagons with beds in the bottom of the wagon so the children could sleep on the way home, which in many cases took two or more hours. Others came in buggies and on horseback, and still others walked. Some families came and camped for the duration of the meeting. Some had tents, some crude wooden structures, and others used the school house for shelter. These occasions were also social gatherings that developed true fellowship and friendships that lasted throughout the entire lives of those involved. The children looked forward to the spreading of good food on the tables under the shade of the great oak trees, where fried chicken, chicken pies, country-cured ham, home-made pickles, pies, and cakes abounded. The campers were supplied with fresh vegetables, watermelons, and cantaloupes by the people of the community. After supper the spring became a very popular place for a drink of cool spring water. The path to the spring could have been called "lovers' lane", since many courtships developed there that ended in marriage for the young people of Peatown and the neighboring communities.

The aforementioned spring is several yards down a hill east of the church building. The solemnity of the baptismal services held in nature's own setting, late in the afternoon in a beautiful clear natural pool in the stream fed by the pure water of the Peatown spring made a lasting impression on the candidates and spectators alike, patterned after Jesus' own baptism in the River Jordan. From these experiences many have gone on to establish churches in other places throughout Texas and the United States. ¹¹

Two of the early leaders in the Christian Church in Texas, who held meetings at Peatown innumerable summers were Randolph Clark and Chalmers McPherson.

Clark, a Confederate veteran, attended Bethany College in West Virginia, founded by Alexander Campbell, an Irish-American theologian and founder with his father of the Disciples of Christ. From Bethany he returned to Texas and began his life's work of teaching and preaching. He and his brother, Addison Clark, began a school, Add-Ran College at Thorp Springs, Texas that was donated to the Christian Churches of Texas, was later moved to Waco and then, after a name change to Texas Christian University, was moved to Fort Worth. McPherson, a native Canadian, came to Texas in 1879 where for three years he was editor of the Christian Courier. He was the first field secretary for Texas Christian University and later head of New Testament Christianity of Brite College of the Bible of Texas Christian University. 12

The original five-acre plot, a part of the estate of Haden Edwards, early colonizer and empresario of East Texas, was used for church and school purposes as set out in the original deed, with the first school reported in session in 1860. The church building was used for school until 1900 at which time a one room school building was erected. Another room was later added. In the mid-1920's, this school building was torn down and, at the discontinuance of school, the pupils were sent by bus to Longview and Kilgore. 13

The building in which the church was organized stood west of the present building in what is now the cemetery. Some years later this building was torn down and the building which had been abandoned at Christian Union was taken down and brought and erected at Peatown on the site of the present building. In 1912 and 1913, this building was remodeled and enlarged: From the turn of the century, through the advances of the 1900's, the giving of sons again to the service of the nation in World War I, the changes brought about by the roaring '20's, the pangs of the Great Depression of the 1930's, the arrival of

prosperity to the area brought on by the discovery of the closely-adjacent great East Texas Oil Field, and the sharing of sons again to the war effort during World War II, the church moved on.

The remodeled building housed the congregation until June, 1951, when it was dismantled and the present red brick church building was built by gifts and offerings from members, former members, and friends of the church. Many of these were descendants of charter members. Spanning six generations of people dedicated to the worship of God, the new building was dedicated in October 1951. A business meeting was held in December 1951, just two months later, and the note on the new building was paid in full. 14

In a grove of stately, spreading oak, gum and tall graceful pine trees deep in the heart of East Texas, the Peatown Christian Church has stood for one hundred fourteen years, located on Farm to Market Road 2011, ten miles south of Longview and three miles west of the Gregg County Airport. The well-kept, adjoining cemetery has a register of 180 marked graves, the oldest marker being 1857. Housed for over a century in structures representing the most primitive of early East Texas architecture, those refurbished and restored from second-handed materials, to a modern brick veneer comfort-conditioned sanctuary, this congregation of dedicated and committed Disciples of Christ has stood as a bulwark of fortitude and perseverance to the community, the people of the county, the surrounding area, as well as a historic tower of Christian strength and vitality throughout the state and nation.

Truly, the Peatown Christian Church, because of the antiquity of its charter, the historic significance of its physical site, and its influence for good in the county and throughout the state and nation for more than a century, is eligible and deserves to be designated as a landmark and made official by the granting of the Texas Historical marker.

February 1985

*Compiled by
Miss James H. Griffin*

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Valentine, Vallie McHaney Morgan, The Story of Julia Barclay Holloway
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Footnotes

1. Richard B. Levy, History of the Creation of Gregg County, Texas
Page 9
2. Lillian Watson, A History of the Peatown Christian Church
1871 - 1971 October 1971 (unpublished)
3. Judy Watson McClure, Confederate from East Texas, Nortex Press.
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4. Thelma Dickson, Personal Interview, January 1985
5. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Page 1
6. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Page 14
7. George Prothro Swiley, The Family Story of James P. and Sarah
Elder Holloway (unpublished)
8. Judy Watson McClure, op. cit. Page 3
9. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Page 2
10. Vallie McHaney Morgan Valentine, The Story of Julia Barclay
Holloway McHaney, My Mother
(unpublished) September 1959
11. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Pages 7, 8
12. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Pages 8, 9
13. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Page 14
14. Lillian Watson, op. cit. Pages 2, 3

PEATOWN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

This church traces its history to the Disciples of Christ (Christian Union Church) organized near Camden (now Easton) in 1852. When that church disbanded during the early 1870's due to the coming of the railroad to Longview, its members formed congregations in other places. The Peatown Christian Church was organized in 1871 with twelve charter members. It drew families from the ante-bellum settlement of Edwardsville, commonly known as Peatown and other neighboring rural communities. Its members worshiped for 80 years in a structure built from timbers taken from the old Christian Union Church. Baptisms were held in a nearby spring. The church and cemetery are located on Hwy #2011 ten miles south of Longview and three miles west of the Gregg County Airport.

Helen Griffin

GUM SPRING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NEW DANVILLE

In 1848, C. W. Scott and Haden Edwards mutually agreed to each donate five acres of land for the establishment of a Presbyterian church in the New Danville area to be called "The Old School Presbyterian Church." Because Mr. Scott and S. S. Barnett were the only Presbyterian families in the area at that time, they asked neighboring families to help erect a church on the lot so that there might be preaching by other denominations in the neighborhood. A log building was completed in 1849 and sermons were preached there by Methodists and Cumberland ministers. On September 28, 1850, Rev. M.W. Staples, a Presbyterian minister passing through on his way from Marshall to Henderson, preached a sermon and made an appointment to organize a Presbyterian Church at a later date. Illness prevented Rev. Staples' return, but a week later Rev. J. M. Becton, another minister passing through, made an appointment to organize the church on the first sabbath in October 1850. On that date a protracted meeting was being held by the Methodists, so the organization was postponed until the next day. On the first Monday in October 1850, the Gum Spring Presbyterian Church was organized by Rev. Becton.

The church was so named because it was erected at the site of a "large and never failing spring with a large gum sunk in it, found there when the country was first taken possession of by the whites." Rev. Becton's text that October 7, was Prov. 3:17, and the following members were accepted into the church: C. W. Scott, Allen Sloan, Thos. W. Templeton, Mrs. T. C. Barnett, and Mrs. M. J. Scott. Mr. Templeton and Mr. Sloan were elected ruling elders and Mr. Templeton was ordained, not having been an elder previously.

In December 1850, five more members were added. They were Meshack Barber, Mrs. Caroline Barber, Mrs. Elvira Templeton, Mrs. Elizabeth Sloan, and Mrs. Nancy Sloan. Thus the membership continued to grow.

On January 26, 1851, the Session elected Mr. Templeton as its first delegate to Presbytery, meeting at Marshall. At that same Session meeting, a negro boy, Samuel, belonging to J. H. Maxwell, was received as a member. Minutes of the Session prior to the Civil War show a number of slaves were accepted as members of the church.

On May 3, 1851, the first Communion service was held and also the first baptism at which eight children were baptized. They were Clavin and Mary Sloan, Mary Asenoth Scott, Martha Ellen, James Stephen, Caroline Talitha Cumi, and Catherine Cinthy McCowan, and Samuel White Barber.

In the minutes of the Session there follows a report of another first in our church history - a case of discipline. This became necessary when a gentleman grew angry because a letter of his was misplaced by the Session and could not be returned to him. Though many efforts were made to pacify him, he is reported to have at various times insulted Rev. Becton and circulated false rumors about him, refused to appear before the Session to answer the charges against him, and drew in succession a rifle, a shot gun, and a scribe-all on two church members, one, the clerk of the Session. It was concluded that, and I quote, "The Church had no other means left but to cut him off. That it was not duty to peril life in giving notice to one whose conduct was so unchristian."

Six years later disaster struck. The Minutes simply state, "The Church consumed by fire the 31st day of Dec. 1857. Books and furniture all lost. J. A. Smith, Clerk".

It is said that a distressed church member called on Meshack Barber and wailed, "What are we going to do, Mr. Barber? The answer was, "We are going to build another church."

Evidently they did, because the next entry states Rev. M. J. Wallace slated supply minister for the year 1858.

This building is the Church constructed at that time under the leadership of A. Sloan, M. Barber, W. H. Leach, and Joseph D. Dixon. At that time there were 76 members listed on the church roll. It is interesting to note that these 76 members have at least 24 descendents who are members of our Church at the present time. There may be more but the ones that I know of are: Mrs. Henry Wallace, Mrs. James Hollingsworth, Mrs. Cecil Hart, Miss Evelyn Barnett, Mrs. Clay Laird, Mrs. Jeff Moore, Miss Mary Belle Moore, Miss Ouida Moore, Mrs. Billy Guess, Mr. Roy Moore, Mrs. Lois Osborn, Miss Caroline Ross, Miss Martha Barton, Mr. Virgil Barton, Mr. James Hall Griffin, Jr., Mr. J. A. V. Griffin, Mr. Jud Griffin, Mr. Jim Griffin, Mr. John Griffin, Mrs. O. N. Pederson,

Mr. Dick Laird, Miss Virginia Laird, Mrs. Jim Sparks, and Mr. Buster Laird.

The large rocks by the sides of the building are the original foundation. Free standing bridge timbers in the attic are also an interesting part of the original construction. Lumber is hand hewn by slaves. The pews are original furnishings.

The upper story was the meeting place of Danville Masonic Lodge 101 for many years and of the Woodmen of the World Lodge. Classes of the Danville Masonic Female Academy were held here from 1858 to 1874. The Academy, chartered at the original Gum Spring location in 1854, later evolved into Lon Morris College now located at Jacksonville.

In 1874, the population of New Danville was moving toward the railroad - to Kilgore. On Sept. 27 of that year the following resolution was presented at a Congregational Meeting by C. B. Kilgore:

"Resolved that the Presbyterian Church Organization at New Danville known as the Gum Spring Church be and the same is hereby removed to the town of Kilgore, and that hereafter it shall be known as the New Danville Presbyterian Church.

Resolved further that the church building at New Danville shall not be removed and that it shall be the duty of the church to provide for preaching at said building as often as convenient and as regularly as possible at the discretion of the minister in charge, and the Session of the Church."

The resolution was accepted with only one member dissenting. Since that time the building has been used by various denominations. Among them are the Danville Methodist Church, which worshiped here until the brick building just across Danville Road was built, and the Trinity Assembly of God Church which is presently worshipping here.

Miss Caroline Ross
Dedication of the Texas State
Historical Marker.
January 17, 1971

First Presbyterian Church
Main and Lawrence Streets
Kilgore, Texas
Grace Union Presbytery

HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, KILGORE, TEXAS

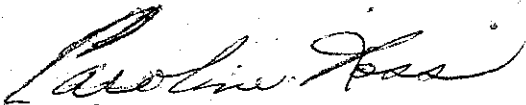
The First Presbyterian Church, Kilgore, Texas, was organized in October, 1850, near a location called the Gum Spring, and called The Old School Presbyterian Church. The founding minister, the Rev. J.M. Becton, and an elder were present when the Presbytery of Eastern Texas was organized in 1851. The church at Gum Spring burned, and a new church was built in 1858, in the Danville Community and called the Gum Spring Presbyterian Church, New Danville. It was here that the Danville Female Masonic Academy was organized. This school later evolved into Lon Morris Junior College. Because settlers were moving to the railroad in nearby Kilgore, the church also moved to Kilgore in 1874. Services were held at Alexander Institute until a building was erected at the corner of South and Rusk Streets that same year. The name at this time was changed to the New Danville Presbyterian Church, Kilgore. This church burned in 1931. Worship services were held at the Kilgore City Hall until a new building was constructed on the same site in 1932. In 1934, oil was discovered on the church property, and it was necessary to tear part of the building away so that oil wells could be drilled. At this time the name was changed to the First Presbyterian Church of Kilgore. In 1939, the congregation moved to its present location at Main and Lawrence Streets in Kilgore.

Important events during the 129 years of service of the church include establishment of five mission churches in Kilgore when the population of East Texas was swelled by the oil boom; the addition of a new parlor, kitchen, and fellowship hall by the Rosa May Griffin Foundation; and the award of a Texas Historical Medallion to the old Danville Church in 1970. This church burned in 1978, and a Texas Historical site marker has been obtained.

First Presbyterian Church
Main and Lawrence Streets
Kilgore, Texas
Grace Union Presbytery

History - 2

Recent ministers of the church include Dr. Cecil H. Lang, Dr. Shirley C. Guthrie, and the Rev. J. Howard Edington. Current minister is the Rev. Dan F. Goodwin, Jr.



Caroline Ross, WOC Historian
March 2, 1979

Katherine Brown,
President, WOC