

McKinney Avenue Baptist Church

Statement of Historical Significance:

The McKinney Avenue Baptist Church at 2601 McKinney Avenue is a century old and one of the only remaining historic buildings on McKinney Avenue. While the building has been altered over the last decade to accommodate a restaurant use, the building's presence and character remains intact. The building's massive edifice continues to support impressive columned porticos and grand stairs.

The architect and builder of McKinney Avenue Baptist was Charles William (C.W.) Bulger (1851-1922), one of the most prolific church architects of the early twentieth century in Texas. He is credited with designing over 100 churches in the state, including Gaston Avenue Baptist Church (his first in the city), East Dallas Christian Church (City of Dallas Landmark), expanded the Slaughter Building (aka, the National Exchange Bank Building), remodel of First Baptist in Dallas, and the Baptist Memorial Sanitarium (McDonald 1978: 75-76). Bulger has been called a specialty architect of Baptist Churches; however, he is best known locally for designing the first steel reinforced concrete skyscraper in Dallas, the Praetorian Building. In his obituary on June 6, 1922, Bulger is heralded as a nationally significant architect who also served as deacon of Baptist Churches of America. His is recognized as bringing into fashion "classical" style Baptist churches.

In July of 2005, Rev. J. Frank Norris, a recent graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, becomes the pastor of McKinney Avenue Baptist. The church was a "mission church" of small membership. In July of 1905, Rev. Norris held revival on the lot next to the future site of the church at the corner of McKinney Avenue and Routh Street. A small wood frame structure soon occupies the same location as plans are prepared for a large "classic" style church that would seat 1500 and house classrooms for 50 Sunday school classes. In April of 1906, as ground is broken for the new building, Rev. Norris announces that in one day, the church raised \$21,000 in subscriptions, more than half of what will be need to construct the new church.

At the time McKinney Avenue Baptist was built, there were nine white Baptist churches in the city. These include First, Second, Gaston, McKinney Avenue, Oak Cliff (Convention Memorial), South Park, First German, First Oak Cliff and Emmanuel. Three of the churches, McKinney, Oak Cliff, and Second, were under construction and a fourth, Gaston Avenue, was near completion. In the Spring of 1906, just days after C.W. Bulger's renderings of the church appeared in the *Dallas Morning News*, the City Building Inspector, L. L. Bristol, reports to City Council that "next quarter, the number of permits issued and value of construction will likely be higher than anytime in the city's history." The McKinney Avenue church was one of a number of buildings soon to be under construction, including a city jail, high school, Sanger Brothers, YMCA, Woodman of the World Building, Scottish Rite Temple, Holy Trinity College, Knights of Pythias Temple, among others. Large construction projects alone expected to exceed 1.2 million dollars during the second quarter. This amount is more than double the amount recorded

for the first quarter of 1906, which was \$500,000. In January of 1907, the *Dallas Morning News* reported 1906 to be a record year in construction, with churches and stately residences a contributing factor.

Over the next two years (from 1906-1908), Rev. Norris leads the congregation, aiding in the development plans for the new edifice and growing the congregation. His participation in revivals appears to be a significant factor in the growth of the church at this time. At one revival in April 1907, the *Dallas Morning News* reports that church added 40 new members and converted 80. A month later, Rev. Norris is elected president of Baptist Standard Publishing Company. At this time, he is credited with organizing another Baptist church in the city, Cedars Springs Baptist Church. By late summer of that same year, services are held in the new church building, which is still under construction. In May 1908, Rev. Norris resigns from the church to serve as editor of the *Baptist Standard*, a Baptist newspaper with a circulation of 40,000 (nationwide). During his tenure, the church grew to over 400 members and a substantial portion of the funds (over \$25,000) need for the new building was raised.

According to church records, work on the interior of the McKinney Avenue Baptist Church is still underway in 1911 when the church's third minister, Dr. Fred Hale, resigns. His successor, Dr. J.H. Moore of Oklahoma, is credited with completion of the church building, inside and out in spring of 1913. The mortgage of the church is burned in 1922, reportedly becoming the first Baptist church in the city to be out of debt. Three years later, in May of 1925, the congregation announces plans to erect new building on Oak Lawn. Just a month prior to the churches announcement, the *Dallas Morning News* notes record attendance at area churches. The Depression disrupts the church's plans until 1936 when the newspaper reports construction to start soon. By March 1937, the congregation, renamed Highland Baptist, had moved in the new auditorium at Oak Lawn and Wycliff. The congregation occupied the McKinney Avenue site for 30 years. In 1941, Highland Baptist Church notes that former church is occupied by another group who is leasing the building from the former congregation.

Rev. Norris' work at McKinney Avenue Baptist Church occurs at an early but pivotal point in his ministry. He begins his service at the church having just graduated from seminary. At the end of his three years, he leaves to leads a major religious publication. It is also during this period (1907-1909) he is credited with ending the Texas Baptist newspaper war, with influencing the transfer of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from Waco to Fort Worth, and with helping to abolish racetrack gambling in the state. Later in his career, he begins the first regular radio ministry in the United States, becomes the leader of the fundamentalist movement in Texas, and organized the World Missionary Baptist Fellowship. Rev. Norris contributions to the development of two churches (First Baptist Church of Mt. Calm and First Baptist Church of Mineral Wells) and Arlington Baptist College (Tip O' Hill Terrace) are noted in three Texas Historic Site Markers.

Rev. Norris ministry and carrier were also marred with controversy• having been the subject of court trials for perjury and murder and a reported anti-cathlotic and member of

the KKK. According to David R. Stokes, radiobroadcaster and Senior Pastor of Fair Oaks Church in Fairfax County, Virginia, “Throughout his ministerial career Norris manifested the ability to shift gears abruptly on a wide variety of issues. He was a staunch anti-Catholic as evidenced by his stand against fellow Detroit broadcaster, Father Charles Coughlin, and his fierce campaign for Herbert Hoover and against Al Smith in the 1928 presidential election. Yet, he had an audience with Pope Pius XII in 1947. The New York Sun quoted Norris as saying that the pope was “the last Gibraltar in Europe against communism.” It is through these and other activities and his political leanings that Rev. Norris becomes one of the most controversial religious figures in the state of Texas.

Other historical figures at the local or even state level of significance may be associated with the McKinney Avenue congregation. Research on this aspect of the churches history is ongoing.

Timeline of McKinney Ave. Baptist Church

7-31-05– Dallas Morning News: J. Frank Morris, new pastor of McKinney Avenue Baptist Church gives **sermon from tent adjacent to the site of the congregation’s future church**, which is expected to cost 40,000.

2-26-1906 – Dallas Morning News: Plans for New Church. Details for \$30,000 Structure for **McKinney Avenue Baptist Church to be erected as soon as the plans are ready** on the corner of McKinney Avenue and Routh Street. Reports of officers of the church show that in the six months’ pastorate of Rev. J. Frank Norris, the congregation has experienced splendid growth and increased interest in every phase of the work.

4-01-1906– Dallas Morning News: **Dirt to be broken and work to begin on McKinney Avenue Baptist Church** this week. Structure to be of brick and stone and “classic in effect.” Church to have basement and two stories. Building will occupy a greater part of a block with four entrances, the main entrance of McKinney. A gallery in the main auditorium is to be projected. Seating in the auditorium expected to hold 1500. Sunday school classrooms, to hold 50 classes, will be housed at the rear of the building. Rev. J. Frank Norris declares that the church will not “have a useless square foot” in it. Judge Kenneth Foree and Judge Hiram F. Lively on building committee.

Architect and contractor is listed as C. W. Bulger. Architect’s drawing included on page 9 article. Building expected to cost 35,000.

4-08-1906– Dallas Morning News: Rev. J. Frank Norris announces that church held meeting for the purpose of starting subscriptions for funding the new church building. While \$10,000-12,000 was expected the Baptist pastor found at the end of the meeting a

total exceeding **\$21,000 raised in one day, over half the funds needed for new structure.**

4-09-1906–Dallas Morning News: City Building Inspector, L. L. Bristol, reports to City Council that “next quarter, **the number of permits issued and value of construction will likely be higher than anytime in the city’s history.** Buildings planned include: a city jail, high school, Sanger Brothers, YMCA, Woodman of the World Building, Scottish Rite Temple, Holy Trinity College, **McKinney Ave. Baptist Church**, Knights of Pythias Temple, among others. Large construction projects alone expected to exceed 1.2 Million Dollars during the second quarter. This amount is more than double the amount recorded for the first quarter which was 500,000.

9-14-06–Dallas Morning News: Plans of the church and Sunday school classroom adjusted to allow the structure to sit further back from the avenue. **Construction now estimated at \$45,000.** Erection of the physical structure to begin before October 1st.

10-10-1906–Dallas Morning News: Article reports on ceremonies and ground breaking held at site of new church. Rev. J. Frank Norris announces his plans for the church.

2-27-1907–Dallas Morning News: Building **cornerstone to be laid** with ceremonies soon. **Walls stand five feet** above the ground at present time. Ceremony held on March 11th.

2-28-1907–Dallas Morning News: Article reports on the strength of Dallas Baptist churches. **City has nine white Baptist churches;** these include First, Second, Gaston, McKinney Avenue, Oak Cliff (Convention Memorial), South Park, First German, First Oak Cliff and Emmanuel. McKinney, Oak Cliff, and Second are all under construction. Gaston Avenue near completion.

3-22-1907, 3-31-07–Dallas Morning News: City-wide revival held at Dallas’ Baptist Churches. Rev. J. Frank Norris, an accomplished evangelist, had more than 80 conversions and 40 new members in his church alone since the Revival began.

4-16-1907–Dallas Morning News: Rev. J. Frank Norris elected president of Baptist Standard Publishing Company. His duties are not to interfere with his ministry at McKinney Avenue.

5-06-1907–Dallas Morning News: “The new structure has reached such a stage as to indicate of what will be the appearance of the building, when completed. The exterior is at present in the rough, no cement applied to the outside walls.”

8-05-1907–Dallas Morning News: Construction of the main auditorium sufficient to allow the **congregation to worship in new facility.** More than \$5,000 was raised during the day’s services for furthering work on new building. Two years and one month ago church membership was reportedly 13. **Enrollment is now more than 350.** The pastor of the beginning of this organization has been Rev. J. Frank Norris.

9-02-1907–Dallas Morning News: Cedar Springs Baptist Church recently organized largely through the efforts of McKinney Avenue Baptist Church pastor Rev. J. Frank Norris.

12-02-1907–Dallas Morning News: Large revival held in new building.

1-01-1908–Dallas Morning News: 1906 structures completed in **1907 led to a local record in buildings erected**. Churches and stately residences contributing factor.

5-04-1908–Dallas Morning News: **Rev. J. Frank Norris resigns** to manage Baptist Standard fulltime, a Baptist newspaper with a circulation of 40,000 (nationwide). Rev. Norris came when it was a “mission church” which was **housed for some time in a small wooden frame house** until the new church was sufficiently completed to allow services. The new building, when completed, will cost \$35,000 of which \$25,000 has already been spent. **Completion of the church and its furnishing is expected within the year**. Under his nearly three year leadership, the church grew to over 400 members. Dr. George B. Butler of Bryan named pastor.

4-13-1925–Dallas Morning News: Newspaper reports on record attendance at area churches, sets new record for the city at over 50,000 attending services.

5-10-1925–Dallas Morning News: Congregation announces plans to erect new building at Herschel and Oak Lawn. Land already purchased.

2-16-1936–Dallas Morning News: 20 Million to be spent on construction within city. **First phase of McKinney Ave. Baptist to begin soon at new location**. Cost of first phase is estimated \$60,000.

10-11-1936–Dallas Morning News: Newspaper reports “Cash flowing for Erecting Big Buildings.” Seven major structures underway in city including McKinney Avenue Baptist Church, now **Highland Baptist Church**.

3-21-1937–Dallas Morning News: Women’s Missionary Union to meet at new church building of Highland Baptist Church.

7-26-1941–Dallas Morning News: Congregation celebrates 50th Anniversary. Article notes that **church housed for thirty years at the corner of McKinney Avenue in a building still owned by the church** but leased to another congregation.

City Designation Criteria

History, heritage and culture: Represents the historical development, ethnic heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or country.

Historic event: Location of or association with the site of a significant historic event.

Significant persons: Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city, state, or country.

Architecture: Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, landscape design, method of construction, exceptional craftsmanship, architectural innovation, or contains details which represent folk or ethnic art.

Architect or master builder: Represents the work of an architect, designer or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state or country.

Historic context: Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites, or areas which are eligible for preservation based on historic, cultural, or architectural characteristics.

Unique visual feature: Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city that is a source of pride or cultural significance.

Archeological: Archeological or paleontological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories of historic or prehistoric interest.

National and state recognition: Eligible of or designated as a National Historic Landmark, Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, State Archeological Landmark, American Civil Engineering Landmark, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic education: Represents as era of architectural, social, or economic history that allows an understanding of how the place or area was used by past generations.