

## ABSTRACT

### “What Mean Ye by These Stones?”: The Origins and Architecture of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo

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The First Baptist Church of Amarillo is an architectural treasure that resembles the great cathedrals of Europe. How did such a beautiful church come to exist on the Panhandle of Texas at the beginning of the Great Depression? And why did a congregation of Southern Baptists, part of a denomination that tends to deemphasize the role of architectural beauty in worship, undertake such a costly project? This thesis seeks to answer these questions by exploring the early history of the church alongside the historical, economic, and social context in which it was built. Additionally, the thesis identifies a variety of influences on the church's architecture and aesthetics and examines recent building projects undertaken by the current congregation to preserve the church's beauty for future members. Throughout, I argue that FBCA stands as a unique example of a marriage between Baptist sensibilities and a traditional Christian emphasis on beauty.

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“WHAT MEAN YE BY THESE STONES?”: THE ORIGINS AND ARCHITECTURE  
OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF AMARILLO

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
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Honors Program

By  
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Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement throughout the project. Particularly, I am grateful to Margaret Thonnard for serving as my photographer during the research trip to Amarillo. Readers will notice her beautiful photography dotted throughout the thesis.

To David Lyle Jeffrey, with great gratitude for teaching me to read – and love –  
both Art and Scripture.

## INTRODUCTION

I first learned about the First Baptist Church of Amarillo two years ago, in the spring of 2018. I was a sophomore in Dr. David Jeffrey's "Masterworks in Art" class, a course that explored the history of Christian art and architecture from the early church to modern times. A couple months into the semester, we arrived at our unit on Christian architecture. In class we flew through a dizzying array of pictures of great basilicas and cathedrals of Europe, but one church in particular stood out to me. Though its beauty rivaled that of the European churches, I was surprised to find that it was actually the First Baptist Church of Amarillo, in my very state. Dr. Jeffrey explained that the church was an excellent modern example of the principles and designs we had been studying. In his book *In the Beauty of Holiness: Art and the Bible in Western Culture*, he went even further: "in the beautiful First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, these basic features are given their most elegant American treatment."<sup>1</sup>

The shockingly beautiful pictures of the church were only magnified by its intriguing location in the Panhandle of Texas. Dr. Jeffrey hinted that the church might make a great topic for one of our papers in his class, or even for an honors thesis project. I did preliminary research to try to ascertain the reason why a church this beautiful had been built in Amarillo – was it a zealous architect, a large donor, something else? I contacted the current pastor, Howie Batson, and his assistant, Carol Brian. They were kind enough to send me a copy of *Sacred Spaces*, a short book filled with beautiful

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<sup>1</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, *In the Beauty of Holiness: Art and the Bible in Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 371.

photos of the church and its new 2010 addition, as well as reflections on the building by Batson himself. After a few weeks of research, I talked with Dr. Jeffrey, and we decided that the project could, indeed, work as an honors thesis.

From the very beginning, the goal of the thesis was not just a closer look at FBCA's architecture and ornamentation, though that was certainly needed. The only scholarly sources available on the architecture were Jay C. Henry's *Architecture in Texas: 1895-1945*, which mentioned the church only briefly and with some errors, and Willard Robinson's *Reflections of Faith: House of Worship in the Lone Star State*, which hardly referenced the church at all. Buie Harwood's *Decorating Texas: decorative painting in the Lone Star State from the 1850s to the 1950s* offered a brief analysis of the interior decorative painting, but limited its study to the vestibule. Clearly a close analysis of the church's architecture and ornamentation was needed. What was also needed, however, was an explanation of how this church, resembling the great cathedrals of Europe, came to exist in the dusty plains of Amarillo at the beginning of the Great Depression. The church's own history book, *The Grand March: A Pictorial History of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo Texas, 1889-1989*, put together by Mrs. Maston C. Courtney and Mrs. James B. Franklin in 1989 for the church's centennial celebration, was helpful in this regard. However, those authors were more concerned with compiling photos and information together than offering an analysis of why and how the church was built. Thus, from the very beginning this thesis aimed to answer both aesthetic and historical questions.

A final aspect that interested me in this church was its Baptist heritage. I am a lifelong Baptist and, due to various childhood moves, have been a member of about five

different churches within the denomination. The only truly beautiful ornamentation I remember seeing in those churches was at a Baptist church my family joined while I was in elementary school. It had a magnificent rose window at the front of the sanctuary, filled with Christian symbols that I studied throughout many sermons. I always wondered about their meanings, and I never heard anyone explain them until Dr. Jeffrey's class. It was my joy to learn that those symbols stood in a much larger network of Christian iconography, which itself was rooted in Christian tradition and history. Both the class and my own experiences made me realize that traditional notions of Christian beauty, while not completely alien to Baptist churches, are not regular staples in their building processes.

This is an unfortunately common observation. When I tell friends and acquaintances about FBCA, they usually express surprise about the denomination: "And this is a Baptist church?" Their second question: "But has it always been a Baptist church?" as if the Baptist congregation took over later from some other denomination. What I admire the most about FBCA is its marriage of a rich and beautiful sacred space with a congregation that is alive in both faith and practice. In this it perhaps even surpasses many European cathedrals, which with increased secularization now unfortunately host only dwindling congregations. That FBCA combines a commitment to sacred space with the vitality of a healthy Baptist congregation makes it quite unique, a model to other churches seeking this marriage of beauty and living faith.

The first chapter explores the beginnings of both Amarillo and FBCA around 1889 and follows the growth of both until 1926, providing the social, historical, and economic context for the decision to construct the Thirteenth and Tyler building in 1926.

The second chapter follows the details of the design and construction process, as well as church efforts to pay for the massive building. The third chapter provides an analysis of the church's architecture and aesthetics. The fourth relates the 1997 restoration and 2010 addition to the church and concludes with thoughts on the church's place and example among current trends in Baptist (and more broadly, evangelical) church buildings.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The First Baptist Church of Amarillo 1889-1926: Historical, Economic, and Social Context

When a small group of Baptists founded the First Baptist Church of Amarillo in 1890, their first church building was a small frame structure infested with fleas. They could not have imagined that forty years later, their descendants would be dedicating a magnificent \$500,000 church in the same town. From its beginnings in the late 1880s, the town of Amarillo's rapid growth transformed the church from a small group of Baptists making their way on the rough frontier to a respectably sized congregation. By the mid-1920s, a variety of economic and cultural forces enabled construction to begin on the church's magnificent building at Thirteenth and Tyler St.

#### *Amarillo's Beginnings*

When the town of Amarillo became the county seat of Potter County, Texas in August 1887, it boasted almost nothing but the promise that the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway would soon arrive in the fledgling community. The site, which was originally called "Oneida" by its developer, James Berry, had been established only a few months earlier in a direct bid by Berry to claim both the county seat and the coveted railroad. At that time the Panhandle of Texas was still a largely unsettled territory. An extended Anglo push into the region had been impossible until about thirteen years before, when in 1874 the U.S. Army defeated several Native American tribes in what became known as the Red River War. As a result of the war, the tribes were forced into

Oklahoma reservations, leaving a vacancy that cattlemen such as Charles Goodnight soon filled. They moved their herds into the Panhandle and created the large ranches that soon became emblematic of Panhandle ranching.<sup>1</sup> In 1881, Joseph F. Glidden and Henry B. Sanborn established Frying Pan Ranch on what would become the western edge of Amarillo. Similarly, the famed LX Ranch was founded just north of the future town site in 1884.

An influx of investment from investors back east and overseas caused large ranches such as these to quickly dominate ranching in the Panhandle.<sup>2</sup> While Amarillo was not founded until 1887, this growing cattle industry boomed throughout the early 1880s. Unfortunately, however, “its very success attracted excessive investment, overstocking, bad management, and depressed prices, thereby making the industry vulnerable to any dislocation.”<sup>3</sup> A series of hard winters and droughts in the mid-1880s devastated the industry. Though many ranches suffered, “well-managed ones survived, and a far better-organized industry emerged,” an industry that would benefit greatly from the coming railroad.<sup>4</sup> Despite such setbacks, the area “continued to attract people, including cattle raisers, farmers, town builders, merchants, and the families that came with them.”<sup>5</sup> Such pioneers settled and did business in and around the small, isolated towns that began to pop up across the Panhandle.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Howard Carlson, *Amarillo : The Story of a Western Town* (Texas Tech University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, Frederick W. Rathjen, “PANHANDLE,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, last modified June 15, 2010, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ryp01>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 18.



One such town was Berry's Oneida site, which won election for the Potter county seat on August 30, 1887. Berry represented the interests of several Colorado City merchants who wished to establish their brand stores in the Panhandle and make the Oneida site into the region's main trading center.<sup>6</sup> With the county seat won and the railroad on its way, the merchants' interests were well secured in the little town. The site quickly became known as Amarillo, probably as a result of the Amarillo Creek and Lake nearby, "natural features [that] had been named by New Mexican traders . . . probably for the yellow soil along the creek banks or the yellow wildflowers that were abundant during the spring and summer."<sup>7</sup> (The current pronunciation is an anglicized version of the Spanish word for yellow.) At first, the town consisted mainly of tents, but soon these were replaced by small, frame buildings.<sup>8</sup> Within a few months of the county election, the Fort Worth & Denver City Railroad arrived, "and by October 1887 freight service was made available. Amarillo boomed as a cattle-marketing center. Holding grounds, complete with pens, were built near the tracks to corral the numerous herds that came from ranches in the Panhandle, South Plains, and eastern New Mexico for shipment."<sup>9</sup> Ranchers who once had to drive their herds 225 miles further north to Dodge City, Kansas, could now sell their cattle in Amarillo and have them shipped by rail to stockyards in Denver, Colorado.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, H. Allen Anderson, "AMARILLO, TX," last modified June 9, 2010, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hda02>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Maston C. Courtney and Mrs. James B. Franklin, *The Grand March* (Whitney Russell Printers, 1989), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, "AMARILLO, TX."

<sup>10</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 28.

The arrival of a second railroad the next year further cemented Amarillo as a major player in the cattle trade, connecting the town to the Santa Fe Railroad's network of rails, which ran all the way to Chicago, the thriving capital of America's livestock and meat industry.<sup>11</sup> By the summer of 1888, the growing town "boasted eleven stores, several saloons, a hotel, a restaurant . . . and a population of 200."<sup>12</sup> The spring of the following year, however, brought new challenges. Harsh rains flooded part of the town, exposing the site as a low-lying flood zone. This worked to the advantage of H.B. Sanborn, a part owner of Frying Pan Ranch, who had been angling since 1888 to move the town eastward, out of the flood zone and onto his property. To entice businesses and homeowners towards his side of town, "Sanborn erected the elegant, forty-room Amarillo Hotel, which became the town's social center and the unofficial headquarters of area cattle buyers. He also donated a half block for Amarillo's first union church."<sup>13</sup> Most enticing of all, he offered to "trade lots in the new location for those in the original site and contribute to the expense of moving buildings."<sup>14</sup> The brutal rains of 1889 convinced many in Amarillo to accept Sanborn's offer, and soon the town had moved eastward.

#### *First Baptist Church of Amarillo: The Early Years*

In 1889, Amarillo's first church building was erected on the land donated by Sanborn. That a church building would be established so soon after the town's founding was anything but inevitable. The neighboring town of Tascosa, located in the adjacent

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<sup>11</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 31, quoting Price and Rathjen.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, "AMARILLO, TX."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Oldham county and founded in 1876, had no church at all for its first ten years.<sup>15</sup> Frontier life, apparently, was rough and exhausting, with little time or space for religion. Other establishments fared better. Within three years of Amarillo's founding, no less than six saloons and a number of brothels provided entertainment for the steady cycle of cowboys moving through town.<sup>16</sup> New arrivals to Amarillo noted that it felt no change of pace on Sundays,<sup>17</sup> and any religious sentiment was limited to some services at the Frying Pan Ranch and the activity of a few Methodist Church circuit riders. Nevertheless, one such circuit rider, Isaac Mills, established an official Methodist church in the town in 1888, the first church in the city. In the beginning, services were held either at the county courthouse or the home of Judge William B. Plemmons.<sup>18</sup> One member of the small congregation, George A. F. Parker, enthusiastically spearheaded the construction of a small church on Sanborn's donated land.<sup>19</sup> Parker, the manager of a lumber company in town, provided both materials and leadership, and it was reported that all citizens, "regardless of creed," provided labor to construct the building.<sup>20</sup>

The small chapel, first known as Parker's Chapel and later as Union Church, hosted all the denominations in town, which steadily grew to include the Methodist, Baptist, Christian, and Presbyterian traditions. "All denominations attended union Sunday

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<sup>15</sup> James Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains: A Study of Amarillo Baptists, 1920 to 1940" (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981), 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 17.

School, and each denomination alternated in furnishing a pastor for the worship services.”<sup>21</sup> A Baptist congregation was organized in that chapel by the Rev. Thomas H. Storts, an itinerant Baptist preacher and missionary who had been conducting services for them once a month. The congregation was officially established in September 1889 with sixteen charter members. Not long after this, the small group of Baptists began raising funds for their own church building. The Ladies Aid Society of the church, organized in 1890 by founding church member Marie Bynum Smith, helped by “[giving] ice cream suppers and [sponsoring] other forms of entertainment to raise funds for the building.”<sup>22</sup> In September 1890, the congregation purchased two lots at Fifth and Pierce St. for \$275. They completed the construction of a small frame building on the site by Christmas of the same year.

The new church building at 500 Pierce was small, but impressive for a congregation that still as of yet had no residential pastor. It was about 36 feet by 60 feet, “with a high ceiling and double doors in the center front.”<sup>23</sup> Several years later, in 1895, men from the church raised money to remodel the outside of the building. They constructed a bell tower in the northeast tower and located the entrance in the tower itself. The only surviving period photo of the church shows a small, respectable church building (see Figure 1.)<sup>24</sup>

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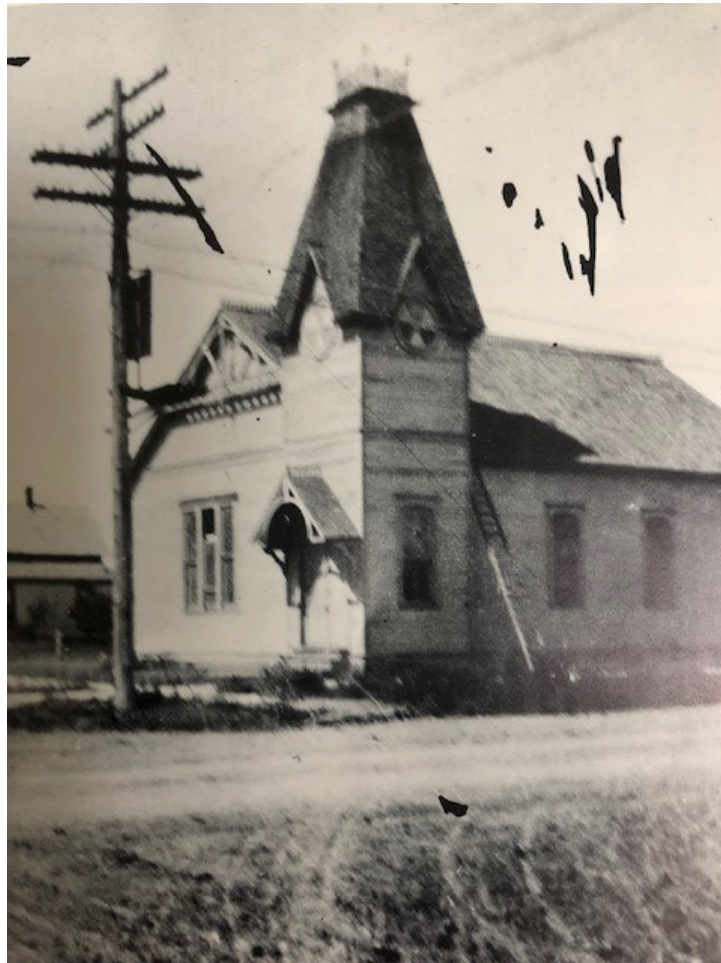
<sup>21</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; Hickman, “Crisis on the High Plains,” 19.

<sup>23</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> The building at 500 Pierce St. was renovated and relocated to the current Thirteenth and Tyler St. property in May 1964.

Unfortunately, the structure was built on cedar block stilts that left the shady ground beneath the church easily accessible to hogs and chickens. Such animals, which routinely took refuge there, “were not only noisy but also the cause of a flea infestation in the church, since the fleas could easily make their way through the flooring and into the Baptist assembly.”<sup>25</sup> An ongoing battle between the fleas and the women of the church ensued, with the women trying various methods, including strong-smelling flea powder and peppermint oil, to rid the church of the fleas. It was to no avail.



**Figure 1.** First Baptist Church at 500 Pierce St.

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<sup>25</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 3.

The young church also faced challenges of the spiritual variety. Apparently only one member of the church was both willing and able to “pray in public.”<sup>26</sup> As one member recalled years later:

On one occasion this talented member was out of town, and W. H. Fuqua, one of Amarillo's most prominent citizens and later moderator of the Palo Duro Association, had the responsibility of closing a Sunday school session in prayer. Neither Fuqua nor a Jim Smith were able to pray an extemporaneous prayer, and neither knew how the Lord's Prayer began. They were rescued by a woman in the congregation who started the prayer for them.<sup>27</sup>

This anecdote is especially touching because Fuqua and the other man mentioned, James L. Smith, were leaders in the young church. Both had arrived in Amarillo shortly after the town's conception and soon played significant leadership roles in not only the church but the town as well. In the summer of 1889, Fuqua and his wife, then residents of a small town near Dallas, had planned a round trip by train to New Mexico. When they arrived in Amarillo, however, “they got off and stayed.”<sup>28</sup> An industrious man, Fuqua purchased a livery stable, operated a horse-drawn streetcar service, and established a retail coal business in Amarillo before becoming the president of the First National Bank in 1894. For his part, James L. Smith and his wife arrived in Amarillo in 1888 and were two of the church's sixteen charter members. Smith started a general mercantile store and became a

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<sup>26</sup> Hickman, “Crisis on the High Plains,” 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 18, paraphrasing article from the Amarillo Daily News, “Hereford Banker Speaks at Historical Meet in Canyon City,” Feb. 15, 1925.

<sup>28</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, H. Allen Anderson, “FUQUA, WILEY HOLDER,” last modified June 12, 2010, accessed August 15, 2019, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffu22>.

wealthy and respected businessman.<sup>29</sup> The couple provided the church with their first organ, and Mr. Smith was the first organist.<sup>30</sup>

The lay leadership of men such as Fuqua and Smith was certainly admirable. But the itinerant missionary Rev. Storts, who had helped to establish the church, felt that now that the church had its own building, “a permanent pastor should be called.”<sup>31</sup> The church obliged and called the Rev. G.W. Capps, who had recently moved to the nearby Palo Duro Canyon from central Texas, to be their first pastor. Capps had studied at Baylor University in Independence and pastored several churches in central Texas before responding to State Mission Board pleas for missionaries to go to the Panhandle. Unfortunately, because he lived about forty miles away, he was only able to make the journey to Amarillo once a month. Because this arrangement was difficult, his ministry at the church lasted only about a year. During his short tenure as pastor, however, he was instrumental in founding the Palo Duro Canyon Baptist Association. Coming from a hub of Baptist activity in central Texas, Capps likely saw the logic and necessity in bringing the Baptists of the region together and connecting them to the Southern Baptist Convention. He moderated the first meeting of the new association, which comprised representatives of eight area churches. During the meeting, a representative to the upcoming Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta was elected.<sup>32</sup>

Bennet Hatcher became the church’s first resident preacher in December 1891. He was pastor of the church for five years, giving stability to a congregation that had already

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<sup>29</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 58, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

been through two pastors in a little over a year. Under his leadership, the church grew slowly even as Amarillo began struggling through the difficult decade of the 1890s. A nationwide economic collapse hurt businesses and the cattle market, and drought once again ravaged the area. Political squabbles over the town's government further complicated an already difficult time. "Surely, the drought and hard times slowed Amarillo's development. The minor boom of 1888-90 ended, settlement declined sharply, and during the next several years – 1892-1897 – the city's population growth slowed."<sup>33</sup> Despite such difficulties, however, the town pulled through and by the turn of the century, economic vitality had returned. In 1900, the town of 1,442 could boast ten lawyers, three newspapers, two banks, a soon-to-be-opened hospital, and even a jewelry store.<sup>34</sup> Due to a new law passed in the Texas legislature, the town also stood poised for rapid economic growth.

#### *Population Boom and a New Building at Ninth and Polk*

In 1895, the legislature passed the Four Section Act, which opened up large amounts of government land up for purchase by settlers wishing to reside on the land and use it for farming or raising livestock. Prior to this legislation, the majority of government land had been leased to large ranches, which used it to graze their cattle. But both the new law and a landmark court case began to favor farmer-stockmen and potential new settlers over the interests of the commercial ranches. The courts ruled in 1902 that once-leased land must be made available for purchase before it could be leased by ranches again. As a result, 1902 marked the beginning of a "major land rush" as the once-leased

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<sup>33</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 55-60.



land went up for sale and settlers “poured into the Panhandle.”<sup>35</sup> Many settlers came from other areas of Texas, but many also came from Midwestern states like Iowa and Illinois, traveling south by railroad. In all, “the new arrivals caused the Panhandle’s population to nearly quadruple before 1910. The number of farms almost doubled.”<sup>36</sup> New people and new money flooded the region, making a number of Amarillo’s early citizens very rich as they sold food, lodging, ranching supplies, and other necessities to the newcomers. The town itself also continued to grow, adding a public library in 1902 and a performing hall called the Grand Opera House in 1907. Such advances indicated an appetite for both education and cultural events among the general public.<sup>37</sup>

The land rush and subsequent population boom boosted First Baptist’s membership numbers and undoubtedly pressured its members to begin plans for a new building. (This, and the ongoing battle with the fleas of their present building.) Membership more than doubled from 1901 to 1904, from 154 members to 343. With this in mind, the church appointed a committee in late 1904 to “select an architect to plan a new church building [with a budget] between \$10,000 and \$15,000.”<sup>38</sup> The church had been through a series of pastors from 1897 to 1904 (Rev. W.A. Mason, Rev. James P. Robnett, Rev. W.A. Mason again, and Rev. Anderson E. Baten, respectively). The church’s newest pastor, the Rev. Eugene Alldredge, accepted the position in 1905 with the expectation that the church had “promised to build a new church building.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 11-14.

The Building Committee, which included both James L. Smith and W.H. Fuqua, set to work. As part of the Building Committee, Fuqua not only helped find a new location for the church at 809 Polk Street, but bought and donated the land himself.<sup>40</sup> In the autumn of 1905, the location was approved and the Building Committee recommended a plan drawn by architect O.G. Roquemore “with the stipulation that these plans . . . be proven practical and the cost feasible.”<sup>41</sup> Evidently this could not be proven or some other delay ensued. Frustrated with the lack of progress towards constructing a new building, Rev. Alldredge resigned in October 1906. At some point, the architectural planning was turned over to the well-established Fort Worth firm Sanguinet and Staats. The firm produced buildings and styles of all types, from factories and skyscrapers to churches and schools.<sup>42</sup>

The building they designed for the church was built between 1907 and 1908 and featured many elements of neoclassical design prevalent in Protestant architecture at the time (see Figure 2.) The basic design of the church combined a cubical geometric form with Classical porticos facing both street fronts. A large dome, “a prominent feature on numerous churches inspired by the work of the influential Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio,” crowned the auditorium.<sup>43</sup> Variations on this cubical, Palladian form

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<sup>40</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 15, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, Christopher Long, “SANGUINET AND STAATS,” last modified June 15, 2010, accessed August 15, 2019, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/cms01>.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, Willard Bethurem, and Robinson, Jean M. *Reflections of Faith: Houses of Worship in the Lone Star State*. (Baylor University Press, 1994), 169.

were common among Protestant churches of the early twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> This was for reasons both aesthetic and theological.



**Figure 2.** First Baptist Church at Ninth and Polk St.

As Willard Robinson notes, “without a central focus upon an altar or a need for processions, evangelical churches [in particular] persisted in their deprecation of the narrow nave, preferring instead large edifices with wide auditoriums and good acoustics.”<sup>45</sup> A large auditorium and good acoustics were of particular concern to First Baptist, as an expensive organ with exposed pipes was the centerpiece of the new sanctuary (see Figure 3.)

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<sup>44</sup> For example, see First Baptist Church, Waco (ca. 1907), First Baptist Church, Tyler (ca. 1915), and First United Methodist Church, Austin (1928). All churches mentioned in Robinson, 171-172.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 163.



**Figure 3.** Sanctuary at Ninth and Polk St.

The cost of the building was ultimately three times what had originally been budgeted in 1904 (an increase from \$15,00 to \$44,000), but the church raised the money without difficulty through congregational giving and the sale of the former building and its lot.<sup>46</sup> The result was a beautiful edifice that looked and felt vastly different from the small frame building the church had used since 1890.

During the construction of the building at Ninth and Polk, Rev. Robert F. Jenkins became pastor, having previously pastored a church in Greenville, Texas. He proved equally helpful as a skilled preacher and “excellent financier.”<sup>47</sup> This gift of administration was especially useful because during the construction of the new building, the church remarkably shouldered another cost: constructing a building for its daughter church, Second Baptist. This daughter church, later known as Pierce Street Baptist

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<sup>46</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 16, 18.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

Church, was established in North Amarillo with a congregation that consisted mainly of new converts at a summer revival held by First Baptist. Jenkins and W.H. Fuqua spearheaded the effort to build a church for the new congregation, and by the time of its completion, nearly all of the \$4,000 cost had been raised.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently First Baptist helped another satellite congregation, which had begun as a Sunday School mission of the church in 1908, secure a building in East Amarillo in 1910. It was first known as Cleveland Street Baptist Church and shortly after as Tabernacle Baptist Church.<sup>49</sup>

First Baptist's generosity towards other up-and-coming Baptist congregations is especially notable considering that it occurred when the church was constructing and paying off its own new building. It reflects a great commitment on the part of the church to both mission and evangelism; indeed, because of such efforts Baptist influence spread beyond the immediate vicinity of First Baptist and into other sections of Amarillo. Nor did it stop there. In 1914, the church sponsored an extension church several miles outside of town in the Bushland area. Within three years, this extension became self-supporting and organized into a separate church.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, when the San Jacinto area of the city began to grow in 1922, First Baptist purchased two lots there for the purpose of building a small "Sunday School mission" or satellite church. A team of professional carpenters set the foundation on a Thursday and Friday, and on that Saturday a full slate of men from the Baraca Sunday School class of First Baptist turned out in "full force" to build it. Every man brought what construction tools he had, and "by late evening the building was

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<sup>48</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 21; Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 21; Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 19.

erected and shingled, complete except for doors, windows, and painting.”<sup>51</sup> San Jacinto Baptist Church became a full-fledged church by 1926. Such unstinting generosity in both time and finances on the part of First Baptist foreshadowed the sacrifices many church members would make to build a new church building at Thirteenth and Tyler in the late 1920s. In the meantime, however, the church settled into its grandiose new building on Ninth and Polk. Rev. Jenkins remained pastor until 1915, becoming the longest serving pastor in the church’s short history and providing great stability during a period of extended growth for the church. No one could have guessed, however, how that growth would accelerate in the years to come.

### *Oil Boom and Roaring Twenties*

Amarillo’s economy continued to expand. Wheat production, which had started in earnest around 1909, soared to meet the wartime demand of 1914-1918. Thousands of acres once used for cattle grazing were converted into farmland as the price for a bushel of wheat tripled.<sup>52</sup> This economic prosperity contributed to Amarillo’s long period of growth between the 1910s and 1920s. It was not the entire story, however. By the early 1920s, the wheat industry suffered a collapse as demand and prices plummeted after the war, leaving a new industry in the Panhandle to pick up the slack. cursory exploration of the Panhandle’s oil and natural resources had been made in the early 1900s as oil wells sprang up throughout southeast Texas. Such exploration was unsuccessful until December 1918, when the newly formed Amarillo Oil Company struck a natural gas well on the land of rancher Robert Masterson. It yielded fifteen million cubic feet of gas per

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<sup>51</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 81.

day.<sup>53</sup> Banker W.H. Fuqua and other Panhandle businessmen soon leased land in Carson County northeast of Amarillo and “convinced the Gulf Production Company to drill for oil.”<sup>54</sup> On May 2, 1921, the company’s well “Gulf-Burnet No. 2” produced the first oil of the Panhandle. Just a few years later, the Dixon Creek Oil Company struck a reserve in the nearby Hutchinson County that yielded a staggering 10,000 barrels a day.<sup>55</sup> As wells sprang up throughout the region, major changes were in store for Amarillo and the Panhandle as a whole. Soon, Amarillo became “the corporate center of major oil companies. Abundant natural gas brought plants for extraction of carbon black, helium, and zinc smelting, while the marketing of petroleum products required construction of refineries and pipelines.”<sup>56</sup> Wealth poured in as “114 companies, representing a capital investment of about twelve million dollars,” formed in the town during the latter part of the 1920s.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the Panhandle’s “old economic foundations of cattle and wheat” recovered from the shaky post-war years and continued as profitable industries.<sup>58</sup>

Beyond the development of the region’s newfound natural resources, other changes were on the way as well. A town that had its beginnings in the railroads became even more connected to the outside world through another transportation revolution. By this time, “the availability of moderately priced automobiles and cheap fuel brought a demand for better roads, and in the 1920s the Panhandle led Texas in the development of

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<sup>53</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 83-84.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>55</sup> Rathjen, “PANHANDLE.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 96, quoting Price and Rathjen.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 95-96.

highways.”<sup>59</sup> In particular, the commissioning of the famed Route 66 Highway in 1926 was a celebrated milestone.<sup>60</sup> The highway began in Chicago and made its way down through St. Louis and Amarillo before heading west towards its end in California. It strengthened the connection Amarillo had already built to the states of the Midwest through the railroads. Indeed, sustained Midwestern influence on Amarillo and the Panhandle has been noted by historians,<sup>61</sup> and plays a role in the construction of the church building at Thirteenth and Tyler. On a broader level, Amarillo became connected to the rest of the nation as never before with the dawn of marketable radios and radio stations in the early 1920s.<sup>62</sup>

As a result of such connectivity, the Roaring Twenties hit Amarillo in much of the same way they did the rest of the nation. The economic boom fueled a rise of consumerism, bootlegging flourished in the wake of Prohibition, and new music and styles could be heard and seen across the town. The citizens of Amarillo also continued to show a great appetite for the arts. When the town’s Grand Opera House burned down in 1919, they energetically supported a \$300,000 bond issue for a new auditorium, municipal building, and library. The centerpiece of the town’s cultural life became the new Amarillo Municipal Auditorium, which opened in 1923.<sup>63</sup> Townspeople flocked there to see both professional performers, such as the world-renowned harpist Albert Salvi, and homegrown groups like the Amarillo Symphony Orchestra. The Panhandle

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<sup>59</sup> Rathjen, “PANHANDLE.”

<sup>60</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 92.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 115-116.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 114.



Music Festival, hosted at the Auditorium, sold fifteen hundred season tickets for its 1924 season.<sup>64</sup>

Amarillo's former existence as an isolated frontier town was no longer a reality. Connected to the rest of the nation by railroad, radio, and automobile, bolstered by an oil and natural gas boom, and recognized as a key trade center of the tri-state (Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico) area, Amarillo was becoming justifiably urban. In the midst of its growth, however, it remained markedly conservative in other areas, including religion. One of the local newspapers boasted in 1927 that churches of every denomination were represented in Amarillo, that over 50% of citizens were church members, and that the town experienced "less Sabbath desecration and fewer commercial activities . . . on Sunday than in any city of its size in the South."<sup>65</sup> An extension of this conservatism could be seen in the allegiance of First Baptist to other Baptist associations. From its beginning years, when it helped to form the Palo Duro Baptist Association, First Baptist remained connected to its denominational agencies, including the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).<sup>66</sup> In 1930, it would even host the annual meeting of the BGCT.

By the mid-1920s, Amarillo was continuing to grow at an ever more rapid pace. In the years from 1920 to 1927, the population of Amarillo and its surrounding suburbs had spiked from 15,494 to an overwhelming 52,680. It was an increase of 240%. Amarillo was the only town in the state to experience more than a 100% growth over that

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<sup>64</sup> Carlson, *Amarillo*, 115.

<sup>65</sup> "Amarillo Is Known for Its Many Churches," supplement to *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, January 16, 1927, p. 8., cited in Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 27-29.

<sup>66</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 158.

same period.<sup>67</sup> Nor did this growth show signs of leveling off. In 1927, W.H. Fuqua himself, as president of the First National Bank, made a special announcement over national radio lauding Amarillo's riches, discussing the Panhandle's position as one of the best undeveloped regions in the nation, and urging people to move there.<sup>68</sup> Both Amarillo's population and economic growth looked as if they would continue unabated.

First Baptist felt the growth of the period as well, more than doubling in membership from 343 in 1904 to 781 in 1924.<sup>69</sup> In 1917, only nine years after the 1908 dedication of the new building, a two-story brick building had to be erected on the back of the church lot to provide more room for Sunday School classes.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in the early 1920s an annex was built on the rear of the church to provide more educational space and a kitchen.<sup>71</sup> As a final effort to gain more space, in the mid-1920s the church purchased a nearby lot and a couple former Army barracks, which they moved onto the lot and converted into educational space.<sup>72</sup> When it became clear that even this move would not solve the space problem, talk began of constructing a new and larger building at another location. Soon, plans would be underway for the construction of a new and magnificent building at Thirteenth and Tyler.

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<sup>67</sup> Hickman, "Crisis on the High Plains," 24.

<sup>68</sup> "One Time in Amarillo: Banker Tells Nation of Riches of Amarillo (1927)," *The Amarillo Pioneer*, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.amarillopioneer.com/blog/2017/11/28/one-time-in-amarillo-banker-tells-nation-of-riches-of-amarillo-1927>.

<sup>69</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 13, 34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

### *Conclusion*

By the late 1880s, both the ranching industry and the arrival of railroads in the Panhandle had breathed life into the town of Amarillo and the small Baptist congregation that formed there. A land rush and population boom grew the church and allowed it to proudly dedicate a new building at Ninth and Polk in 1908. By the mid-1920s, the oil and gas industry had arrived and not only further swelled the town's population, but ushered in a new era of economic prosperity and connectivity to the outside world. Compelled by the need for more space and secure in the town's economic prosperity, planning for the church's new building began.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Building the “Perfect Church”: First Baptist Church of Amarillo 1926-1930

On the morning of Sunday, August 29, 1926, Pastor Gholston Leonard Yates came before his congregation not with a traditional sermon, but with a short homily and an impassioned plea. Yates had been pastoring the Amarillo congregation for about two years and had overseen the desperate project of converting army barracks into additional educational space for the rapidly growing church. That morning he read from Joshua 5:13-15, dwelling in particular on verse 14: “What saith my Lord unto his servant?” As the church minutes from the day record, Yates explained that “Joshua had found God and . . . stressed the thought that if we, as a church, sought the mind of God and yielded ourselves as fully to His will, ‘God would give us a plan that would be ours to be victorious.’” With that, the pastor called forward A.E. Meyer, the chairman of the deacons, to present the deacons’ recommendation that the church purchase land for a new church site. Their reasoning was threefold: the current building was in the middle of a business district that would only grow more congested in the future, the current building could not be remodeled without significant interruption to church activities, and its sale could provide a large sum to put towards a new building. A vote was called, and “in a moment several hundred sprang to their feet” to approve the recommendation. Only one member rose in opposition, apparently out of attachment to the present building. Even this member, however, came around to an affirmative vote. “Dr. Yates, pointing in a happy way to him said, ‘I know you well enough, brother, to know that you will want to

make it unanimous!’ And he immediately replied with a hearty, ‘Yes.’ So the motion was carried a unanimous vote of all present and voting.”<sup>1</sup> With that, the congregation of First Baptist Church of Amarillo embarked on a four-year journey towards building a structure that would appropriately house the church body. With the influence of Pastor Yates, the architects, and a hefty budget, the new building would do more than just provide more space, however; it soon became regarded as the “perfect church” in terms of its architectural beauty as well.

With a unanimous vote behind them, leaders in the church moved quickly. On October 6, 1926, less than two months later, the church elected a Building Committee.<sup>2</sup> It consisted of T.W. Cotton as Chairman, H.C. Pipkin as secretary, Chester Adams as treasurer, Lester Stone, J. Lindsay Nunn, and A.E. Meyer.<sup>3</sup> Pastor Yates himself “moved that the Building Committee be given plenary powers with authority to act in all matters pertaining to the duties and work of the Committee, with full authority to take the initiative in whatever plan necessary towards the erection of a new church plant.”<sup>4</sup> This included the selection of an architect, though any final plans of the architect would have to be submitted to the whole church body for approval. Wielding such a large mandate of power, the Building Committee set to work in finding an architect for the new building.

What was the Building Committee looking for in a new church building?

Answering this question is in some ways conjectural. Though specific Building

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo, August 29, 1926. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>2</sup> Church Minutes, October 6, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Maston C. Courtney and Mrs. James B. Franklin, *The Grand March* (Whitney Russell Printers, 1989), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Church Minutes, October 6, 1926.

Committee minutes are referred to in other documents, they are not found in the church records and may no longer exist. However, a few sought-after qualities are certain, such as additional space. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the mid-1920s the church had nearly doubled in size from when it had constructed the building at Ninth and Polk. Though sanctuary space to house the entire congregation was an objective, room for educational classes was also important. As the first chapter outlined, many of the “band aid” measures undertaken by the church while at Ninth and Polk were made to provide for additional educational space on Sunday morning.

For help in planning a building that would provide educational space for every age group, the church turned to H. Beauchamp of the Baptist Sunday School Board, headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. In a letter dated April 22, 1927, Pastor Yates wrote to the Sunday School Board expressing his appreciation “for the exceedingly helpful and efficient service your Board has rendered us in the making of the plans for our proposed new building . . . Brother Beauchamp came to us at our call, and has been untiring in his efforts to plan for us the building we wanted and needed.”<sup>5</sup> While the church-selected architect designed the church itself, Beauchamp helped First Baptist create the “perfect” plan for educational space. Indeed, even before the church was built, Southern Baptist leaders declared their approval of the plans. The church records contain a small, printed pamphlet detailing the glories of the education building, with quotes from members of the Sunday School Board. For example, Arthur Flake, head of the board’s Department of Sunday School Administration, lavished praise on the plans: “I would pronounce this building *perfect*. Indeed, we think so much of this plan that it is our

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<sup>5</sup> Pastor Yates to Baptist Sunday School Board, April 22, 1927. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

purpose to . . . recommend it, without reservation, to the entire Southern Baptist constituency.”<sup>6</sup> This pamphlet, which also contains detailed floor plans and layouts of the church, seems to have been distributed to other Southern Baptist churches as an inspiration to those considering new building projects. For a moment, this far western member of the Southern Baptist Convention was displayed as a shining example to the whole denomination. As Pastor Yates wrote in the same letter, “So far as I know, this is the first time a church has ever undertaken to build a house containing separate Sunday School department quarters for every year, up through the Intermediate age.” While it is difficult to confirm this, First Baptist was certainly at least one of the first in a trend that would become quite common among large Baptist churches. Indeed, in a denomination that prizes small-group biblical study as a hallmark of Sunday morning practice, the education departments of certain churches actually surpass the enrollment of many organized schools. In total, the First Baptist Church of Amarillo’s education building housed room for 2,500 people.<sup>7</sup>

Given the final form of the building at Thirteenth and Tyler, however, it can be inferred that additional space was not the only quality the Building Committee was looking for in a church. An ornate and costly beauty rests in its walls, from the terra cotta carvings that adorn the outside of the sanctuary to the vaulted ceiling and costly chandeliers that characterize the inside. How did such beauty end up in Amarillo? One answer is that the town was far more cultured than might be expected from a western town that in 1926 was less than forty years old. As mentioned in the first chapter, with

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<sup>6</sup> “The Perfect Church” pamphlet. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>7</sup> “Complete Educational Facilities for 2,500 in New Baptist Church,” *Amarillo Sunday News- Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 27.

the arrival of new modes of transportation and communication technology, Amarillo was not as isolated as it would seem. For example, the Amarillo Municipal Auditorium, opened in 1923, boasted world-renowned performers and attracted many townspeople. Due to the oil boom, Amarillo was a thriving economic center. At the time a new building was being discussed, this economic prosperity showed no sign of drying up. Investing in a building that was not only large but beautiful, an inheritance for future generations, may have seemed more viable given the deep pockets of many church members.

Another explanation can be given for the remarkable beauty of the church, this in the form of a person. As mentioned above, Pastor Yates presided over the entire process of calling for, planning, and building the new church. Yates himself was not a Texan, but an Alabama native. He converted to the Baptist faith at age 19 and “was immediately ordained into the ministry and held several pastorates in Alabama before coming to Texas where he served in Tyler, McKinney, and Amarillo.”<sup>8</sup> Yates was a thoughtful man, described as someone who had “unusual insight and vision.”<sup>9</sup> This is best revealed in his sermons, especially the sermon he preached at the dedication service of the new church at Thirteenth and Tyler:

I grant you that this is an expensive church, a marvel of beauty. It cost some of us far more than the world will ever know. I wish I could enumerate the sacrificial gifts. This building for some of us is our box of spikenard. Many complained in Mary’s time that her gift to the Lord was too extravagant. But somehow, as she did, we want Him to have the best. Love is always extravagant.

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<sup>8</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 36.



Such words are striking for a Baptist minister. Yates and his relationship to the building project are best described in the words of his wife, who wrote shortly after his death: “During the building of our new Church, after spending the day supervising the construction of the building, most of our evenings were spent going over the blueprints and he would rejoice over how beautiful this or that would be when finished.”<sup>10</sup> This portrait of a church leader delighting in every detail of the church design contributes to the theory that Yates had much to do with the final beauty of the structure. His ability to communicate this vision to his congregation should also be noted. As one of his contemporaries noted, “If it had not been for his vision we would not have built this plant. Again, if it had not been for his vision we would have lost it. The Lord was with him and we knew it.”<sup>11</sup> Not only did Yates influence the beautiful design of the church, but as pastor he ultimately authorized the eventual \$500,000 cost, if only by supporting the actions and decisions of the Building Committee and encouraging the congregation to approve them. Indeed, it has been noted by many that the stress of construction and the subsequent stress of paying for it may have contributed to his decline in health; he passed away in 1936, six years after the dedication of the building at Thirteenth and Tyler. As his wife wrote: “The building of the church may have cost him much in physical strength but it was recompensed by the thought the building would suffice for generations in Kingdom work.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Program of Memorial Service of Gholston Leonard Gates, March 15, 1936. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>11</sup> Summary of Pastor Yate’s years at FBCA. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>12</sup> Program of Memorial Service of Gholston Leonard Gates, March 15, 1936. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

Another way of understanding how this beauty reached Amarillo rests in the hands of the architects chosen for the project. A few months after its formation, the Building Committee “elected Guy A. Carlander of Amarillo, Texas and Ferrand & Fitch, a Co-partnership of St. Louis, Mo., as associate architects to perform the architectural work connected with the erection of the new Church Auditorium and Educational Building.”<sup>13</sup> According to the letter Pastor Yates sent to the Sunday School Board, Professor Gabriel Ferrand (of the partnership Ferrand & Fitch), then head of the School of Architecture at Washington University in St. Louis, would design the building and Carlander, a member of the church himself, would “superintend its construction.”<sup>14</sup>

Gabriel Ferrand was born in Toulouse, France in 1876 and received his architectural education at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1908, he emigrated to the United States, practiced in New York, and eventually became the professor of Design at the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburgh.<sup>15</sup> In 1914, he was appointed a professor at Washington University in St. Louis.<sup>16</sup> At about that time, however, he returned to France to fight for his country in the Great War. By 1916, he was honorably discharged and returned to Washington University, this time as dean of the School of Architecture. A tribute to Ferrand in an architectural journal after his death in 1934 portrays him as passionate about teaching “students of his adopted country the

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<sup>13</sup> Accountants’ Report on FBCA building project, Walter G. Russell and Company Accountants and Auditors. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>14</sup> Pastor Yates to Baptist Sunday School Board, April 22, 1927. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Clason Weatherhead, *The History of Collegiate Education in Architecture in the United States ...* (Columbia University, 1941); “St. Louis Historic Preservation,” accessed March 12, 2018, [http://dynamic.stlouis-mo.gov/history/people/detail.cfm?Master\\_ID=2159](http://dynamic.stlouis-mo.gov/history/people/detail.cfm?Master_ID=2159).

<sup>16</sup> “St. Louis Historic Preservation.”

fundamental principles of planning and designing as developed by the École des Beaux-Arts.” He was also concerned that architecture be appreciated by the wider public.<sup>17</sup> His leadership of the School of Architecture was regarded highly: “With his excellent training and sound scholarship, his keen appreciation of the rare faculty of imagination in the architecture students as well as his attractive personality, Ferrand was ideally fitted to direct the school.”<sup>18</sup> More importantly, however, he operated a private practice in St. Louis that gained some fame in southern states. “In St. Louis and throughout Missouri, Mississippi, Texas, West Virginia and other southern states are to be found many churches and schools, monumental gateways and residences, which he produced.”<sup>19</sup> Before his work for the First Baptist Church of Amarillo, he designed the United Hebrew Temple in St. Louis (1926) and the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Mississippi (1927). Both have bearing on what he designed for the Amarillo congregation, and the United Hebrew Temple in particular will be discussed as part of Chapter Three’s examination of the architecture of the Thirteenth and Tyler building. Shortly before his death, Ferrand received the Medal of the Chevalier of Honor of the French Republic for his contributions to architecture.<sup>20</sup>

How did the congregation at First Baptist get into contact with Ferrand? As a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, it is possible that they received his name from the congregation in Jackson, Mississippi. It is also helpful to remember that because of the railroads, Amarillo was far more connected to the Midwest (and with it, St. Louis)

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<sup>17</sup> Ernest John Russell, “Gabriel Ferrand: A Tribute,” *Architectural Record* 76 (November 1934).

<sup>18</sup> Weatherhead, *The History of Collegiate Education in Architecture in the United States ...*

<sup>19</sup> Russell, “Gabriel Ferrand: A Tribute.”

<sup>20</sup> “Architect for Local Church Wins Honors,” *The Raleigh Register*, March 20, 1932, p.4.

than any other region of the United States at the time. Ferrand's original emigration and his subsequent location in St. Louis gave the Amarillo congregation surprising access to a premier French architect.

The other architect selected was Guy A. Carlander, a member of the church who had been practicing architecture in Amarillo for about seven years. Born in Pratt, Kansas in 1888, he attended high school and some college in Kansas at Ottawa University.<sup>21</sup> Around 1913, "Carlander went to Chicago, where he attended art classes at the Chicago Art Institute and realized his aptitude for architectural design."<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter he joined the architectural department of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company as an architectural draftsman and building inspector. In 1916, the railroad moved him to projects in Amarillo, where he stayed until his induction into the Army in 1918. He spent most of that year as part of the army, where he rapidly rose from Private to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. by proving himself in overseeing the production and packaging of mustard gas bombs bound for France.<sup>23</sup> After his honorable discharge in the final days of 1918, Carlander returned to work for the Santa Fe Railroad in Amarillo. Soon, however, he quit the railroad and opened his architect's office in June 1920. "By 1927 [Carlander] had already completed 20 buildings in the Panhandle," and he would go on to produce many

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<sup>21</sup> "Guy A. Carlander – Biography," Guy A. Carlander Papers. Panhandle Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth D. Carlander, *Guy Anton Carlander, April 8, 1888 – April 19, 1975: Notes on His Life*, Guy A. Carlander Papers, Amarillo Public Library.

more.<sup>24</sup> Details of Carlander's architectural style will be discussed as part of Chapter Three.

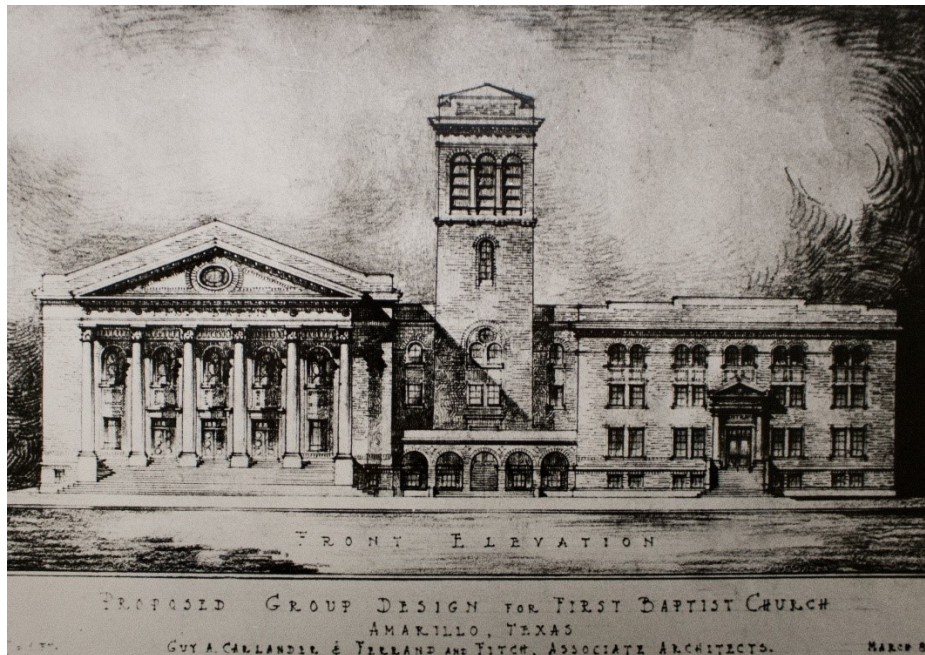
According to the final Accountants' Report of the Thirteenth and Tyler building, "formal contract with these architects was entered into on January 15, 1927. It provided that the compensation of the architects should be fixed at an amount equal to 5% of the structural cost of the buildings, excluding their fee as a part of such cost."<sup>25</sup> Work on the designs did not begin immediately, as a small pox epidemic swept through Amarillo in the early months of 1927. As the church minutes note, "there were no public gatherings of any public nature in city, therefore no church services or conferences were held [in January and February.]"<sup>26</sup> When the epidemic was over, however, work on the designs began in earnest. The earliest existing group design between Ferrand & Fitch and Carlander is dated March 8, 1927. The basic outline of the actual building can be glimpsed in its basic form of a sanctuary and an education building balanced on the fulcrum of a tower (see Figure 4.) However, it is far more classical in style, likely revealing the hand of Ferrand. The sanctuary emulates the form of the Ninth and Polk building. The next existing proposed group design is dated only a few days later, on March 12, 1927, and appears far more similar to today's building (see Figure 5.)

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<sup>24</sup> Amy Von Lintel. "Panhandle Modernism: Guy A. Carlander, Amarillo Architect, Third Lecture." Presentation given in April 2014 at West Texas A&M University, [https://www.academia.edu/8584983/Panhandle\\_Modernism\\_Guy\\_A.\\_Carlander\\_Amarillo\\_Architect\\_Third\\_Lecture](https://www.academia.edu/8584983/Panhandle_Modernism_Guy_A._Carlander_Amarillo_Architect_Third_Lecture).

<sup>25</sup> Accountants' Report on FBCA building project, Walter G. Russell and Company Accountants and Auditors. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>26</sup> Church Minutes, March 9, 1927.



**Figure 4.** Earliest existing proposed group design, March 8, 1927. All graphics in this chapter courtesy of First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.



**Figure 5.** Proposed group design, March 12, 1927. For comparison to current building, see Figure A5 in the Appendix.

Evidently, this second design pleased the Building Committee enough to boost the budget originally proposed for the building. On April 3, it recommended that the

congregation approve the plans, which would cost from \$75,000 to \$100,000 more than originally forecasted. The budget increase and the church design were unanimously approved.<sup>27</sup> Both the congregation's decision and the design sketch were published the following week in the *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe*, which noted that "the edifice, to be one of the finest in the South, will cost more than \$450,000, according to present plans. Work on the structure will begin as soon as possible."<sup>28</sup> In a way characteristic of most newspaper articles published regarding the church, the article spends roughly three times as much space lauding the size of the educational space as it does speaking about the architecture.

By December of that same year, the same newspaper reported that the plans were now complete and filed with the city building inspector. The article quotes Pastor Yates as saying that the plans would be turned over to bidders in the first couple months of 1928, and that actual construction would start by April. The paper also proudly announced that Amarillo would be receiving an original masterwork of art: "The building is not copied after any other church in the world, but is a combination of architecture and called modernized 'Early Christian.'"<sup>29</sup>

While the newspaper article telegraphed the enthusiasm of church leaders to begin, progress was made much more slowly due to "existing financial and business conditions."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, by early June the building program for the church ground to a

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<sup>27</sup> Church Minutes, April 3, 1927.

<sup>28</sup> "Drawing of New Baptist Church for Amarillo," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe*, April, 10, 1927, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> "Plans Completed for 'Ideal' Baptist Church Home; Constructions Planned to Begin Early in January," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, December 4, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Recommendations from Building Committee to Membership of First Baptist Church, June 3, 1928. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

complete stop. In a shocking move, the Building Committee back-pedaled on nearly all fronts, recommending that “the building program for the new church be indefinitely postponed.” It also recognized the continuing space problem at the church and gravely acknowledged that “our existing facilities are inadequate to accommodate a growing Sunday School and that unless adequate provision is made, the Sunday School must either stand still or retrogress.” It suggested that temporary structures, similar to those in the past, be adjoined to the existing building for a cost of about \$4000. The exact reason why the Building Committee made such an about-face is unknown, though in light of events that followed, it could be that they were at that time unable to sell the Polk Street property.

Whatever the reason, this pessimism did not last long. Less than two months later, on October 14, 1928, the church body unanimously approved the sale of the property at Ninth and Polk for \$180,000 to a J. Ray, J.N. Beasley, and Roberts-Oliver Lumber Company. “A payment of \$50,000 was to be made when the contract was completed; and the balance of \$130,000 was to be paid when the building was turned over to the purchasers.”<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, the buyers allowed the church to stay in the building for another year or so until construction of the new structure was complete.

Around that same time, on October 14, 1928, the congregation approved the recommendation of the Building Committee that the general contract be awarded to Windsor Construction Company at a price of \$343,000. As the congregation ratified the contract, the Building Committee reported the numbers for what lay ahead. They forecasted the total cost of the building (including extra expenses such as light fixtures,

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<sup>31</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 44.



lead glass, and pews) to be \$376,500. The church “[faced] the undertaking” with two visible assets: \$100,000 in dependable subscription notes and \$155,000 from the sale of the Ninth and Polk property (the other \$25,000 of that sale had been applied to the remaining bill of purchasing the Thirteenth and Tyler lot.) The Building Committee recommended that subscriptions be raised by at least \$25,000, and recommended that “no loan be negotiated until absolutely necessary in the course of construction, and that even then such loan be held to the lowest possible figure consistent with the proper construction and completion of the building and the equipment thereof.”<sup>32</sup> All of these recommendations passed unanimously on the first vote, and in a burst of inspired commentary, the clerk recording the church minutes noted that this was “no doubt the greatest hour and greatest act in the history of this great church.”

Unfortunately, trouble with the architects delayed movement forward on construction. In late October, the Building Committee discovered that the architects believed that “the original structural plans of certain portions of the building structure were incorrect and unsafe in that they failed to provide sufficient steel and reinforcement work, and did not conform to good engineering practice.”<sup>33</sup> Carlander, the Amarillo-based architect, presented these facts to the Building Committee on October 27, 1928, and they immediately contacted Ferrand & Fitch to inform them that the structural plans would be “checked, revised, and corrected” at the firm’s expense. In the same meeting, the Building Committee authorized Carlander to “proceed immediately to re-design the structural work of the Church.” Ferrand & Fitch, for their part, refused to cover the cost

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<sup>32</sup> Church Minutes, October 14, 1928.

<sup>33</sup>Accountants’ Report on FBCA building project, Walter G. Russell and Company Accountants and Auditors. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

of redesigning the plans, and by late December, “the remainder of the architectural work, consisting of designing the terra cotta forms, was taken from Ferrand & Fitch, and so far as [the auditors were] able to determine, they afterwards became inactive in the further construction of the Church Auditorium and Educational Buildings.”<sup>34</sup> These particulars concerning the architects, especially Ferrand’s exit from the process, account for the wide-ranging confusion over who designed the Thirteenth and Tyler building. In various official records, Guy Carlander is inaccurately listed as the only architect. This is the case in the building’s nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 and in Jay C. Henry’s *Architecture in Texas: 1895-1945*. The information on Ferrand’s exit also accounts for his conspicuous absence from the church’s triumphal dedication in August 1930.<sup>35</sup> Though the redesigning of the structural plans fell to Carlander, a glance at the initial group design (see Figure 5) reveals that no substantial changes were made to the appearance of the building itself. As Chapter Three will discuss in greater detail, Ferrand’s fingerprints remain indelibly on the structure. It follows that both architects should be recognized for their work on the building.

At long last, construction on the Thirteenth and Tyler building began in early 1929. Photos of its construction are included as Figures 6 and 7. The task of funding the building also continued. The pastor and other church leaders tirelessly declared Cash Days, designated Sundays where members were encouraged to contribute their pledged subscriptions in cash. On June 3, 1929, the regular Deacons’ meeting heard a report on

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Though the Amarillo Sunday Globe-News ran an entire special section of the newspaper devoted to the church’s dedication, Ferrand is only mentioned once, and no indication is given that he attended the dedication.

the amount of the subscriptions pledged and the amount collected. Remarkably, as of that date \$134,529 dependable subscriptions had been pledged; nearly \$10,000 more than the original goal of \$125,000. Additionally, about 30% of these pledges had already been collected. Though church leaders continued to press subscribers to pay their balances and non-subscribers to contribute, the church was steadily meeting its financial goals to fund the building.<sup>36</sup> It should also be noted that existing records do not point to a single, wealthy donor who underwrote a large percentage of the cost, but to many members of the church giving the small or moderate amounts within their means.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 6.** Street view of construction, November 27, 1929.

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<sup>36</sup> Church Minutes, June 3, 1929.

<sup>37</sup> Accountants' Report on FBCA building project, Walter G. Russell and Company Accountants and Auditors. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.



**Figure 7.** View of construction from pulpit, November 27, 1929.

On Sunday, October 27, 1929, the congregation approved the pursuit of a \$150,000 loan to cover the remainder of the construction.<sup>38</sup> On the following Tuesday, October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed in what is now known as Black Tuesday. As Paul Carlson describes, “the subsequent economic downturn that produced the Great Depression resulted on a national level in bankruptcies, bank failures, agricultural depression, large-scale unemployment . . . and related problems.”<sup>39</sup> Amarillo suffered such problems, though “to a lesser degree.” Its robust, oil-based economy saved the town from the worst of the Depression and delayed its onset for a few years. Several months later, on March 23, 1930, the congregation approved a \$150,000 loan from the

<sup>38</sup> Church Minutes, October 27, 1927.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Howard Carlson, *Amarillo: The Story of a Western Town* (Texas Tech University Press, 2006), 119.

Southwestern Life Insurance Company. Despite the economic uncertainty the nation faced, the church received reasonable terms for the loan, which was to be paid off within ten years. It had an interest rate of 6% per annum, and the church was not required to pay the first installment for two years. The \$150,000 loan was a large one; adjusted for inflation, the same amount would equal \$2,306,000 today.<sup>40</sup> However, it was only about a third of the final cost of the \$500,000 building project. Remarkably, the other two thirds were paid through the sale of the Ninth and Polk property and through church member subscriptions.

“On December 29, 1929, after a lengthy extension on their contract of sale, the membership of First Baptist Church . . . gathered for their last worship service in the Ninth and Polk Street building.”<sup>41</sup> The church had arranged to spend the first part of the year in the Municipal Auditorium on Sunday mornings, so as to not interrupt regular services while the remaining construction was completed on the new building. During the last service in the Ninth and Polk building, however, a fire “interrupted Pastor Yates’ sermon of farewell to the structure.” The pastor noticed the smoke and calmly instructed the congregation to evacuate. As the writers of *The Grand March* describe:

Dr. Yates is credited with preventing what easily could have been a disastrous stampede by the large congregation attracted that evening because of the nature of the service. In a few moments time, the building was emptied for the last time after twenty-two years of continuous service.

While the fire scare created a hasty farewell of the congregation to the building at Ninth and Polk, the actions of Pastor Yates prevented it from being a tragedy.

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<sup>40</sup> “US Inflation Calculator,” *US Inflation Calculator*, accessed October 28, 2019, <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

<sup>41</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 44.

On Sunday morning, August 3, 1930, First Baptist dedicated its new building. Despite a variety of setbacks and delays, the church had succeeded in planning and executing a building that would not only meet its need for educational space, but which stood as an original masterpiece of architecture as well. Such beauty would not have been possible without the combination of the economic prosperity of Amarillo, the generosity of the First Baptist congregation, the personal efforts of Pastor Yates, and the contribution of the architects, Gabriel Ferrand and Guy A. Carlander. It is to a direct study of the architecture and aesthetics of the new building that Chapter Three will turn.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Architecture and Aesthetics of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo

This chapter will explore the various influences on the architecture and aesthetics of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo.<sup>1</sup> This will include an exploration of the Romanesque and Byzantine elements in the church's design and an analysis of the Baptist influence on the design. The church's interior decorative painting, completed by J. Charles Schnorr in 1930, will also be discussed, as FBCA is the only known Baptist church in Texas with interior decorative painting.

On the morning of August 3, 1930, nearly 1,800 people gathered to hold the first Sunday service in the new church building.<sup>2</sup> After four years of fundraising and building, the congregation dedicated their \$500,000 offering and rejoiced with their pastor, who delivered the dedicatory sermon:

Humbled by a profound sense of God's infinite goodness toward us and chastened, we trust, by the difficulties which have been met by us, our hearts thrill with joy unspeakable as we stand in this epochal hour and behold the fulfillment of our dreams, [this] glorious building, which . . . has a meaning and significance for us who have toiled and prayed and sacrificed for it that no human tongue could tell.<sup>3</sup>

The town likewise rejoiced with the congregation, and as part of the fanfare, the Amarillo Sunday Globe-News ran an entire section on August 3 devoted to examining the church,

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<sup>1</sup> Though many beautiful photos are included in this chapter itself, if the reader is not already familiar with what FBCA looks like, I would direct them to the Appendix, which features many more photos.

<sup>2</sup> "Baptists Dedicate \$500,000 Church with 1,800 Present," *Amarillo Daily News*, August 4, 1930, p.25.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Maston C. Courtney and Mrs. James B. Franklin, *The Grand March* (Whitney Russell Printers, 1989), 49.

its ornamentation, and history. The articles included profiles of early church members and descriptions of the new church. One article related the story of how a specialist had come all the way from New York to install the church's new chimes. The title of the article? “‘Them Bells is Well Hung,’ Expert Claims.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Exterior Architectural Design and Influences*

While the architecture of the church was praised at the time of its dedication, there was very little commentary about what had influenced the design. After the original design was finalized in 1927, one newspaper article noted that “the building is not copied after any other church in the world, but is a combination of architecture and called modernized ‘Early Christian.’”<sup>5</sup> What exactly was meant by the phrase “modernized Early Christian” is unclear, but by November 1929, the associate architect Carlander clarified by referring to the design as “early Christian or Romanesque.”<sup>6</sup>

The church does indeed display many Romanesque – particularly Italian Romanesque – features, chiefly in the simple symmetrical structure of the sanctuary building and the rounded rows of windows featured in both the sanctuary and the education buildings. The grand, recessed nature of the arch evokes something of the great portals common to the Romanesque cathedrals of Europe, and the intricately carved façade is another testament to the church's Romanesque style (see Figures 8 and 9.) At the same time, however, the carved terra cotta forms, which when closely examined are

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<sup>4</sup> “‘Them Bells is Well Hung,’ Expert Claims,” *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe*, August 3, 1930, p.27.

<sup>5</sup> “Plans Completed for ‘Ideal’ Baptist Church Home; Construction Planned to Begin Early in January,” *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, December 4, 1927, p.20.

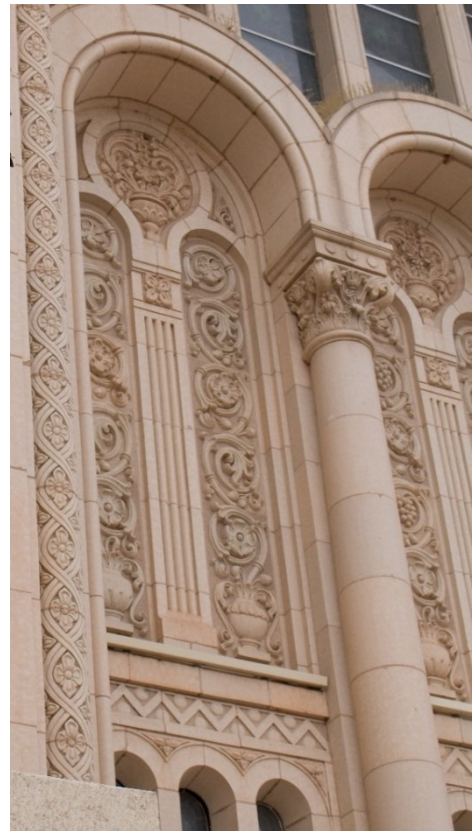
<sup>6</sup> “New First Baptist Plant Expected to be Completed Soon,” *Amarillo Daily News*, November 25, 1929, p. 1.



patterns of vines, fruit, and flowers, are a simplification of some of the greater carvings of biblical scenes as seen in the portals of European cathedrals. Though the forms are not overbearing in their allusions to the Romanesque (Henry describes them as an



**Figure 8.** Facade of sanctuary. Photo credits to Margaret Thonnard in this chapter unless otherwise noted.



**Figure 9.** Close-up of terra cotta forms on facade.

“abstraction and simplification [of] medieval forms”)<sup>7</sup>, they are sufficient to provoke a kind of reverence and awe.

The tower, which in this case serves as a fulcrum between the sanctuary and education building, offers a further Romanesque flavor. As a whole, the Romanesque

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<sup>7</sup> Jay C. Henry, *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 107.

features of FBCA are similar to those of Central Christian Church in Austin, completed in 1928. Central Christian Church is mentioned in both Henry's study of Texas architecture from 1895-1945 and Robinson's study of Texas ecclesial architecture, which includes commentary from the same period.



**Figure 8.** Central Christian Church of Austin, Texas; completed 1928. Photo credits Larry D. Moore, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1157831>



**Figure 9.** First Baptist Church Amarillo

The example of Austin's Central Christian Church is instructive because it demonstrates some of the same Romanesque forms of FBCA: the shape of the sanctuary, rounded windows, and a recessed arch. As Robinson notes, it also boasts additional Romanesque ornamentation, such as the corbel tables and polychromatic arches.<sup>8</sup> As others have noted, however, FBCA is not exclusively Romanesque in style.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Willard Bethurem Robinson, *Reflections of Faith: Houses of Worship in the Lone Star State* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 1994), 186. Central Christian Church is also commented on in Henry's *Architecture in Texas*, p.162-163.

<sup>9</sup> Henry, *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, 106-107; David Lyle Jeffrey, *In the Beauty of Holiness* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 371.

The only academic analysis of the architecture of FBCA comes in a brief entry in Jay C. Henry's *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, within a broader chapter entitled "Academic Eclecticism." By this, Henry means the tendency of architects to mix and synthesize various historical architectural forms in buildings of all types, a proclivity seen throughout the United States in the 1920s. Thus, he situates FBCA in this chapter, noting a "cross-breeding" of Romanesque and Byzantine forms similar to those he describes later in his analysis of Rice University's academic buildings.

The Byzantine influence on FBCA, though absent from the analysis of newspaper reporters or other observers at the time of its dedication in 1930, is arguably even stronger than the church's Romanesque features. The design of church's iconic façade, with three smaller arches under a single, larger arch, is distinctively Byzantine.<sup>10</sup> This design reappears behind a new memorial fountain in the 2010 addition to the church. The 2010 addition also incorporates Byzantine revival pillars, accenting the church's pre-existing Byzantine features. In the sanctuary, carved and painted Byzantine pillars and capitals also attest to the influence of that style. A greater analysis of this is included below as part of an examination on the church's interior ornamentation. As Central Christian Church in Austin offers a look at a Romanesque design that omits Byzantine influence, so the United Hebrew Temple in St. Louis offers a glance at what FBCA may have looked like with only Byzantine, and no Romanesque, influence.

The United Hebrew Temple, dedicated in 1927 as one of the three largest synagogues in the nation, is one of the major works of Gabriel Ferrand, the principal

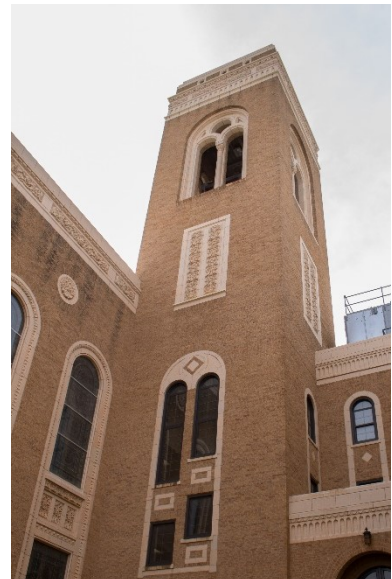
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<sup>10</sup> Rounded arches are also a Romanesque ornamentation, and the Byzantine and Romanesque styles seem to overlap at this point.

designer of FBCA.<sup>11</sup> As the Central Christian Church in Austin demonstrates other details of Romanesque design, the United Hebrew Temple features more Byzantine leanings than FBCA, such as its central dome (see Figure 12.) The major similarity between the two buildings, however, is evident from first glance: the grand front façade featuring three arches underneath a larger arch. The United Hebrew Temple also boasts several instances of two arches enclosed under a single arch, a Byzantine detail that also ornaments the tower of FBCA (see Figure 13.) The grill design featured at the top of the Temple’s façade design and the similar latticework at the back of its meeting room also anticipate the latticework which frames the baptistery at the front of FBCA’s sanctuary.



**Figure 12.** United Hebrew Temple in St. Louis, completed 1927. Photo courtesy of Missouri Historical Society.



**Figure 13.** Campanile Tower of FBCA. Note the double arch formation at the top.

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<sup>11</sup> “History of the Library & Research Center - Missouri Historical Society,” Missouri Historical Society, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://mohistory.org/library/library-research-center-history/>. In 1989, the congregation sold the building to the Missouri Historical Society, which renovated it and turned it into an archive and reading room. The principal architects on the building were Maritz and Young, with Ferrand named as a consulting architect.



The similarities between the Temple and FBCA confirm David Jeffrey's thoughts concerning the basic parallels between Jewish and some Protestant architecture.<sup>12</sup> Both put the proclamation of the written word at the center of the proceedings, demonstrated here by the presence of the Torah Niche at the front of Temple and the centrality of the pulpit in both (see Figures 14 and 15.) This stands in contrast to traditional Catholic structures, where an altar and the Eucharistic celebration literally takes center stage. Such buildings also command a central aisle, notably absent in both FBCA and the Temple. (Rather than a central aisle, a middle section of seating is preferred, likely to increase the number of people who can be in the direct path of the speaker or preacher's voice. Again, the proclamation of the word and its hearing is the highest priority.)<sup>13</sup> In any case, the overwhelming similarities between the United Hebrew Temple and FBCA point to the dominance of Ferrand's hand in the design process in Amarillo.



**Figure 14.** United Hebrew Temple, interior. Photo courtesy of Missouri Historical Society.



**Figure 15.** Interior of FBCA, close-up of stage and pulpit.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey, *In the Beauty of Holiness*, 370-371.

<sup>13</sup> Baptist General Convention of Texas. Stewardship and Direct Missions, *Seminar on Church Architecture, First Baptist Church, Dallas, June 6-7, 1957*. (Dallas, Tex: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1957), 25-26.

As pointed out in Chapter Two, there has been an enduring confusion over what architect is responsible for designing FBCA. As related in that chapter, the evidence points to Ferrand and Carlander collaborating on the original design, with Ferrand taking the primary role as designer. Ferrand's primary role as designer is confirmed not only by an August 3, 1930 newspaper article, but also by the design itself.<sup>14</sup> Ferrand was a Frenchman by birth and completed his architectural education at the prestigious École des Beaux Arts, which likely gave him all the tools he needed to design a work like FBCA. His work on the United Hebrew Temple in St. Louis likewise demonstrates his fluency with Byzantine design.

Though Ferrand was the principal designer, associate architect Guy A. Carlander had some role in the design process and an even greater role in executing it. Carlander, who had practiced architecture in Amarillo for about seven years and was a member of FBCA, seems to have been brought on from the beginning for his ability to supervise the work locally. He was an impressive architect in his own right; Amy Von Lintel notes in her research on Carlander that his various works demonstrate elements of Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Byzantine styles.<sup>15</sup> However, Carlander would never design another church on the scale of FBCA or even in the style of FBCA.

In the years surrounding and following the construction of FBCA, Carlander designed two other churches for Baptist congregations in both Vernon, Texas and Groom, Texas, towns not far from Amarillo. According to its cornerstone, the First Baptist

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<sup>14</sup> "Beauty and Utility Combined in Plan Of Baptist Church," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Amy Von Lintel. "Panhandle Modernism: Guy A. Carlander, Amarillo Architect, Third Lecture." Presentation given in April 2014 at West Texas A&M University, [https://www.academia.edu/8584983/Panhandle\\_Modernism\\_Guy\\_A.\\_Carlander\\_Amarillo\\_Architect\\_Third\\_Lecture](https://www.academia.edu/8584983/Panhandle_Modernism_Guy_A._Carlander_Amarillo_Architect_Third_Lecture).

Church of Vernon was erected in 1926, a few years before FBCA (see Figure 16.)

Neither that church nor the First Baptist Church of Groom have the same flair and beauty as FBCA. This is likely a function of how much money the respective congregations could spend on the building. Both, however, feature a more Gothic design, somewhat rare among Baptist churches, but perhaps indicating Carlander's preferred style for churches.<sup>16</sup> In any case, nothing about these churches suggests that Carlander had more than an associate role in designing FBCA: the strong Byzantine and Romanesque sensibilities can likely be attributed to Ferrand.



**Figure 16.** First Baptist Church of Vernon, TX, completed in 1926. Photo credits Barclay Gibson, <http://www.texasescapes.com/Churches/Vernon-Texas-Churches.htm>.

The mixing of Romanesque and Byzantine influences, however, demonstrate that neither Ferrand or Carlander was uncomfortable with such combinations. This places them squarely within the movement of Academic Eclecticism that Henry describes. The nature of the movement was widespread during the first half of the twentieth century:

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<sup>16</sup> This hypothesis is further confirmed by a design he submitted to the First Methodist Church of Amarillo, which is similarly Gothic (see design in Panhandle Plains Historical Museum records.) The commission did not go to Carlander, though the present building is, indeed, in the Gothic style.

“churches built between 1900 and 1940 [now] comprise the most diverse stylistic range of any building type from the period in Texas.”<sup>17</sup> The many different styles of historic Christian architecture and its more modern iterations “had supplied an unusually rich repertoire of models for architects and their patrons to draw upon: copying, combining, improvising, and abstracting within the Academic Eclectic tradition.”<sup>18</sup>

Due to the mixing of styles within the Academic Eclectic movement and the decentralization of the Baptist denomination in general, it is difficult to define any one standard for Baptist churches during the period. On the whole, Neo-classical Revival and Georgian Revival styles were preferred, but were by no means the only styles employed. The Romanesque style “also characterized a number of other Baptist churches,” and even Gothic was used for others, though this was rarer and usually utilized by denominations with a more liturgical focus.<sup>19</sup> Whatever their churches looked like, Southern Baptists in general entered a building boom in the 1920s, with “the value of Southern Baptist Church buildings dramatically [increasing] from \$61 million [in 1917] to \$213 million [in 1930.]”<sup>20</sup> This reflects the general prosperity experienced in the nation at that time. Therefore, the decision that FBCA’s leaders made to build is not unique for the time period in which it was built, but rather for the scope and budget of the project.

Though there was no dominant Baptist period influence on the style of the church, other influences of the denomination must be considered. For example, as a result of the Baptist denomination’s commitment to evangelism and the preaching of the gospel to

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<sup>17</sup> Henry, *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 178, 226-227.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 137.



believers and non-believers alike, the sanctuary takes on an auditorium form. The genesis of this move to more theater-like forms of gathering spaces will be discussed in Chapter Four. Another influence of the Baptist denomination is the presence of a massive educational space. As Chapter Two explains, the need for more educational space was a major incentive for the congregation to construct a new building, and the sheer size of it garnered praise from observers as far away as the Southern Baptist Convention headquarters in Nashville. At the time of its dedication, the education wing of FBCA boasted 138 rooms that could in total hold 2,500 people.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the education building of FBCA “epitomizes the prominence that the educational wing played in church designs during the 1920s” as churches placed a larger emphasis on small-group instruction and became many towns’ social centers.<sup>22</sup>

Two other parts of FBCA’s exterior bear special mention in relation to their Baptist roots. The large rounded arch that dominates the front façade has been interpreted by Robinson as the indicator of a “Baptist temple,” which apparently “appeared in a number of Baptist churches in the state.”<sup>23</sup> A final note on the exterior is the Bible statue in the stone on the front of the education building (see Figure 17.) This, again, telegraphs the importance of Scripture to the denomination and is similar to a Bible sculpture found in the top parapet of Prospect Hill Baptist Church in San Antonio (dedicated 1911.)<sup>24</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> “Complete Educational Facilities for 2,500 in New Baptist Church,” *Amarillo Sunday News- Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 27. At the time of its dedication, FBCA had 1,728 members and an average Sunday School attendance of 1,250. This according to *The Grand March*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Henry, *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 227. As examined above, Central Christian Church in Austin displays such an arch, as does the First Baptist Church of Texarkana. Both churches found in Robinson, p. 227.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

contrast to the Bible sculpture and the flowers, vines, and fruit terra cotta forms, many European cathedrals boasted sculptures of entire biblical scenes and various saints. In the second proposed group design (discussed in Chapter Two), one of the architects – presumably Ferrand – penciled in a few human forms in the grand façade of the building, perhaps thinking of these cathedrals. Ferrand probably did not yet understand how Baptists were characteristically against such displays of human forms – though they at times tolerated them in stained glass or mural. To some Baptists, such glorying in the human form hedges on idolatry. Carlander, a member of the church, likely understood this distinction, and in the end, oversight of the terra-cotta carvings fell to him. Thus, the more subdued adornment of vines, flowers, and grapes, as well as the Bible sculpture.

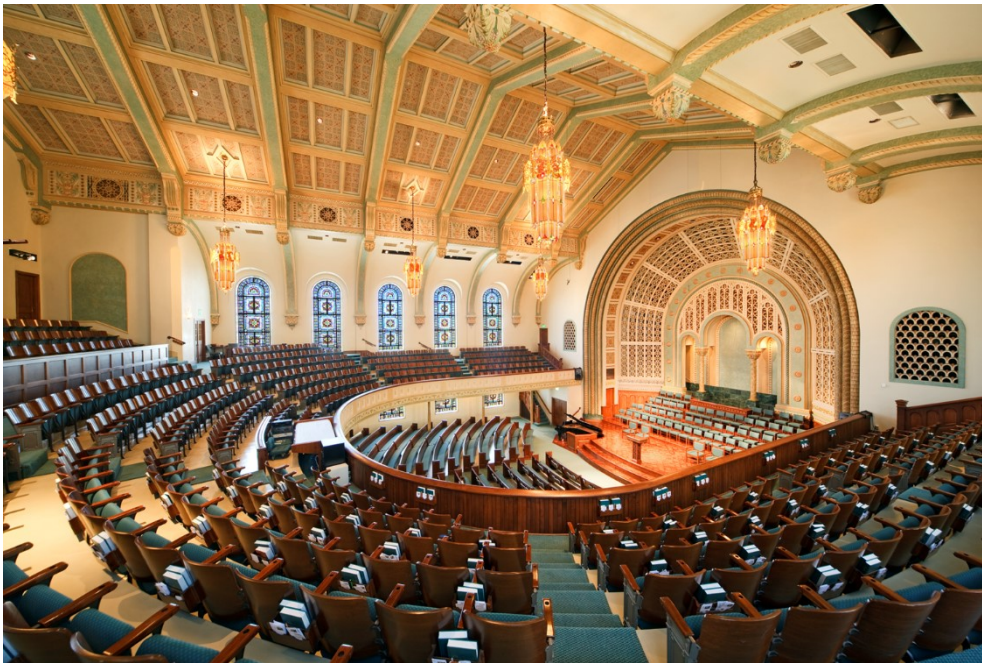


**Figure 17.** Bible sculpture at the top of FBCA Education Building.

### *Interior Aesthetics and Ornamentation*

Though the exterior architecture of FBCA merits mention in Henry's study of Texas architecture, neither he nor Robinson, who published an architectural study of

Texas sacred spaces in 1994, give attention to the church's interior. This is a notable omission given the fact that FBCA is the only known Baptist church in Texas to feature interior decorative painting.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the church was nominated and approved to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 as part of a group of churches featuring such painting.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 18.** Sanctuary of FBCA, photo credits Tina Diaz.

Several months before the church opened in August 1930, the Building Committee announced its contract with painter J. Charles Schnorr to “to design and execute a Mosaic ceiling over the main auditorium and under the balcony in the

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<sup>25</sup> Buie Harwood, *Decorating Texas: Decorative Painting in the Lone Star State from the 1850s to the 1950s* (Texas Christian University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Henry, *Architecture in Texas, 1895-1945*, 303. Henry notes that FBCA is included on the National Register, but does not comment on the interior decorative painting itself.

auditorium.”<sup>27</sup> Schnorr was also to “paint a realistic mural representing the Jordan River, which is to be the background for the baptistery.”<sup>28</sup> Schnorr, a painter with studios in New York City and in Pueblo, Colorado,<sup>29</sup> had made his name locally by painting Amarillo’s Capitol Hotel and was apparently chosen by Carlander and the Building Committee “out of many artists” competing for the FBCA job.<sup>30</sup> His other, previous work included the “million dollar Pueblo County Courthouse, the Colorado theatre at Pueblo, the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Albuquerque, [and] the Hippodrome in New York.”<sup>31</sup>

Very little is known about Schnorr himself. While he was working on the project, newspapers gleefully proclaimed that he was:

a nephew of the famous Baron Jacob Carl Zevalt Von Schnorr, who was knighted by King Ludwig of Bavaria for his exceptionally fine work in illustrating the German Bible. Charles Schnorr’s grandfather, for whom the decorator was named, was a famous portrait painter.<sup>32</sup>

Schnorr’s surviving work, however, has dwindled, as has information about the painter himself, including where he received training and when his family immigrated to the

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<sup>27</sup> “J. Charles Schnoor [sic] of Pueblo Employed To Decorate New First Baptist Church; Famous Artist,” *Amarillo Daily News*, May 3, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “Advertisement for J. Charles Schnorr,” *Amarillo Sunday-Globe News*, August 3, 1930, p.27.

<sup>30</sup> “J. Charles Schnoor [sic] of Pueblo Employed To Decorate New First Baptist Church; Famous Artist,” *Amarillo Daily News*, May 3, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> “Decorations in New Church Work of Famed Artist; Gift of Mastersons,” *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*: August 3, 1930, p. 26.

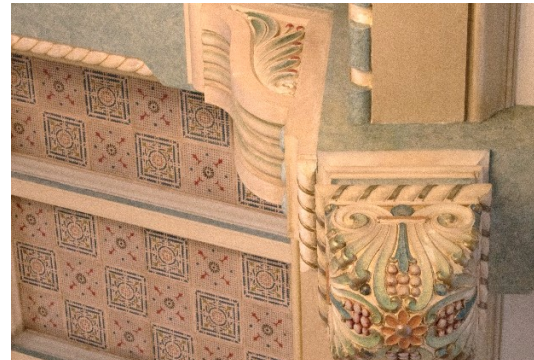
<sup>32</sup> “Masterson’s To Give Church Decorations As Tumlin Memorial” *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*: June 8, 1930, p. 13.

United States.<sup>33</sup> Regardless, it is interesting that yet another artist of close European descent (the other being Ferrand) had such influence on the aesthetics of a church on the Panhandle of Texas. Schnorr's work was paid for by "a very generous gift to the congregation from Mr. and Mrs. R.B. Masterson, Jr., in memory of Mrs. Masterson's father."<sup>34</sup> The Mastersons were a rich cattle-ranching family who owned a successful property in the area and so apparently had the resources to fund such an elaborate project.<sup>35</sup>

Schnorr's decorative painting transformed the interior of the church into a masterpiece resembling the great cathedrals of Europe. It is featured most prominently in the ceiling of sanctuary, where, as observers noted at the time of its unveiling, it resembles a mosaic (see Figures 19.)<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 19.** Close-up of Schnorr's decorative painting of the sanctuary ceiling.



**Figure 20.** Painted carvings of grape clusters and flowers cap supporting arches.

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<sup>33</sup> The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Albuquerque, Amarillo's Capitol Hotel, and the Hippodrome in New York, all of which featured Schnorr's work, have been destroyed, though it is still on display in the Pueblo County Courthouse in Pueblo, Colorado.

<sup>34</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, H. Allen Anderson, "MASTERSON, ROBERT BENJAMIN," last modified June 15, 2010, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fmacb>.

<sup>36</sup> "Decorations in New Church Work of Famed Artist; Gift of Mastersons," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 26.



Just below the ceiling, painted carvings of grape clusters cap supporting arches, giving the appearance of “huge clusters of fruit and flowers” hanging from the ceiling, as one observer noted on the day of its dedication (see Figure 20.)<sup>37</sup> This suggests some collaboration between Schnorr and the workers who carved the caps and the other capitals of the sanctuary. In any case, the continuation of the vine and fruit motif, first evident in the terra cotta carvings of the front façade, draws on a common allusion in Christian art to Christ’s discussion of the vine and branches in John 15.

Schnorr’s brush is also evident on the capitals of the baptistery pillars and the pillars throughout. The painted capitals resemble what the great Byzantine church capitals (like the ones of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, as shown in Figure 22) might have originally looked like, though the paint has either disappeared or been retouched by now.



**Figure 21.** One of two painted capitals that frame the baptistery. Note Schnorr’s delicate grading of colors from their most intense shades to the absence of color.



**Figure 22.** Painted capital at Basilica di San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. Note the un-painted capital in the background. Photo credits <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/san-vitale>

The capitals in FBCA are more Corinthian than anything else, and contribute to what one reporter called a “Roman effect,” though how Roman the sanctuary is on the whole is

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

questionable. Another reporter, describing the first phase of Schnorr's work in an article published on June 8, 1930, was particularly impressed by the choice of color scheme: "Every pillar, beam or panel in the building will be rich in color harmony, gold, blue, gray, rose, orchid, and all the other pastels making the perfect blend."<sup>38</sup> The majesty of Schnorr's work is particularly notable in the painted lattice-work which frames the baptistery (see Figure 24.)

What is not immediately evident upon entering the sanctuary is that the church's organ pipes are hidden behind this lattice-work arch. The choice to cover the organ pipes is an intriguing one considering the fact that many Baptist congregations embraced the aesthetic created by situating the organ pipes as the centerpiece of the sanctuary.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, this was how the sanctuary at the Ninth and Polk building was oriented (see Figure 3.) Visible, central organ pipes indicated the importance placed upon music in worship, and was perhaps also a result of the fact that "congregations boasting of the [best] organs in the land wanted them placed in full view of visitors."<sup>40</sup> Whatever the reason that the builders of FBCA opted for a more disguised incorporation of the organ pipes into the sanctuary, it encourages the feeling that the sanctuary is from a time far before the twentieth century.

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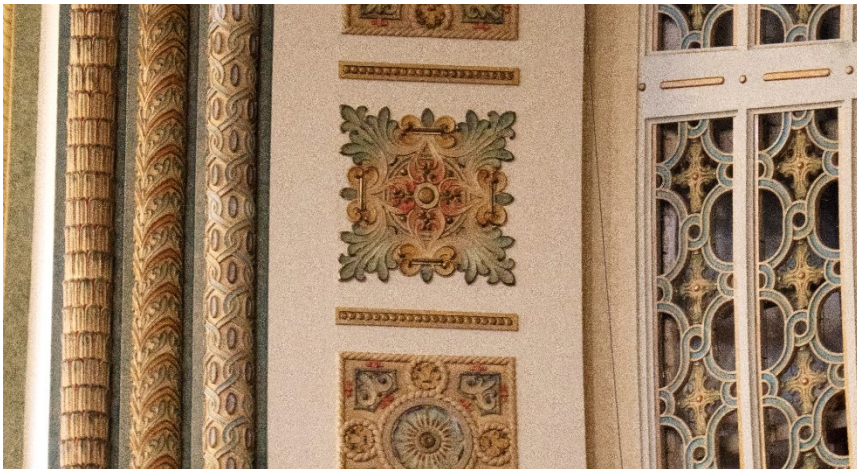
<sup>38</sup> "Masterson's To Give Church Decorations As Tumlin Memorial" *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, June 8, 1930, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, the 1890 building used by the First Baptist Church of Dallas.

<sup>40</sup> Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: the Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York ; Oxford University Press, 2002), 123.



**Figure 23.** Note the backlighting behind the latticework, revealing the organ room.



**Figure 24.** Close-up of the decorative painting adorning the arch and latticework.

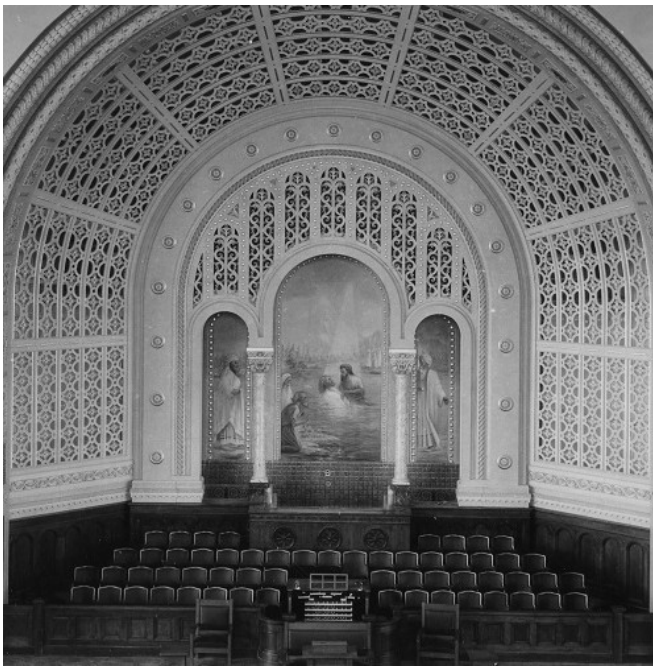
The central focus of Schnorr's work was a mural he painted behind the baptistery, a subject of great interest to observers:

Behind the pulpit, high over the organ, three mural paintings depicting the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan with the multitude in the background, give a realistic effect to the baptistry [sic], held in plate glass in front of a green tank which seems a part of the river scene. The lights overhead make it

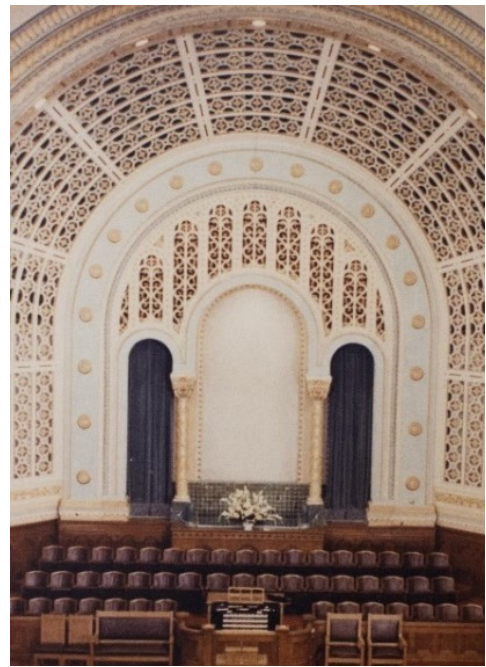


impossible to tell where the painting stops and the water of the baptistry [sic] begins.<sup>41</sup>

What looks like two richly robed religious leaders flank the main painting, which feature John the Baptist baptizing Christ with possibly Peter and Mary Magdalene in the foreground (see Figure 25.) Because of the mural's central location, photos of it dot the pages of the church's history *The Grand March* until about 1947.<sup>42</sup> From that point on, it is a blank space, first a stark white and now a light blue that matches the blue used to paint the latticework (see Figure 26.)



**Figure 25.** Schnorr's baptismal mural of John baptizing Christ in the Jordan. Photo courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.



**Figure 26.** Blank space and curtains where the mural was obscured. Photo undated, First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

<sup>41</sup> "Decorations in New Church Work of Famed Artist; Gift of Mastersons," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 74.

*The Grand March* does not address how or when this change occurred, but the story passed down through church members over time is that one night a certain church deacon came into the sanctuary and white-washed the mural without church approval.<sup>43</sup> Apparently the mural had not been popular with the congregation anyway, so the church finished the painting job without fanfare and the deacon never faced disciplinary action. The mural was a fascinating part of the church dedicated in 1930 because Baptists tend to have an iconoclast streak in the literal meaning of the term – as noted above, images of humans within their churches, if they appear at all, tend to be sparse because of the fear of idolatry. It is not a surprise, then, that the mural did not last long. Another opinion is that the mural was not destroyed because of any self-righteous iconoclasm, but because the mural was simply ugly. All of the extant pictures of the mural are taken from the back of the sanctuary, making it difficult to corroborate this claim either way. In any case, the story of the ill-fated mural illustrates that the beauty of FBCA is somewhat fragile; there was never a guarantee that it would happen or that it would endure.

The vestibule of the church also deserves special mention, as it bears the marks of Schnorr's so-called "Tiffany style."<sup>44</sup> According to newspaper accounts, "Schnorr created the design used in the new church especially for Protestant churches, and the local building is the first to be decorated in that design."<sup>45</sup> Given the lack of information available on Schnorr today, it very well may have been the first and only building he

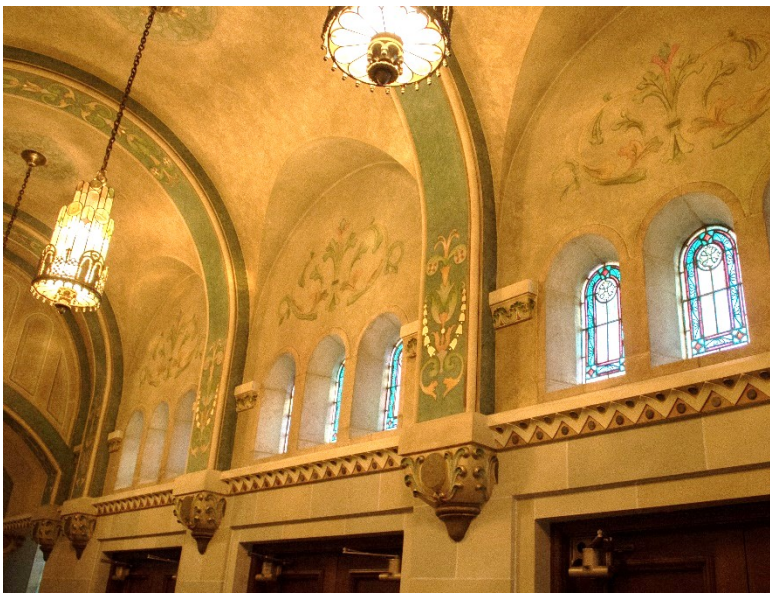
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<sup>43</sup> Howard Batson, Interview with the author, March 11, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> It is unclear exactly what is meant by "Tiffany style," whether that is his style of painting, his method of stenciling and painting, or the complex interplay between structure and painting seen throughout the church.

<sup>45</sup> "Decorations in New Church Work of Famed Artist; Gift of Mastersons," *Amarillo Sunday News and Globe*, August 3, 1930, p. 26.

decorated in that design. Buie Harwood's *Decorating Texas: Decorative Painting in the Lone Star State from the 1850s to the 1950s* features the only academic analysis of the church's interior painting. Harwood mentions that Schnorr's "signature in this church is a distinct, pre-planned interplay of structure and decoration."<sup>46</sup> This has already been made clear in the discussion of the capitals above (see Figure 21) and carries through to his work in the vestibule, particular the zig-zag design of the molding (see Figure 27.)



**Figure 27.** Vestibule of FBCA, featuring the decorative painting of Schnorr.



**Figure 28.** Close-up of bells and pomegranates decorative painting.

Given his upbringing in a family of painters, some of whom painted Christian subjects, Schnorr surely had knowledge of Christian iconography. He was likely referencing such knowledge when he painted what look to be golden bells and blue pomegranates in the vestibule (see Figure 28.) Though they have not had a wide usage in

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<sup>46</sup> Harwood, *Decorating Texas: Decorative Painting in the Lone Star State from the 1850s to the 1950s*, 66.

Christian art, such symbols are drawn from Exodus 28:33-34, when the Lord describes the patterns for the hem of the high priest's robe:

On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem, with bells of gold between them, a golden bell and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe.

The subtle usage of blue pomegranates and golden bells situates the church as deeply sacred space, even an heir to the sacredness of the Holy of Holies which the high priest entered once a year in his beautiful robes. The three verses chosen as inscriptions over the three doorways into the sanctuary likewise contribute to the sanctity of the space. They are, from left to right, Habakkuk 2:20a, Habakkuk 2:20b, and Psalm 100:4. Together, they form the message, "The LORD is in his holy temple . . . Let all the earth keep silence before him . . . Enter into his gates with thanksgiving." The chosen verses, with their references to the Lord's "holy temple" and "his gates," emphasize the Lord's holiness and indicate that this Amarillo building, too, is a space where that holiness is made manifest.

The stained glass of the church bears special mention. While stained glass is common in many Baptist churches, the forethought and beauty put into the stained glass of FBCA is unique. Again, it is difficult to make blanket statements about decorative or architectural elements in Baptist churches because of the decentralization of the denomination. It is reasonable to say, however, that Baptists do not always prefer the presence of symbols in their stained glass (again, the wariness towards idolatry), and in general gravitate towards more geometric patterns than symbols or depictions of biblical scenes.

The stained glass of FBCA, however, makes use of at least ten symbols from the Old Testament and New Testament. The panes were designed and produced by the Jacoby Art Glass Co., a prominent St. Louis, Missouri firm that created the stained glass for many churches in the “Midwest and Plains region,” as well as secular institutions such as the Armstrong Browning Library on the campus of Baylor University.<sup>47</sup> Though many other decorations for the new church were paid for by specific members of the congregation, usually as memorial gifts in honor of a loved one, the stained glass windows seem to have been absorbed in the church’s building budget.<sup>48</sup> This suggests that the Building Committee and Pastor Yates had the most control over the design of the windows.

To date, the only study of the church’s stained glass has been a short paragraph in *The Grand March* which identifies the symbols and suggests some of their traditional meanings. The table below gives the symbols:

<b>North Wall – Old Testament Symbols (from front to back)</b>	<b>South Wall – New Testament Symbols (from front to back)</b>
Star of David	Five Point Star (symbolizing Christ’s nativity)
Serpent around the Tree of Knowledge	Descending Dove
Burning Bush	Open Bible
Tablets of the Ten Commandment	Chalice
Seven Branched Menorah	Crown

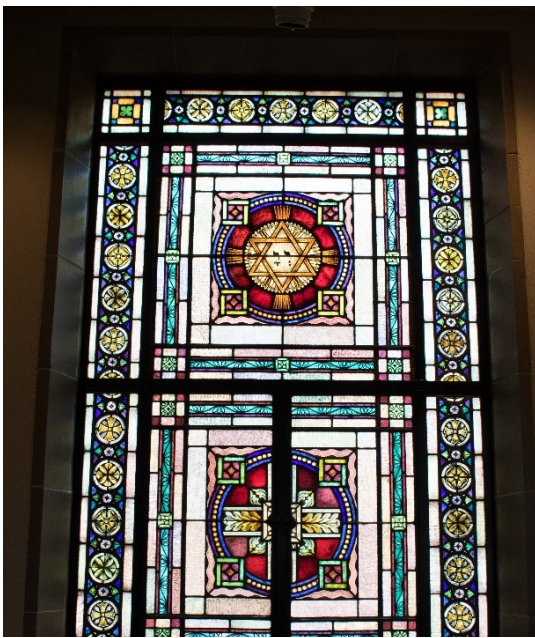
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<sup>47</sup> Jacoby Art Glass Company Armstrong Browning Library, “ABL Stained Glass Window Records - Jacoby Art Glass Company, Inclusive: 1922-1986, Undated,” accessed March 4, 2020, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/bayabl/30005/babl-30005.html>.

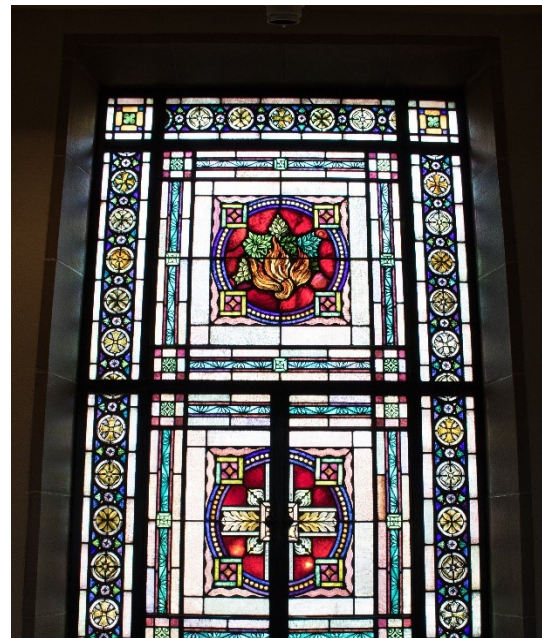
<sup>48</sup> Architects Final Statement, August 2, 1930, page 14. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.



As a preliminary observation, it is notable that key symbols from both the Old and New Testaments were chosen. This telegraphs the idea that the whole of Scripture is important to the church, or at least to its leaders who chose the designs. Regardless, the decision to include both testaments allows the windows to tell something of the narrative arc of the Bible; indeed, the symbols appear to be in relatively chronological order from front to back. Of particular note is the Star of David, which features a Hebrew inscription of the parts of the tetragrammaton, the divine name YHWH (see Figure 29.) Paired with it across the aisle is the first New Testament symbol, a five-point star. The writers of *The Grand March* note that it “[symbolizes] the birth of our Lord,” perhaps as a reminder of the star that stood over the place of Christ’s birth.<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 29.** Stained glass window featuring the Star of David with a version of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton at its center.



**Figure 30.** Stained glass window featuring the burning bush from Exodus 3.

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<sup>49</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 48.

The fact that both the Old Testament and New Testament windows start off with a star symbol suggests that each window relates to its partner across the aisle in some way. Thus, the divine revelation of Yahweh to his people precedes the revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ. The pairing of the burning bush and the open Bible likewise relate to methods of divine revelation. The pairing of the Ten Commandments and the Chalice may represent the Old and New covenants, respectively, and the pairing of the serpent around the tree and the descending dove, while difficult to parse, may refer to the removal of the Lord's presence because of sin and his return through the Holy Spirit. Finally, the menorah, traditionally a symbol of the Jews and their mission to be a light to the world,<sup>50</sup> is paired with the crown, which could stand for Christ's final victory in his second coming. Together, they may represent some eschatological principle, the fulfillment of the vocation of the Jews in the light and reign of Christ. As it is, the crown is the only one of the ten symbols repeated elsewhere in the sanctuary. It tops the row of windows at the back of the sanctuary, under which the church's organ extension, the Trompette en Chamade, was installed as a gift by the Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd P. Hayes during the church's centennial celebration in 1989 (see Figure 31.)<sup>51</sup> The repetition of the crown in that stained glass further suggests its importance as a symbol of Christ, his people, and his final victory.

Some observers may be surprised that the symbol of the cross, the signature of Christian faith, is not included in these ten symbols. A second look, however, reveals that the cross is included throughout the stained glass in various geometric patterns and

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<sup>50</sup> "The Menorah," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-menorah>.

<sup>51</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 168.

shapes (see Figures 29, 30, and 31.) A re-examination of the latticework reveals a similar realization: the cross is the very fabric of the design (see Figures 24.) This calls to mind Paul's words in Colossians 1:17, "In him all things hold together."



**Figure 31.** Stained glass windows at the back of the sanctuary. They feature a repetition of the crown symbol and cross shapes throughout. These windows are the ones visible at the top of the three arches of the front façade. Note the Trompette en Chamade below.

In total, the building and its ornamentation cost over \$550,000.<sup>52</sup> The careful planning of the Building Committee and architects yielded a structure that would serve the congregation for decades to come. Schnorr, the painter, completed his work a mere two weeks before the church was dedicated in triumph on Sunday August 3, 1930.<sup>53</sup> His three months of work on the interior of the building provided for a sanctuary just as

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<sup>52</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> "First Baptist Church Nears Completion," *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe*, July 20, 1930.



impressive on the inside as the outside. What was meant by the Romanesque and Byzantine inspired exterior? The intricate carvings? The pain-staking work of Schnorr? Pastor Yates gestured to these questions as he read Joshua 4:6, the text for his sermon that day: “What mean ye by these stones?”<sup>54</sup> He gestured towards an answer as well:

[This building] is first of all a memorial of God’s goodness toward us. How constant and unchanging has been his mercy and goodness. Some of you came here as pioneers forty-one years ago. Others have come under more favorable conditions and still others have been here only a few years; but all of us testify that these stones are vibrant with the love of Him.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The context of this verse in the book of Joshua is when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the land the Lord had promised to them. Joshua commanded the people to raise a memorial of twelve stones to mark their miraculous passing through the waters: “That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What mean ye by these stones?’ then ye shall answer them that [here] the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.” (Joshua 4:6-7, KJV).

<sup>55</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 50.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### An Enduring Baptist Inheritance: First Baptist Church Amarillo 1995-Present

This final chapter will describe the 1997 restoration and 2010 addition to the church, spearheaded by current head pastor Dr. Howie Batson. These projects ensured the church's beauty would be enjoyed by many more generations of worshippers, continuing the legacy of the original builders. In conjunction with this, lessons will be drawn from FBC Amarillo's unique position as an architectural treasure and a thriving Baptist church.

When Howard Batson became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo in September 1995, he made the restoration of the aging sanctuary one of his first main initiatives. As he puts it, when he walked into the sanctuary for the first time, he had two conflicting reactions: "Wow, how beautiful!" and "Wow, how in disrepair!"<sup>1</sup> Without any major restoration efforts since 1930, the sanctuary exhibited significant wear. Worn and frayed carpet needed replacing, seats needed resurfacing, paint in the balcony aisles needed restoring, aged wiring needed to be addressed, cracked columns and plaster needed restoring, and large audio-visual equipment obstructed the sanctuary's former beauty. Additionally, a "leading contractor in the community" had declared the church's attic a "fire trap."<sup>2</sup> Batson led the church in raising money for the large-scale restoration project. He quelled the worries of some church members who feared a complete "remodel" by articulating a vision of the restoration of the sanctuary to its former glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Batson, Interview with the author, March 11, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> 1997 Restoration Promotion booklet. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

Indeed, the goal of the project was to “take [the] room back to the feeling they had on that first morning when they walked in as best we could.”<sup>3</sup> A 1997 booklet passed out to the church to explain the need for restoration is very instructive for understanding how church members viewed the building as a unique and sacred space:

This sanctuary has witnessed many events of great joy and celebration, as well as times of trouble and profound sorrows. Here, too, people have found the Presence of Christ, His enduring love and faith to continue in His steps. This sanctuary continues to be a focus of our Christian pilgrimage.

It also highlighted the church’s responsibility to care for the sanctuary, couching it in terms of both stewardship of God’s gifts and concern for visitors to the church:

We would never let our own homes fall into disrepair and, as good stewards, we must not allow it to happen to God’s House, either. . . Also if we do not accept the responsibility of restoration and preservation, we will continue to communicate to our visitors that we do not care about God’s place of worship.

The sanctuary was not only a place to meet God and worship him, but also a testimony to all who came through the doors concerning how seriously the church took God and their worship of him. The booklet also explained that the money for the restoration would need to come from the sacrificial giving of church members, offered weekly over a six-month period, rather than the church’s normal budget or from money given to missions. No monetary goal was set, but church leaders made it clear that to do the work correctly would be costly, and that “the extent of the restoration will depend largely upon the response of our members.”<sup>4</sup> In total, the project was patterned on 2 Kings 22, where King Josiah directed the restoration of the Temple in his first major act as king. The booklet

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<sup>3</sup> Batson, Interview with the author.

<sup>4</sup> 1997 Restoration Promotion booklet. First Baptist Church of Amarillo.

draws a parallel between Josiah's situation and the First Baptist Church of Amarillo.

"We, too, have come to a time in our history when God's House has fallen into disrepair and must be restored." It stressed the sacrifice and care of the congregation that undertook the original construction of the building and asked, "Do we have the faith of our forefathers? . . . Together, we can ensure that our children and the following generations can experience the same love, power and glory of God that we have found here."<sup>5</sup>

The church raised an impressive 1.6 million for the project and in 1997 completed a complete restoration of the sanctuary. Among the other necessary repairs was the installation of a recessed audio box, allowing for the church to utilize new technology without the obstructions of the former audio-visual equipment. An artist from Azerbaijan restored the original plaster column work and created matching plaster tiles to adorn the wall of the balcony. Once the work was completed, the church gathered in excitement on September 14, 1997 for a "Celebration of Restoration and Renewal." They rededicated the sanctuary and celebrated with the performance of an oratorio entitled "Saviour." FBCA had succeeded in restoring the sanctuary's former glory for many new generations of worshippers.

Nor was that the last time that the church would invest in renovating and accenting the architecture left by the 1930 congregation. In the mid-2000s, Pastor Batson again approached the church with a request. Batson explained to the church that they had "a masterpiece by a master artist," but that it lacked an "appropriate frame." At the same time, the space on the south side of the original building was occupied by a road and a

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<sup>5</sup> 1997 Restoration Promotion booklet. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

parking lot, both of which constituted a hazard because of their close proximity to the building (see Figure 32.) Working with Charles R. Lynch, an Amarillo architect, and Turner LandArchitecture, the church developed a Master Plan in 2007 with the aim of fixing the hazardous elements of the south side of the church's campus by creating the "frame" of which Batson spoke.<sup>6</sup> The church site, which at that time consisted of "[a] historic original chapel, current church sanctuary, a family life center, education & ministry center, and a youth park open space" was soon unified by covered Byzantine pillar archways and rotunda (see Figure 33.) Also included were an entry fountain, patterned brick paving, and an ice/snow melt system which uses excess heat from the campus HVAC to create safe walkways during winter.



**Figure 32.** Aerial shot of FBCA campus, circa 1980. Note the road and parking lot on the left side of the sanctuary. First Baptist Church of Amarillo Records.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles R. Lynch, AIA Inc. "First Baptist Church." Accessed April 18, 2020. <https://www.crlarchitects.com/charles-lynch-first-baptist-church/>; Turner LandArchitecture LLC. "First Baptist Church Amarillo." Accessed March 12, 2018. <http://www.tla-landarch.com/julien-clarke/>. Both websites feature a wonderful portfolio of FBCA photographs.

According to Batson, the designers tried to “echo back to the original design and work” in order to serve as a type of spiritual preparation before entering the magnificent sanctuary. For example, the ceiling of the rotunda mimics the ceiling of the sanctuary, as does the rotunda’s stained glass windows. It picks up on the cross motif of the sanctuary’s stained glass and features eight different crosses from different periods and traditions of Christian history (see Figure 34.) Another echo back to original building is the design of the small façade behind the fountain, which imitates the shape of the iconic façade of the sanctuary (see Figure 33.)



**Figure 33.** Unifying pillars and rotunda, result of 2007 Master Plan. Photo credits to Margaret Thonnard in this chapter unless otherwise noted.





**Figure 34.** Ceiling of the rotunda. Stained glass and painted ceiling design mimic that of the sanctuary (for comparison see Figures 19 and 31 in Chapter Three.)

On November 7, 2010 the church held an outdoor celebration and cut the ribbon on the Master Plan project. In total, it had raised 12 million for the project, and the results did not disappoint. As a finished work, “the exterior space [is adorned with] eight stained glass windows, 38 chandeliers, a bronze sculpture, a water feature, courtyards, and rose gardens.”<sup>7</sup> It is now open continuously as a space of peace and reflection for members and non-members alike.

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<sup>7</sup> Howard K. Batson, *Sacred Spaces: First Baptist Church of Amarillo* (First Baptist Church of Amarillo, 2013).



**Figure 35.** Another feature of the 2007 Master Plan is the cruciform design of the covered walkway. Also visible in this photo is a glimpse of the pavilioned courtyards.

From the church's 1997 and 2010 projects, it is clear that FBCA values their building as a treasure and are willing to sacrifice to restore and even enhance it. The uniqueness of their building is underscored by an anecdote Batson tells about the time he had an insurance adjuster come look at the church after another church nearby suffered extensive fire damage. No sooner did the adjuster enter the sanctuary that he told Batson, "I don't know what you have this insured for, but it is not enough." He went on to explain that, "You'll never do this room again. I don't care how much money you have. The craftsmen aren't there [sic], the technique isn't there." The adjuster added that there was enough concrete in the building to construct three buildings by modern standards. In telling the story, Batson reminisces on how both he and the church as a whole "realize the



jewel that they have.”<sup>8</sup> It is this knowledge that drove the church to preserve the legacy of the original builders as both a way to honor God and preserve it for future worshippers.

But as members of First Baptist are quick to point out, their church is not only beautiful on the outside, but also thrives on the inside with a diverse, multi-generational congregation. As Batson says, “it is not a museum, [but] a vibrant place of worship.”<sup>9</sup> Several thousand people attend each Sunday, making it “a sanctuary that is just as alive today, if not more so, than when it opened.” As the church leaders predicted in 1926 when first planning for the new building, church membership has continued its upward climb from 781 members in 1924 to 11,460 on the membership roll in 2019. (This includes 4,344 members who actually live in the Amarillo area. The church has about 2,000 in attendance every Sunday.) The church is also incredibly diverse. In the words of a 2016 article written by Batson:

First Baptist Church of Amarillo is a very eclectic gathering of people. The only thing we have in common is that we all call Jesus “Lord.” Each Sunday, we preach the gospel in five languages to folks from about 15 cultures . . . Seeing all of God’s children worship together brings me joy.<sup>10</sup>

The church’s diversity comes from a variety of sources, including immigrants from Laos, Vietnam, Burma, East Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>11</sup> Like other evangelical churches, First Baptist also has a large focus on missions. It sponsors a variety of local and international missions programs and trips, and every year “more than

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<sup>8</sup> Batson, Interview with the author.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “Howie Batson: ‘Bringing the Hope of the Gospel’,” *Baptist Standard*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.baptiststandard.com/opinion/profiles/howie-batson-bringing-the-hope-of-the-gospel/>.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Brian, Interview with the author, March 11, 2019.

10% of [the church's] average weekly attendance leaves the country" for this purpose.<sup>12</sup> All of this demonstrates that the First Baptist Church of Amarillo is a thriving Baptist church, by all accounts a shining example of the denomination. So why is its ornate architecture anything but standard for a Baptist church?

It is not that Baptists do not build expensive churches anymore. No, congregations within the denomination regularly invest millions in building projects. However, these buildings normally look quite different from what the congregation of FBCA constructed in 1930. A brief review of Protestant architecture, with a focus in the architecture of evangelical groups, will help outline why many Baptist churches look so unlike FBCA. Whereas Christian architecture before the Reformation reflected a desire to worship the Lord "in the beauty of holiness"<sup>13</sup> and an acknowledgment of the space itself as sacred, the emphases in Protestant churches were quite different. As Jeffrey explains, "Protestant church architecture developed in a fashion that reflected the more democratic taste of congregational worship, as well as the Protestant emphasis on preaching."<sup>14</sup> Additionally, in many cases the space was considered sacred only insofar as God ordained to come among his people, either through "his people's worship" or through the indwelling of the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> This positioned some Protestants to begin to see "the temple of stone or wood [as] no more than an insignificant shell surrounding the living congregation of the faithful

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<sup>12</sup> "Missions History," FBC Amarillo, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.firstamarillo.org>.

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 96:9

<sup>14</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, *In the Beauty of Holiness* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 368.

<sup>15</sup> Premkumar Williams, "Shaping Sacred Space: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Church Architecture" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305362762/?pq-origsite=primo>, 38.

which assembles within its walls.”<sup>16</sup> This philosophy of the basic sameness of space led to the form of the Puritan meetinghouse, a building nearly architecturally indistinct from other buildings in town.<sup>17</sup> Again, the emphasis was on the communion between believers and their edification from the preaching of the Scriptures rather than any sense of the meeting house as sacred.

Premkumar Williams identifies the next major transformation in evangelical architecture as the point at which “[the] revivalist influence dramatically began to transform this ideal [of edification of believers] to that of proclaiming the gospel to the faithless, thereby generating a new style of architecture centered on the word – theater.”<sup>18</sup> In this he follows Jeanne Kilde, who argues that the late nineteenth century move towards theater-like churches, with their better acoustics and lighting, developed out of practical utility and a concern that the listener clearly hear the gospel message. As Kilde notes, “Driven by the power of the marketplace, rather than tradition, secular auditoriums were more responsive to consumers’ – that is, audiences’ – needs.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Williams notes that, “by and large, the appropriation of the theater form for theological function seems to have been driven by the theater’s practical utility rather than any great potential for theological expression.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gustaf Hamberg, *Temples for Protestants*, quoted in “Shaping Sacred Space: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Church Architecture,” 41.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, “Shaping Sacred Space,” 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: the Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2002), 130.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, “Shaping Sacred Space,” 58.

In many ways, First Baptist's Thirteenth and Tyler building adapts this auditorium-like form, as did its Ninth and Polk building. But while the auditorium-like quality of the sanctuary and its impressive amount of educational space proliferated among evangelical churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the architectural beauty of the "Perfect Church," held up as an ideal in 1930, never caught on among other Baptist churches in the United States. Part of the reason for this may be unfortunate timing. As noted, the Great Depression hit at about the time of FBCA's completion. The difficult economic times hardly encouraged building projects on a scale the size of FBCA, nor did the years of World War II that followed. By the time that churches and secular institutions alike had reached a level of normality after the war years, the Baptist philosophy on church building had solidified into a concern for a conducive place for Christian education and evangelism of non-believers. In 1957, the Baptist philosophy on church architecture was summed up by one Baptist architect in two points:

1. Southern Baptists have a very great and consuming desire to serve the masses of the people, all of the people, and the entire family, as well as all of the families on both sides of the tracks . . . 2. The emphasis . . . at the present time [is] on the individual as such. Whether this individual is in the Nursery department, or an Adult, or a child, or a teenager, the emphasis is on the individual. How can we do the most for each individual?<sup>21</sup>

With service to the "masses" and to the "individual" as primary guides, design features such as the auditorium style, better acoustics, and innovations in technology and video equipment proliferated in Baptist churches. This trend continues today. Current guidelines and fact sheets distributed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas focus

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<sup>21</sup> Baptist General Convention of Texas. Stewardship and Direct Missions, *Seminar on Church Architecture, First Baptist Church, Dallas, June 6-7, 1957*. (Dallas, Tex: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1957), 25.

almost exclusively on practical concerns for building a worship center, such as dimensions of the platform/stage, congregation seating, and baptistery. Their “Worship Space Remodeling” Factsheet lists eight considerations, including Pulpit Platform, Sound System, Lighting, and Air Conditioning, before churches are encouraged in a single sentence to “consider the theological implications of the design.”<sup>22</sup>

From this brief outline of Protestant ecclesial architecture, two themes emerge. One is the homogenization of space, which leads some Baptists to question whether the building even matters at all.<sup>23</sup> The other is the idea that the space of worship should primarily be conducive to hearing the pastor preach from the Scriptures. While these two ideals operate as positive influences on current Baptist architecture, there are also negative influences. One of them is an anxiety about investment in beauty. To some, building costly structures “diverts the church from its major tasks of evangelism, discipleship, and planting other churches.”<sup>24</sup> At the very least, the argument typically goes, should not the money spent on a well-designed building and gorgeous architecture be given to the poor? While a church should certainly both spend and give its funds wisely, it is worth noting that Christ’s disciples asked a similar, indignant question when Mary Magdalene poured out the precious perfume on Christ’s feet: “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor” (Matthew 26:8). In what generations of Christian artists have taken as an enduring call to beauty, Jesus tells the disciples to leave her alone, for “she has done a beautiful thing to me” (Matthew 26:10).

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<sup>22</sup> “Worship Center Remodeling – Fact Sheet 11,” Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2011. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/texasbaptists/church-architecture/Worship-Space-Remodeling.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance, Clyde Meador’s “A Church is Not the Building, And It May Not Even Need One.”

<sup>24</sup> Clyde Meador, “A Church Is Not the Building, And It May Not Even Need One,” *International Mission Board* (blog), October 5, 2016, <https://www.imb.org/2016/10/04/6306/church-is-not-the-building>.

These particular verses were even used by Pastor Yates at the dedication of FBCA in August 1930. That day he preached:

I grant you that this is an expensive church, a marvel of beauty. It cost some of us far more than the world will ever know . . . This building for some of us is our box of spikenard. Many complained in Mary's time that her gift to the Lord was too extravagant. But somehow, as she did, we want Him to have the best. Love is always extravagant.<sup>25</sup>

The church's current pastor, Dr. Batson, has another rebuttal to the idea that expensive architecture necessarily signals a neglect of other important ministries. He believes the real thrust of people's discomfort is the cost to themselves:

[Our ancestors] gave God their best, and . . . now we want to live in our own little cathedrals for ourselves and give God a metal building and put brick veneer up . . . and call it good, because we don't want to waste money. The reality is we want to spend money on our own selves [instead].<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the reason, anxiety surrounding the cost of building discourages some Baptist churches from investing in traditional ideals of beauty.

Another reason Baptist architecture has developed without the traditional emphasis on beauty is a fear of seeming old or outdated. Some evangelicals argue that older church architecture, even if beautiful, might be considered dated or intimidating by potential seekers or church members. Much more desirable, they argue, is the functionality and welcoming atmosphere of forms such as the contemporary megachurch. Such churches are poised to draw in people suspicious of organized religion. As Kilde puts it, "megachurches were born of the desire to bring middle-class white Protestants

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<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Maston C. Courtney and Mrs. James B. Franklin, *The Grand March* (Whitney Russell Printers, 1989), 50. It should also be noted that in the same dedication sermon, Pastor Yates announced that the amount of money collected for missionary offerings actually *increased* during the time of construction.

<sup>26</sup> Batson, Interview with the author.

who likely grew up within a church but had abandoned it as adults ‘back’ to the church.”<sup>27</sup> Kilde goes on to relate the story of how Bill Hybels, the founder of Willow Creek Community Church, went door to door in suburban Chicago to ask residents what they would want in a church. With that information, he made Willow Creek unintimidating and approachable to middle class worshippers. This came forth in an architectural form “familiar” to modern people: a sprawling, commercial complex (see Figure 36.)<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 36.** Willow Creek Community Church, suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. Photo credits CBS Chicago.

Such, argues Kilde, “is emblematic of the utilitarian bent of the megachurch movement: identify the needs and desires of the target group and fulfill them.”<sup>29</sup> As a result, the auditorium form developed to become more mall-like, offering everything

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<sup>27</sup> Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre the Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, 215.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

from food courts and bookstores to gym facilities and premier children's playgrounds. In this way, megachurches not only shy away from traditional ecclesial architectural forms from fear of being outdated, but also focus on catering to the individual and meeting his or her needs. It is the end result of that particular philosophy which has long guided Baptist churches and their approach to building: "How can we do the most for each individual?"<sup>30</sup> When the comfort of the listener, both the church member and the seeker, becomes the greatest ideal, the natural result is buildings that imitate the shopping mall in both function and form. Though the megachurch and its eager pioneers should be commended for their commitment to evangelism, this architectural form is not without consequences. As Williams has noted, "the megachurch is in danger of imitating the democratic atmosphere of the shopping mall, where people want to be comfortable rather than challenged . . ."<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey also warns more generally that "assertive individualism . . . represses the desire for holiness, since an authentic encounter with the Holy requires self-abandonment, not self-absorption."<sup>32</sup>

Putting new forms of evangelical architecture, such as megachurches, beside the traditional beauty of First Baptist's Thirteenth and Tyler building clarifies the different philosophies that guide their construction. Whereas megachurches and the small-scale churches that seek to imitate their concert auditorium setting emphasize a comfortable, seeker-friendly environment, the builders of First Baptist sought to glorify God by giving

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<sup>30</sup> Baptist General Convention of Texas. Stewardship and Direct Missions, *Seminar on Church Architecture, First Baptist Church, Dallas, June 6-7, 1957*. (Dallas, Tex: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1957), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, "Shaping Sacred Space", 62.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey, *In the Beauty of Holiness*, 366.



their very best for the building dedicated to his worship. The result is a structure that itself preaches a sermon to all who see it, a type of “theology in stone,” as one author would have it.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Batson explains that First Baptist’s sanctuary “reminds us [that] God is so much bigger than we are . . . God is not hindered or captured by space, but a room like that reminds you that you can’t capture Him.”<sup>34</sup> Megachurch builders, however, tend to see their buildings in purely instrumental terms. As megachurch pastor Rick Warren puts it: “We see our building as tools for ministry, not monuments. We’re much more into putting money into landscaping, trees and a park atmosphere than making an architectural statement.”<sup>35</sup> But people like Batson have a far more nuanced view of their worship area, articulating a clear theology of sacred space:

When you enter a sacred space of worship, it’s more than an experience. It is an encounter with God. Because of the permanence, the perspective, and the purpose of the sacred space, you quickly understand that this encounter is more than just about you. The [enormous size] of the room, the structure, dwarfs you, and the stones themselves seem to cry, ‘Look higher. Look higher.’<sup>36</sup>

He also mentions that the space is further consecrated because of its centrality to the lives of church members. In an age where many options exist to make life’s greatest moments more convenient, such as rentable wedding venues, online sermons, and funeral home chapels, the sacred space of First Baptist still shapes the lives of church members:

Within these walls and courts, we both celebrate the joys and mourn the sorrows of life. Here, we dedicate our children, give our daughters’ hands in marriage, and bid a temporary farewell to those who die in our midst.

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<sup>33</sup> Taken from the title of Richard Kieckhefer’s *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*.

<sup>34</sup> Batson, Interview with the author.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Williams, “Shaping Sacred Space,” 62.

<sup>36</sup> Batson, *Sacred Spaces: First Baptist Church of Amarillo*, 3, paraphrasing the work of Patrick Poole.

But more importantly, we continue to leave our children with a passion for the story of Jesus and a center for missions.

The hard work and sacrifice passed down by the congregation in 1930 has thus become a treasured inheritance for generations of believers at First Baptist who realize that a building can be far more than a “tool for ministry.”<sup>37</sup> Joining with the long tradition of Christian artists who have sought the Lord and worshipped him “in the beauty of holiness,” they have invested in beauty and reaped the blessings of such a pursuit.<sup>38</sup>

This dedication to beauty remains ill-understood by many other Baptists. Even while I was researching and writing this thesis, I had a friend at my Baptist church comment on my work, “That’s sounds like an interesting topic, but when are you going to say: ‘The joke’s on you: the church is the people not the building – the building doesn’t really matter.’” Such is the dominant idea surrounding Baptist church architecture. Similarly, Clyde Meador, a retired Baptist missionary, writes, “At no time does the New Testament give an indication that any local church of that era had a church building . . . First-century Christians clearly did not experience the need for a special church building.”<sup>39</sup> In an unfortunately typical Baptist manner, Meador leaps over thousands of years of Christian tradition and experience to make his point, decrying the need or inclination for a special church building. Meador’s full article, entitled “A Church Is Not the Building, And It May Not Even Need One,” was shared on social media by the International Mission Board (the missions arm of the Southern Baptist Convention) shortly after the burning of the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris in April 2019. The IMB

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Williams, “Shaping Sacred Space,” 62.

<sup>38</sup> Psalm 96:9

<sup>39</sup> Meador, “A Church Is Not the Building, And It May Not Even Need One.”

shared the article with a caption noting that though “the Christian community mourns the tragic loss of a beautiful and irreplaceable church building, . . . [it] can also mourn in hope.” While the IMB likely meant no harm or controversy in sharing such an article, it comes across as regrettably tone-deaf to those for whom sacred spaces are a reality. In any case, it is clear from their comments that Batson and others do not believe that authentic worship is impossible without a building. Their concern, rather, is about how much potential such buildings can hold for both the congregation and the community. Batson relates a letter written to him by a friend the day after the friend had visited the church:

There is a strong presence of the Holy Spirit at every step – maybe because I experience the Spirit through beautiful, tranquil spaces. Regardless, your congregation has done more than just stack some bricks. Your congregation has made a big, bold statement about the power of God that will draw in many people who need that power in their lives.<sup>40</sup>

This luring, even evangelistic, quality of beauty is ironically neglected by those like Meador, whose primary anxiety about church building is that it may “[divert] the church from its major tasks of evangelism, discipleship, and planting other churches.”<sup>41</sup> Again, FBCA demonstrates that prudential spending on beautiful, sacred spaces need not be considered as a stealing of resources from the three goals Meador outlines, but rather as a timeless investment in them. According to N.T. Wright, an investment in beauty is one of the primary ways the church can proclaim the gospel to a world too often surrounded by a combination of “bleak urban landscapes . . . and tawdry entertainment.”<sup>42</sup> In contrast, a

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<sup>40</sup> Batson, *Sacred Spaces: First Baptist Church of Amarillo*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Meador, “A Church Is Not the Building, And It May Not Even Need One.”

<sup>42</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 231.

church's architecture can announce both its present faith in a powerful and beautiful God and also its hope for the future. This, for Wright, is the hope of a new creation, of "the beauty of the present world taken up and transcended in the beauty of the world that is yet to be."<sup>43</sup> The sharing of this hope, both through words and through stone, is a type of evangelism in itself, one certainly worth the investment.

Thus, FBCA demonstrates that the standard Baptist commitment to evangelism and a traditional commitment to worshipping the Lord "in the beauty of holiness" need not be mutually exclusive. Similarly, its history demonstrates that, at least within the Baptist tradition, such a pursuit of beauty requires strong leaders who are committed to leading their congregation into the investment. This is apparent in both the example of Pastor Yates, who led the church to build and dedicate the building in 1930, and Dr. Batson, who has played a major role in the church's sustained commitment to renovating and creating sacred spaces where people may know and worship the Lord. On August 3, 1930, Pastor Yates concluded his dedication sermon with the following:

Our prayer today is that this church may be the birthplace of thousands, and from it will go the light of salvation till all shadows and darkness are gone and the world is flooded with the light of the perfect day.<sup>44</sup>

Nearly ninety years later, members of FBCA can rest in the blessed knowledge that the current church building, having endured for so long, has indeed been the spiritual birthplace of thousands and a place of rich worship for many thousands more. They can also move forward in the hope that, by the Lord's own strength and beautiful love, this will continue to be so – until the light of the perfect day.

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<sup>43</sup> Wright, 231.

<sup>44</sup> Courtney and Franklin, *The Grand March*, 50.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Photos of the First Baptist Church of Amarillo



**Figure A1.** The 2010 addition with the original building and tower in the background. All Appendix photo credits to Margaret Thonnard.



**Figure A2.** Same view as A1, but showcasing the dramatic night lighting.



**Figure A3.**



**Figure A4.**





**Figure A5.** View from Tyler St.



**Figure A6.** Fountain, part of 2007 Master Plan and dedicated in 2010. The church's Family Life Center, in background, was dedicated in 1980 as a standalone building. The covered walkways now connect it to the main building





**Figure A7.**



**Figure A8.** Memorial plaque commemorating the 2010 addition, located under the rotunda of the walkway. It includes Isaiah 6:3, which reads, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.”





**Figure A9.** Sanctuary interior, view from stage. Note the ornate painted carvings on right.



**Figure A10.**





**Figure A11.**



**Figure A12.** One of the verses (Habakkuk 2:20) above the doors to the sanctuary in the vestibule.



**Figure A13.** Vestibule. Doors at left enter onto the front façade. Doors at right enter the sanctuary.





**Figure A14.** View of rotunda from roof of sanctuary. Notice Polk Street Methodist Church a few blocks away. It was built in 1928, just a couple years before FBCA.



**Figure A15.**

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