

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: First Independent Baptist Church

Other name/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

2. Location

Street & number: 703 G. W. Jackson Avenue

City or town: Corsicana

State: Texas

County: Navarro

Not for publication:

Vicinity:

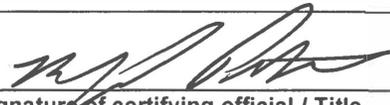
3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

	Chief Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer	<u>10/28/25</u>
Signature of certifying official / Title		Date
Texas Historical Commission		
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____	_____
Signature of commenting or other official	Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government	

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	1	objects
1	1	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** RELIGION: Religious facility

**Current Functions:** RELIGION: Religious facility; OTHER: Sign

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival

**Principal Exterior Materials:** METAL, BRICK, CONCRETE, WOOD, GLASS

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 6-9)

First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** A (Religious Properties)

**Areas of Significance:** Ethnic Heritage/Black, Social History, Architecture (*local*)

**Period of Significance:** 1918-1975

**Significant Dates:** 1918

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 10-19)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 20-24)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission [THC], Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): THC Survey Number 1164 (1989)

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre (0.26 acres)

### Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (use decimal degree format)

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. Latitude: 32.096926°N Longitude: -96.458696°W

**Verbal Boundary Description:** C0000 CORSICANA BLK 104 LOT 1 & 2 .264 ACRES (100 X 115) (Property ID: 27573), Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas as recorded in the Navarro Central Appraisal District. Data accessed, February 24, 2025 (Map 4).

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary follows the legal parcel and includes all property historically associated with the nominated resource.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Hannah Curry, with support from SWCA Environmental Consultants; Conor Herterich of Preservation Texas; and Colleen Robinson and Pastor George Weatherall with First Independent Baptist Church  
Organization: Palindrome Preservation  
Address: 540 Heights Blvd., Suite 330-I  
City or Town: Houston State: Texas Zip Code: 77007  
Email: palindromepreservation@gmail.com  
Telephone: (281) 745-4914  
Date: January 2025

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 25-27)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 28-35)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 5, 36-49)

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**Photographs**

Name of Property: First Independent Baptist Church  
City or Vicinity: Corsicana  
County: Navarro County  
State: Texas  
Photographer: Conor Herterich, Preservation Texas

*All photographs accurately depict property conditions. No changes nor significant deterioration has occurred since the photos were taken in February 2024 and March 2025.*

**Photograph Number: 0001**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Landscape with church overview, view south.

**Photograph Number: 0002**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
North façade and west elevation, view southeast with sign and Texas Historic Marker.

**Photograph Number: 0003**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
West and south elevations, view north.

**Photograph Number: 0004**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
South and east elevations, view northwest.

**Photograph Number: 0005**

Date Photographed: March 25, 2025  
East and north elevations, view southwest.

**Photograph Number: 0006**

Date Photographed: March 25, 2025  
Detail, bell tower with repaired louvers, view northwest.

**Photograph Number: 0007**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Detail, primary entry with original transoms and flanking single doors, view south.

**Photograph Number: 0008**

Date Photographs: February 29, 2024  
Detail, windows on west elevation.

**Photograph Number: 0009**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Narthex, view east with original plaster walls, chair rails, and tile flooring installed in 1967.

**Photograph Number: 0010**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Narthex, view southwest with original transoms and paired doors into the nave.

**Photograph Number: 0011**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Nave, view south, with 1967 lay-in ceiling, original balconies, two-aisle arrangement, seating, and 1967 flooring.

**Photograph Number: 0012**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Chancel, view south, showing non-original air conditioning duct with original exterior door and stained glass windows on the south wall behind the choir loft.

**Photograph Number: 0013**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Nave from balcony, view south.

**Photograph Number: 0014**

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024  
Nave from altar, view north.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

*This project originated from the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant awarded to the property owner by the National Park Service. In January 2021, NPS staff concurred that the property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.*

The 1918 First Independent Baptist Church is located at 703 G.W. Jackson Avenue in the historically Black neighborhood of east Corsicana in Corsicana, Texas. Designed in the Classical Revival style, the two-story wood frame church has a rectangular plan, gable and hipped roof, a prominent original decagonal bell tower, non-original aluminum siding (c. 1960s historic change), and a pier-and-beam foundation with brick skirt. The symmetrical façade is characterized by four full-height Ionic columns supporting a central pediment and a staircase leading to the main entrance. The building retains all of its original wood-frame stained glass windows, many of which were designed with corresponding transoms or geometric Gothic Revival-inspired tracery. The floor plan is largely intact and the interior is defined by a narthex, two-story auditorium style sanctuary, raised chancel, balcony with original fascia, and a fellowship space. The property exemplifies associated property types identified in the multiple property submission *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*.<sup>1</sup> While the architect or builder is unconfirmed, the church may have been designed by Pastor A.L. Moore, who served during construction. Historically surrounded by one-story vernacular single-family residences on a densely developed block, the church building is now one of just six buildings remaining. Despite this change to the setting and a few alterations over the decades including recent repairs to the roof, fascia, and bell tower louvers associated with the NPS grant, the building retains historic integrity.

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## Setting

First Independent Baptist Church was built in 1918 as the fourth building for this congregation and the second on this parcel. The current church was possibly designed by then-Pastor A.L. Moore on a corner lot and faces north onto G.W. Jackson Avenue, in the east side of Corsicana.<sup>2</sup> The previous church on this parcel was a two-story Gothic Revival building with a prominent bell tower centered on the front elevation (Figure 5). Other buildings in the immediate vicinity primarily include early- to mid-twentieth century one-story, vernacular single-family houses and another, newer church along G.W. Jackson Avenue. There are several Texas state historic markers in the vicinity, and the closest National Register property is the Corsicana Commercial Historic District, which is separated by two rail lines and Interstate 45 Business (Maps 1-4).

Landscaping at the church is limited to a grass lawn surrounding the property. The front of the building is accessed from the sidewalk along G.W. Jackson Avenue which continues along the west elevation of the building. The rear entry on the south side of the building does not have any paved access. There is a Texas Historical Commission Historical Marker commemorating the congregation (1980) and a non-contributing metal sign, likely installed in the late 1970s, for the church at the corner of G.W. Jackson Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, however, there are no other resources on the property.

## First Independent Baptist Church

First Independent Baptist Church faces northwest, set back approximately 10 feet from the street on each side (Photos 1-5, 7). Although there are no surviving architectural drawings, the church was built in the Classical Revival style with a combination of different stylistic characteristics. The two-story, wood-frame building has a pier and beam foundation with its original brick skirt, non-original aluminum siding, and a gable and hipped asphalt shingle roof. A simple pediment supported by four Ionic columns is positioned over the primary entrance on the symmetrical front (north) facade. The aluminum siding was likely added in the 1960s within the period of significance and is a historic alteration. The original

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Listing, January 1995, pages 25-26, 28, 62, 64. Accessed February 2025, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64500630/64500630.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Limited evidence related to the architect or builder was found, but the community believes it may have been Pastor A.L. Moore.

First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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bell tower on the northwest corner is a decagon with wooden louvers on each side and a hipped asphalt shingle roof forming its turret. Typical windows are the original 1/1 single-hung wood sash windows with stained glass in a simple, geometric pattern covered with non-original aluminum frame screens. The typical windows on the first floor also have matching transoms.

*Plan*

The building is rectangular with a two-story projecting pedimented porch on its front (north) facade. The church is constructed over a pier-and-beam foundation with a brick skirt to elevate the building. The façade is defined by a larger central bay and smaller symmetric side bays on either side of the central bay. The central bay projects outward creating the entry porch. Apart from the grand entrance from the pedimented porch, the building can be accessed from the remaining three sides via secondary entrances. The original bell tower rises from the northwest corner of the building complementing the colonnaded portico. Overall footprint of the building appears consistent with original construction (Figures 1-3)

*Primary (North) Elevation (Facade)*

The front, or north, elevation (facade) reflects the Classical Revival style (Photos 1-2, 5). The façade is three bays wide with a projecting two-story primary entrance. The central and widest bay features a two-story projecting pedimented porch with overhanging eaves and an unadorned entablature. Both the entablature and the pediment are simple with horizontal wood cladding in different scales which distinguishes these two features from the rest of the building. The porch is supported by its original four full-height Ionic columns with a three-step base plinth and fluted shaft. A series of concrete stairs lead from the sidewalk to the porch which features a recessed entryway with three entrances (a double door flanked on either side by single door entrances). Each door features a fanlight in-unit. Above each entrance is a rectangular stained-glass transom. On the second-floor are three symmetrically arranged typical windows. Flanking the central entrance bay are two symmetrical side bays that are smaller with rectangular stained-glass single-hung windows. The windows have wooden surrounds. The windows on the first floor have a rectangular transom. The westernmost bay of the front facade features the original decagonal bell tower with a turreted roof (Photo 6). Each side of the tower features an original rectangular louvered window. The building is clad in non-original (now historic) aluminum siding with the original red Roman brick skirt. Some instances of wood clapboard siding are present on the second story.

*West Elevation*

The west elevation is nine bays wide and features various fenestration designs and a secondary entrance towards the southern end of the building (Photo 3). The first floor has seven, regularly arranged, original typical stained-glass windows, a door, and a window on the rear portion. The seven windows on the main mass of the elevation all feature a stained-glass transom. Four of these windows (centrally located on the elevation) are double bay and the other three are single bay. The rectangular wooden door features a stained-glass arcade window. The rear window is an original single typical unit without a transom. The second-floor features eight regularly placed original stained-glass windows and a stained-glass window on the rear extension. Of the eight windows on the main mass of the elevation, the four central windows have original Gothic Revival-inspired tracery units (Photo 8). These windows are comprised of two arched two pane windows topped by a single fixed ocular window. The other four windows are single typical windows without transoms. The window on the rear is a single typical unit. There are small metal ventilators in the brick skirt foundation. This elevation exhibits continuity of the horizontal aluminum siding with some instances of wood cladding, and moderately overhanging eaves.

*South (Rear) Elevation*

The southern facade features three rectangular stained glass windows with transoms and a door on the first floor and four rectangular stained-glass windows on the second floor (Photos 3-4). The door is accessed by a series of small stairs from

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the ground. This elevation also exhibits continuity of the horizontal aluminum cladding, moderately overhanging eaves, and shingling of the combination gable and hipped roof.

*East Elevation*

The east elevation mirrors the west elevation in fenestration and ornamentation pattern except that the southernmost window on the first floor features a stained-glass transom (Photos 4-5). Four vents are visible on the brick foundation wall near the ground. This elevation also exhibits continuity of the horizontal aluminum cladding, moderately overhanging eaves, and shingling of the combination gable and hipped roof.

*Interior*

The interior is separated into three distinct sections on both floors moving north to south: the narthex, the nave, and fellowship space (Figure 9). The front doors of the church open into a narrow narthex that provides access to the nave, balcony stairwells, and restrooms (Photos 9-10). The narthex features the original painted plaster ceiling, two-tone original painted plaster walls with a chair rail to separate the colors, and non-original ceramic tile flooring. Two sets of original paired wooden doors with one frosted light and three panels provide access from the vestibule to the nave. Above each doorway is a frosted transom with painted lettering in its center. From east to west, the transoms read: GOD IS LOVE and TEACH ALL NATIONS.

The nave features a two-story auditorium style sanctuary with side balconies supported by simple circular pillars (Photos 11-14, Figure 8). Finishes in the nave include a non-original lay-in tile ceiling that clips some of the second-story windows, original painted plaster walls, and non-original carpet and laminate tile. Original light fixtures of the same style are present as sconces along the nave walls and as pendant lights over the open center. The first story of the nave is divided into three seating banks with two aisles. The chancel is raised by a rectangular stage towards the apse of the church (Photo 12). A niched choir bank is housed at the rear (south) end of the building, separated by a pony wall from the chancel.

The second story has three rows of pews facing towards the center of the nave. Both sides of the second story balcony have a non-original enclosed balustrade pony wall with original paneled woodwork on the fascia. The balustrade is curved towards the front of the church. A niched enclosure reappears on the second story in the same location as the first story, separated from the balconies by rooms on either side of the apse. A non-original air duct runs beneath this enclosed section.

The fellowship space is on the south end of the building, wrapping around the apse. Finishes in these spaces include a non-original lay-in tile ceiling, painted original plaster walls, and non-original laminate tile flooring.

**Sign**

There is an existing metal post and panel sign on the northwest corner of the property, near the intersection of G.W. Jackson Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The sign has a simple metal frame made from painted hollow pipe, though the posts have simple finials at the top to resemble the bell tower on the church. The painted metal panel includes the church's name and schedule for Sunday worship. A blade sign hangs beneath the panel to provide the current minister's name, and a broken pediment light box has been installed at the top of the panel to illuminate the sign. Although the exact date of installation could not be identified, the sign does not appear in photographs of the church from the 1960s but was present when the congregation's Official Texas Historic Marker was dedicated in 1980. Based on the available information, the sign was installed during the late 1970s, likely outside the period of significance, and thus it is treated as non-contributing. Research did not identify any other signage over time. The historical marker is not large enough to be included in the resource count.

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**Alterations and Repairs**

Changes to First Independent Baptist Church have been minimal, however, exact dates for the most apparent alterations occurred are unknown at present. The exterior of the property is clad primarily in aluminum siding—likely added in the 1960s, with only small sections of the original wood still visible. A historic aerial shows a dome on the roof that was likely removed in c. 1950 (Figure 7). On the interior, a lay-in tile ceiling was added and tile flooring was added in the 1960s, and carpet was added to the altar, chancel, and nave area. Additionally, the original geometric balustrade at the balcony was replaced. It is unclear how much of the original exterior cladding and interior flooring are present underneath the altered materials or have been replaced, altogether. The sign was likely added in the late 1970s. In 2025, the congregation completed in-kind repairs to the roof, fascia, and bell tower louvers using funding from the National Park Service’s Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program.

**Table 1. Alterations and Repairs at First Independent Baptist Church**

Date	Description of Alteration
1937	Roof repairs according to reporting in the <i>Corsicana Daily Sun</i> , June 15, 1937
c. 1945	Interior – Reorganize classroom, office, and fellowship spaces in the southern part of the building
c. 1950	Exterior – Removal of original dome from roof. Dome visible in Figure 7.
1953	Building Repairs (unspecified) according to reporting in the <i>Corsicana Daily Sun</i> , September 26, 1953
1955	Building Repairs (unspecified) according to reporting in the <i>Corsicana Daily Sun</i> , May 7, 1955
1960	Porch repairs completed by F.J. Person Contractors according to reporting in the <i>Corsicana Daily Sun</i> , April 30, 1960, and the stamp in the existing concrete.
1967	Interior – Lay-in tile ceiling
1967	Interior – Tile flooring
2025	Exterior – Roof repairs, fascia repairs, bell tower louver repairs.
Unknown	Exterior – Doors
Unknown	Exterior – Window air conditioning units
Unknown	Exterior – Aluminum window screens
Unknown	Interior – Carpet flooring
Unknown	Interior – Balcony railing changes from geometric to solid
Unknown	Interior – Light fixtures (narthex)

**Integrity**

The church remains in its original location. Despite the loss of many single family homes on the block, the residential setting remains largely intact. The historic footprint of the church is intact and changes to the interior plan c. 1945 did not alter the original three-part interior that divided the church into narthex, nave, and fellowship spaces, allowing the church to retain its integrity of design. Despite new exterior siding and a new ceiling, the church retains many original features, including its two-story form and rectangular plan, symmetrical façade, full-height Ionic columns, bell tower, original windows and transoms, fenestration pattern, roof form, and floor plan including the two-story auditorium style sanctuary—all reinforcing integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. With these aspects combined it conveys the feeling of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood Baptist church with Classical Revival detailing and it remains associated with the First Independent Baptist Church congregation.

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### Statement of Significance

First Independent Baptist Church, located at 703 G. W. Jackson Avenue, in Corsicana, Texas was completed in 1918. The property is located in East Corsicana, the city's historically African American neighborhood. First Independent Baptist Church is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property submission *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. It meets the registration requirements under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History at the local level of significance for its role as a community meeting place and a hub for civic engagement between 1918 and the 1970s. During the Jim Crow era, churches were critical public spaces where African Americans could freely gather in worship and discuss important community issues. Over the years, the congregation hosted many religious, civic, and social events that encouraged fellowship and supported other local African American institutions and organizations and the neighborhood at large. The property also meets the registration requirements and is nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level.<sup>3</sup> The two-story Classical Revival church serves as the most elaborate ecclesiastical design among East Corsicana's historically African American churches. While the architect or builder is unconfirmed, the church may have been designed by then-Pastor A.L. Moore. The period of significance extends from construction in 1918 to 1975 which corresponds with the 50-year cut off and recognizes its continued use by the congregation. The property meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it is primarily significant for its role as an important community venue and for its architectural distinction.

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### Corsicana, Civil War through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Corsicana, Texas was established in 1848, and was the seat of Navarro County. Before the Civil War, Corsicana yielded a sizable mercantile industry. Union occupation began in 1865. The mercantile industry, which helped the Confederate war effort lay in ruin leading to economic decline. To help provide employment and maintain law and order, Union Captain R.A. Chaffee engaged both sides of the conflict after the war by enlisting formerly enslaved African Americans to serve as policemen while also supporting former Confederates in disputes to quell any white backlash.<sup>4</sup>

The town's economy began to recover around 1871 with the completion of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad. The tracks and depot visually and physically divided the city into west and east Corsicana. The railroad brought in new residents and merchants, and connected the town's budding economy to larger metro areas. In the late 19th century, Corsicana's economy was concentrated on East Collins Street. New stores and railroad depots drew in visitors and transformed the area into the commercial hub of the community. The establishment of the Texas and St. Louis Railroad, which ran east-west on East Collins Street, helped Corsicana become northeastern Texas's leading trading and shipping center in the late 19th century. By 1880, the city's population was almost 3,400, and the decade saw the establishment of many municipal improvements, including the city fire department, municipal water works, and the installation of the city's first telephone system.<sup>5</sup> Corsicana's economy in the late nineteenth century focused on agriculture, primarily cotton and lumber, and its population by 1885 was approximately 5,000 people which supported eleven churches, including three that served the African American community.<sup>6</sup>

The fate of Corsicana changed forever in 1894 with the discovery of the largest oil and gas deposit west of the Mississippi at the time—a discovery that kicked off the first Texas oil boom. This deposit was the first oilfield in Texas with a substantial economic impact and transformed the town from a regional agricultural shipping community to an important

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<sup>3</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Listing, January 1995, pages 25-26, 28, 62, 64. Accessed February 2025, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64500630/64500630.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, "Reconstruction," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 16, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/reconstruction>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.; Julie G. Miller, "Navarro County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 16, 2024. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/navarro-county>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>5</sup> "Metrics for Corsicana," *Texas Almanac*. Texas State Historical Association. Accessed February 2, 2025, <https://www.texasalmanac.com/charts/place/corsicana#jump-to-population-counts>

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Long, "Corsicana, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 2, 2025, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/corsicana-tx>.

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industrial center. The original well site on S. 12<sup>th</sup> Street south of W. 8<sup>th</sup> Street was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.<sup>7</sup> Wealthy oil men and flocked to the area to establish large refineries and businesses to capitalize on Corsicana's newest investment opportunities. By 1900, refineries around Corsicana produced 1,500 barrels of oil daily, and the census reported that the economic activity had grown the population to slightly more than 9,300.<sup>8</sup>

Engineering data for the Corsicana Oil Field demonstrates that the original well was on the western edge of the oil deposit, leading the new oil industry to work primarily in East Corsicana and the city's outskirts.<sup>9</sup> The 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map supports this by showing the western boundary for the oil field aligned generally with the Houston and Texas Central Railroad tracks and calling East Corsicana the "Oil Well District."<sup>10</sup> The 1905 Sanborn map shows a public school for the city's African American students on E. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue at N. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, indicating that the city's African American population lived primarily in its vicinity, however, the map company did not prepare sheets for most of the surrounding area.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the maps clearly demonstrate that the city's African American population in East Corsicana largely lived on top of the oil field, where they were subject to the health risks from the heavy industrial equipment and refineries. Residential blocks in East Corsicana, established within the original gridded street system, had been subdivided into as many as 24 lots per block, a stark contrast to areas of west Corsicana where blocks had no more than 10 lots per block.<sup>12</sup>

Oil dominated Corsicana's economy for much of the early 20th century, bringing a new wave of prosperity that resulted in a new courthouse, a chamber of commerce, the introduction of electric trolleys, water works, and upgraded streets.<sup>13</sup> However, the city did not supply the infrastructure improvements equally. The municipal waterworks appears on 1900 Sanborn map, however, the city attorney had to order the water works to provide water to homes in East Corsicana in 1916.<sup>14</sup> The city began a street improvement campaign in 1915, during which they paved the streets in the commercial downtown with brick, asphalt concrete in other areas, and applied gravel to the roads in East Corsicana.<sup>15</sup> Even as property values in Corsicana increased by 200% in the years after the discovery of oil, the report is quick to point that the increase did not apply to East Corsicana.<sup>16</sup>

The city's population in 1920 grew to 11,356, and at the height of the oil boom in 1923, refineries produced 354,000 barrels a day.<sup>17</sup> As the oil boom peaked and brought new wealth to the area, the African American communities in eastern Corsicana lagged behind their white neighbors' economic success. Many parcels remained empty and small wood

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<sup>7</sup> Paul D. Hutchison, "Corsicana Oil Field Discovery Well," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, January 1976. Accessed February 2, 2025, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/77001462/77001462.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Annie Carpenter, *History of Navarro County*. Dallas: Southwest Press, 1933, 126.; Julia Cauble Smith, "Corsicana Oilfield," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 16, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/corsicana-oilfield>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. "Oil From Water," [www.texastimetravel.com](http://www.texastimetravel.com), Texas Time Travel, accessed February 16, 2024. [Corsicana | Texas Time Travel](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_006/). *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. Sanborn Map Company, Jan, 1910. Map.

[https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480\\_006/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_006/); Library of Congress only provides Sanborn maps with pages on eastern Corsicana post-1910.

<sup>9</sup> H.M. Davenport, Jr. "Corsicana: Accidental Birthplace of the Oil Industry." Bullock Texas State History Museum, December 1, 2014. Accessed February 2, 2025, <https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/texas-story-project/corsicana-oil-navarro-county>

<sup>10</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. Sanborn Map Company, May, 1900. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480\\_004/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_004/).

<sup>11</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. Sanborn Map Company, Jun, 1905. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480\\_005/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_005/).

<sup>12</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, May, 1900; Research did not identify any evidence that east Corsicana ever functioned as a freedom colony rather than an African American neighborhood of the city, and this is supported by the 1871 railroad construction creating the visual and physical barrier, 19<sup>th</sup> century Sanborn maps demonstrating that the blocks and lots in east Corsicana were already platted and within city limits, and current data available from the Texas Freedom Colonies Project.

<sup>13</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Listing, January 1995, 23-30. Accessed February 2025, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64500630/64500630.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, May 1900; "Council Met Last Night," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, September 20, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Hardy-Heck-Moore, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Listing, January 1995, 30. Accessed February 2025, <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov/NR/pdfs/64500630/64500630.pdf>; "Regraveling East Side Streets," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, August 31, 1915.

<sup>16</sup> H.G. Damon, "Increase in Corsicana Values," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, June 15, 1915.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Long, "Corsicana, TX," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 2, 2025, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/corsicana-tx>.

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dwellings remained scattered, but were contained to the east of the Trinity and Brazos Valley Railway tracks, which were completed in 1912 running north-south along what was North and South Sixth Street.<sup>18</sup> The 1915 Corsicana city directory confirms there were two schools for African American students, the Booker T. Washington School at 905 S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street and the Frederick Douglas School at 1012 E. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Reviewing the residential information by street in the 1915 city directory also demonstrates that very few of Corsicana's African American residents have a listed profession, unlike their white counterparts.<sup>19</sup> Businesses in the area were primarily industrial operations, including a cotton gin, oil storage, twine manufacturing, and local retail businesses were primarily grocers.<sup>20</sup>

The economic growth contributed to a rise in population reaching 15,200 in 1930, but the oil boom ended as swiftly as it began due to the Great Depression, when oil production decreased to 500 barrels a day and a boll weevil infestation impacted the cotton industry. Despite the difficulties, their population increased to 17,500 by 1940, with a racial distribution of 77% white and 23% black. Wartime efforts also benefited Corsicana when Air Activities of Texas established an airfield for pilots participating in basic training. The oil industry continued to be a major driver of Corsicana's economy, with local businesses producing oil field products, such as drills, and in 1950, Corsicana's population grew to 19,211. Massive oil profits fostered extreme wealth in the town and, by the 1950s, it boasted one of Texas's highest concentrations of millionaires.

The Supreme Court's 1954 decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. However, Corsicana public schools remained segregated until after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In April 1966, the Corsicana public school system published an advertisement in the local newspaper, notifying residents of their intention to desegregate the school system, presumably starting with the 1966-1967 school year.<sup>21</sup> However, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare found that the school district's plan to integrate their schools was inadequate. The schools did not get final approval on their integration plan until a federal judge ruled in their favor in February 1974, indicating racial integration did not take place until the early 1970s.<sup>22</sup>

Oil continued to be the dominant driver of progress and growth, however, growth has remained much slower over the past seven decades. In 2020, Corsicana's population was 25,109, an increase of only approximately 6,000 since its rapid growth in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Corsicana's economy in 2025 largely revolves around agribusiness, logistics, regional medical care, biotech, and manufacturing of food products.<sup>24</sup>

### First Independent Baptist Church

Records are inconsistent about the congregation's name over time. Research submitted when the congregation earned its state historic marker states that the congregation was established as the Second African Baptist Church, became Second Independent Baptist Church at an unknown date, and was renamed First Independent Baptist Church on May 6, 1929, under the leadership of Reverend Samuel T. Alexander.<sup>25</sup> The research submitted indicates that Simon Perry and other founders originally named the congregation Second African Baptist Church because they believed that only one other African American Baptist church existed in the state of Texas. Based on the information in congregational records, the church did not become First Independent Baptist until 1929. However, the Corsicana city directory lists the church at this

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<sup>18</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. Sanborn Map Company, April, 1921. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480\\_007/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_007/).

<sup>19</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>20</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, Apr, 1921.

<sup>21</sup> "Notice of School Desegregation Plan Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, April 12, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> James Newman, "Integration Ruling Upheld," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, February 22, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; Christopher Long, "Corsicana, TX," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 16, 2024,

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/corsicana-tx>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.; *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. Sanborn Map Company, Apr, 1921. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480\\_007/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08480_007/).

<sup>24</sup> "Top Clusters," City of Corsicana Economic Development Department. Accessed February 2, 2025, <https://corsicanaed.com/top-clusters/>

<sup>25</sup> "First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana," Official Texas Historic Marker application, October 1979, 6. On file at the Texas Historical Commission.

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address as First African Baptist Church in 1913 and as First Independent Baptist Church starting in 1915.<sup>26</sup> The city directory is supported by the cornerstone on the 1918 building, which uses First Independent Baptist name (Figure 6). The congregation's 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet credits Reverend Alexander with reconciling the existing information and formalizing the change to First Independent Baptist. Reverend Alexander identified that the church was listed as First African Baptist Church in the county property records, Second Independent Baptist Church on the 1886 building cornerstone, and First Independent Baptist on the 1918 church building.<sup>27</sup> Based on the use of First Independent Baptist Church on the cornerstone and in the city directories at the time of the current building's construction, this document acknowledges First Independent Baptist Church as the historic name throughout the period of significance.

*Early Formation and Construction of First Independent Baptist Church*

In 1868, a group of former slaves led by Simon Perry, wanted to have a church of their own and established the congregation in an unidentified home on N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, near Oakwood Cemetery. The congregation formed as Second African Baptist Church "because the founders believed it was the second church within the state organized by Negroes."<sup>28</sup> The use of "independent" in the name differentiated the congregation from the existing Baptist denominational structure in Corsicana. "Independent" carries deeper meaning and could also reflect the spirit of formerly enslaved African Americans, united and free from any other religious or patronizing groups as they established of their own religious beliefs and practices.<sup>29</sup> The principal leaders were Simon Perry, Robert Hardee and wife Hana, Sister Hughes, Jenny Perry, Brother Dempsey Levi and others. Reverend Z.T. Pardee was one of the primary reverends of the church. Seven pastors served after him, including Reverends R.F. Taylor, A.E. Wilkins, C.T. Sykes, Crawford, Robert Toliver, Lions and A.L. Moore.<sup>30</sup> The church went through several disputes during the tenure of Reverend R. F. Taylor, and a group of followers walked out and formed a new church with the name of "Dark Town" which is now known as Wilgo Baptist Church. The second moveout happened during the leadership of Reverend C.T. Sykes. During his time, the church was dynamited injuring a member causing another group to leave and form their own church— Harmony Baptist Church.<sup>31</sup> Within 1928 under the leadership of Pastor Moore, 975 African American members were added to the church.<sup>32</sup> Membership continued to increase over the years.

The first church building was located on East Collin Street at what is now S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and the congregation moved to their second building at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street at an unknown date. The congregation regards their second building as the "first substantial building," however, the only available information about its construction and design is that it was built on a pier and beam foundation. In 1886, a severe storm "blew the building off its blocks and left it completely demolished."<sup>33</sup> The congregation continued to worship in the storm-damaged building until the board recommended that the congregation sell the property at 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and purchase their current property on East 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue (now G.W. Jackson Avenue) and North 5<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, there are no surviving records to explain the board's recommendation to relocate, why they selected the current property, or the decisions regarding the construction of the third church building.

The congregation constructed their third church building later in 1886, and they held worship in that building until 1917 (Figure 5). However, the size of the congregation was still increasing, and soon outgrew the small church. The church committee decided to move forward with a larger building to accommodate the new members in 1913 when Reverend A. L. Moore was called to serve the church. A new plan for a larger and more beautiful building was prepared under his

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<sup>26</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Texas Historical Commission. [Historic Marker Application: First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana], Text, 1980.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. V.P. Perry, "Centennial Anniversary Booklet, 1868-1968," n.p., 8.

<sup>29</sup> Texas Historical Commission. [Historic Marker Application: First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana], Text, 1980.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Rev. V.P. Perry, "Centennial Anniversary Booklet, 1868-1968," n.p., 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

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supervision.<sup>35</sup> Construction began on June 19, 1917, when the existing smaller church was dismantled. The fourth, and current, church building was completed in 1918 at over \$25,000<sup>36</sup>.

Unfortunately, there are no additional church records related to the construction of the current church building. As a result, the author could not definitively identify why the congregation chose to remain at their current location, where they worshipped during construction, if they required unique funding mechanisms to pay for the project, or who designed or built the 1918 church. The *Corsicana Daily Sun* and other local publications did not provide any additional details either. However, research indicates that in the early twentieth century, it was common for a congregation's religious leader to design and supervise construction for small churches.<sup>37</sup> Based on this information and the church's cornerstone (Figure 6), it is possible, though unconfirmed, that the church was designed by the then-Pastor, A.L. Moore.

No specific evidence was found on the design influences for First Independent Baptist Church, but a review of photographs featuring well-known African American churches built before c. 1915 provides some suggestions. It appears that the bell tower and interior design may have been influenced by First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, which is now a contributing resource to the city's National Historic Landmark (NHL) District. The multi-sided conical roof over the bell tower, the multiple aisles in the nave, the balcony, and chancel design appear to be like those at the First African Baptist Church. The exterior may have been influenced by the work of Birmingham-based African American architect Wallace A. Rayfield, who designed numerous churches across the south during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similar Rayfield projects include the Classical Revival style Mount Gilead Baptist Church in Fort Worth (1912) and the dome from the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (1911, NHL 2006). It is possible, though unconfirmed, that Pastor A.L. Moore may have been familiar with these examples.

The new church had electric lights, gas heat, a dining room, office space, choir room, usher's room, a kitchen with a gas stove, and restrooms. Between 1928 and 1936 under the leadership of Reverend Samuel T. Alexander, the congregation spent an additional \$6,000 to refinish the pews, repair a fence on the property (not extant), add concrete sidewalks to the church and adjacent parsonage property, built new furniture and cabinetry for the dining room, constructed a new addition onto the parsonage (demolished c. 2000) with a new bedroom and a screened porch, added indoor plumbing to the parsonage, and installed wallpaper in both the parsonage and church. The congregation finished paying for the parsonage between 1936 and 1942 when Reverend R.B. Bradley joined the church, and they installed a sound system in the nave in July 1943.<sup>38</sup> As the church became a symbol of the community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the reliance on the physical building and 20 years of wear caused a need to replace the original roof, and by 1937, the city approved a request to repair the roof for \$500.<sup>39</sup> The post-World War II years ushered in a new round of renovations for the church, and in 1955, spent \$350 on repairs.<sup>40</sup> Another round of repairs came five years later when the church paid \$1,040 to repair facilities and enlarge the front porch.<sup>41</sup>

When Reverend V.P. Perry moved to the church in 1960, he began planning for the congregation's centennial in 1968. The church's centennial projects included another addition to the parsonage for the cost of \$2,500, repainting the church exterior, and completing a large-scale renovation of the church. The congregation initially planned to raise \$20,000 for the renovation or construction of a new building, however, in 1967, the church awarded a contract to J.A. Collin Lumber Company of Waco to renovate the 1918 building for a cost of \$12,650.00. During the renovation, the congregation worshipped at the Jerusalem Masonic Lodge 63 F&AM. Members volunteered their time to help save costs on the work, including painting the seats and floors. The congregation held a "re-entry" service to commemorate the completed renovations on June 18, 1967. Perry resigned in August 1968, however, in the six years he served, Perry raised over

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<sup>35</sup> Staff Report, *Corsicana Daily Sun*, October 20, 2018. Available at: [https://www.corsicanadailysun.com/news/first-independent-baptist-celebrates-150th-anniversary-sunday/article\\_ce6e72cc-d3e8-11e8-9632-5740ea4f3818.html](https://www.corsicanadailysun.com/news/first-independent-baptist-celebrates-150th-anniversary-sunday/article_ce6e72cc-d3e8-11e8-9632-5740ea4f3818.html). Accessed February 19, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Texas Historic Commission. [Historic Marker Application: First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana], Text, 1980.

<sup>37</sup> Willard B. Robinson, *Reflections of Faith: Houses of Worship in the Lone Star State*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 1994, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Texas Historic Commission. [Historic Marker Application: First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana], Text, 1980.

<sup>39</sup> "Building Permits for Pat Week are listed at \$1850," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), June 12, 1937.

<sup>40</sup> "Eight Building Permits Issued," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas) May 7, 1955.

<sup>41</sup> "Permits," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas) April, 30, 1960.

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\$100,000 from the congregation for the church's renovations and ministries.<sup>42</sup> To celebrate paying off their debt from the renovations, the congregation held a "mortgage burning ceremony" on November 22, 1970.<sup>43</sup> In 1976, local reporting indicated that the congregation had diminished from over 1,000 in the 1920s to approximately 300 members.<sup>44</sup>

**First Independent Baptist Church in the Community (Area of Significance: Social History)**

The new 1918 church building became a symbol of the African American community in East Corsicana and hosted various community events to strengthen cultural roots and advance civil rights. Due to the lack of adequate public school facilities in the neighborhood, the church hosted school events such as musical performances and graduations. One of the earliest instances occurred soon after the construction of the church in May 1918 when a commencement occurred for Frederick Douglas High School graduates.<sup>45</sup> During a time when churches served as the foundation of many African American communities, First Independent Baptist Church hosted events catered towards race relations and improving the quality of life for African Americans. African American fraternal groups such as the Knights of Liberty utilized the space for their meetings aimed at furthering progress in the community.<sup>46</sup> First Independent Baptist Church also provided space for Baptist conventions to strengthen the African American protestant community. The church hosted both the Texas Negro Baptist Ministers Conference and the Texas Negro Baptist Laymen and Women's Convention.<sup>47</sup> Open to both African Americans and whites, these conventions aimed to inspire higher and nobler ideals concerning race relations.

Improvements to the property helped the church host more events, including the local Negro Health Week in 1939 and the local NAACP chapter annual membership drives.<sup>48</sup> Since most of the events catered to adults, some groups, such as the Navarro County Memorial VFW Post No. 3366, sponsored annual Christmas parties for underprivileged African American children.<sup>49</sup> Other community gatherings for children included a nursery school graduation and the establishment of a Boy Scout Troop in 1941.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1940s and 1950s, the church hosted adult educational events, performances, and community meetings. The church served as the venue for presentations during National Negro History Week in 1943, the County Home Demonstration Council used the church to host both routine classes and their county-wide baking event in 1945, and the Negro Navarro County Home Demonstration Club co-hosted a baking show with the local 4-H Club in 1946.<sup>51</sup> Performances included a production of "Pearly Gates" featuring Waco-based performers Mr. Will Graves and Mrs. Odessa Saxton, the Jackson Choral Ensemble, the annual recital for Calhoun's School of Music, and the Butler College choir.<sup>52</sup> In 1947, the local NAACP held a membership campaign meeting, the church hosted a public meeting about a proposed water tower project in 1949, and the VFW used the church for a party for underprivileged African American children in 1952.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Mortgage Burning Scheduled," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, November 20, 1970.

<sup>44</sup> "First Independent Baptist began as Second Baptist," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, June 11, 1976.

<sup>45</sup> "Rounding Out Another Year," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), May 29, 1918.; "Negroes to Hold Meeting," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), June 8, 1921.

<sup>46</sup> "Charles Banister Addressed Meeting Knights of Liberty," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), July 21, 1931.

<sup>47</sup> "Negro Baptist Convention Here," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas) October 15, 1930.

<sup>48</sup> "Observe National Negro Health Week," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), April 5, 1939.; District Workers of the 1947 N.A.A.C.P. Membership Campaign," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas) February 28, 1947.

<sup>49</sup> "VFW Party for Underprivileged," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas) December 26, 1952.

<sup>50</sup> "To Hold Graduation Exercises for Negro Nursery School," *Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light* (Corsicana, Texas), April 21, 1941; "Boy Scouts Offer Real Opportunity For Service Now," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), December 22, 1941.

<sup>51</sup> "National Negro History Week to Be Observed Here," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), February 6, 1943; "Demonstration On Biscuit Making," *Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light* (Corsicana, Texas), September 11, 1945; "Baking Show for Negro Club Women Held On Saturday," *Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light* (Corsicana, Texas), July 30, 1946.

<sup>52</sup> "Caption," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), August 24, 1943; "Advertisement," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), May 9, 1946; "Advertisement," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), May 13, 1947; "Negro College Group To Present Program," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), April 15, 1946; "Butler College Chorale Here," *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), May 14, 1959.

<sup>53</sup> "District Workers of the 1947 NAACP Membership Campaign," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, March 1, 1947; "East Side Negro Residents Oppose Discussed Move Of Old Water Tower," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, March 2, 1949; "VFW Party For Underprivileged," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, December 26, 1952.

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During the 1960s and into the 1970s, the church remained an important community venue for hosting events and activities. The Boy Scouts organized a new troop to meet at the church in 1960, Negro History Week presentations occurred in 1965, and the church hosted a production of the "Life of Christ" musical in 1969.<sup>54</sup> In June 1966, the congregation hosted Barbara Jordan, then a candidate for the Texas Senate, and in August that year, the church served as the beginning and end of a Civil Rights march to Corsicana City Hall.<sup>55</sup>

In 1971, the church hosted the Texas Baptist Youth Council, welcoming 300-400 youth from more than 54 churches in the area for a two-day conference.<sup>56</sup> In 1974, the G.W. Jackson High School class of 1968 met at the church to organize a class reunion.<sup>57</sup> The church also served as a meeting place for neighborhood residents when compiling a list of improvements they wanted to request from the city's Community Development Program Commission. Improvements included converting the former G.W. Jackson High School building to residential, extending a neighborhood drainage ditch, and a municipal multi-purpose building in East Corsicana.<sup>58</sup> The youth group also hosted a Black History Week event in February 1976 featuring poetry, drama, and music from African American authors.<sup>59</sup> The church hosted the official Jackson Ex-Students Association reunion worship service in 1976, as well as the association's official worship service to commemorate the United States' Bicentennial.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to serving as one of the primary places of worship for Corsicana's African American community, the church was used for many secular community activities through at least the 1970s. Unfortunately, additional records about these activities after 1981 could not be located. The church's function as a meeting place for religious, civic, and community activities made First Independent Baptist a key neighborhood hub in East Corsicana.

### Baptist Architecture in Texas<sup>61</sup>

The influx of new immigrants into Texas in the mid-nineteenth century saw an equally large number of new churches constructed. Where some denominations took stylistic influence from other churches on the East Coast or Western Europe, others, including the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, rejected the physical representations of liturgy often utilized by the Catholic or Episcopalian churches. Instead, Baptists sought to construct simple buildings with minimal ornament to concentrate resources on good works and evangelism. This resulted in rectangular plan churches with plain walls, and bell towers within wealthier communities.<sup>62</sup> However, this quickly changed as Texas grew in population and wealth, regardless of race.

In the late nineteenth century, the Protestant evangelical denominations, including Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, advanced and innovated church design, and religious architecture. These denominations' doctrines focused on worship as a vital component of religious practice, and the emphasis required a new type of church building.<sup>63</sup> New churches in this period emphasized size and capacity, in line with evangelization and growth. The result was two-story

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<sup>54</sup> "Plan Organize Negro Scouts," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, April 23, 1960; "Youth Program Given Sunday," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, March 2, 1965; "'Life of Christ' Musical Coming," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, November 21, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> "Senator Jordan Speaker Here Thursday Night," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, June 16, 1966; Jordan was elected to the Texas Senate in 1966 and went on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives between 1973 and 1979; "Negroes March," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, August 29, 1966.

<sup>56</sup> "Texas Baptist Youth Council to Meet Here," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, January 12, 1971.

<sup>57</sup> "Jackson exes asked to meet," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, December 16, 1974.

<sup>58</sup> "CDP Commission panel to study paving projects for grant money," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, December 31, 1974.

<sup>59</sup> "Church Will Have Black History Week Program," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, February 18, 1976.

<sup>60</sup> "Jackson exes set reunion," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, June 6, 1976; Sylvia A. Waters, "Local churches celebrate 200 years of faith Sunday," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, July 2, 1976.

<sup>61</sup> Portions of this section adapted from Hannah Curry, Lauren Maas, and Victoria Myers. "St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, January 2019, 31-34. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/NR/pdfs/100004373/100004373.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 42-43.

<sup>63</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, 197.

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churches or churches with balconies to increase capacity without purchasing more land.<sup>64</sup> Auditorium-style sanctuaries, like opera houses or symphony halls, became popular. Balconies, curvilinear rows of seating, multiple aisles, bowled floors, and flanks of folding doors for enlarging the space are the predominant features of an auditorium-style sanctuary.<sup>65</sup> Auditorium-style sanctuaries used terminal arrangements, requiring members to face forward during the service.<sup>66</sup>

Late nineteenth century churches became multipurpose facilities for meeting the congregation's social and spiritual needs outside of regular worship services.<sup>67</sup> To support their broader ministries, churches offered religious, social, and volunteer activities and adequate space to hold them.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the sanctuaries, the evangelical denominations constructed fellowship and educational spaces including kitchens, dining rooms, parlors, gymnasiums, and classrooms within their church walls to meet the functional needs of their congregation. Church size and wealth dictated how modest or elaborate these spaces were.<sup>69</sup>

The changes in the interior functions of the church also resulted in exterior changes. New churches at the end of the nineteenth century started including taller elements such as finials or bell towers to enhance their visibility and solidify their position as an anchor of neighborhood activity. Congregations also constructed new churches in prominent locations, often occupying entire city blocks when possible. Investing in the construction of the church building became a symbol of stability, the moral climate of the neighborhood, and the evangelical capabilities of the congregation.<sup>70</sup> Even African American congregations, with relatively less wealth compared to their white neighbors, began incorporating architectural details into the designs of their churches to enhance their prominence within their communities.<sup>71</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, some Protestant denominations began mandating architectural styles for new churches, like the Methodist church that required all new churches to be constructed using Gothic Revival style.<sup>72</sup> However, due to the way the Baptist church organizes itself, each church operates completely independently, and the regional, statewide, and national organizations “have no control or authority over a local church,” allowing each congregation the freedom to design and construct their church using any style or materials they choose.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Baptist congregations constructed their new churches following architectural trends that fit their budget. This typically resulted in churches designed in traditional revival styles, particularly in the early twentieth century when new technologies made these styles more affordable and attainable.<sup>74</sup>

Even with each congregation having the ability to choose their own designs, the Southern Baptist Convention formally established a Department of Church Architecture under its Sunday School Board in 1916.<sup>75</sup> The Department of Church Architecture provided professional assistance with construction, design, and space-planning to congregations at low cost.<sup>76</sup> However, the Southern Baptist Convention split from what is now the American Baptist Convention explicitly over the issue of slavery in 1845.<sup>77</sup> African American Baptists in Texas also organized their first district association in 1868

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<sup>64</sup> Anne C. Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Loveland, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Jason John Paul Haskins, "Liturgical Arrangement Typology," *Locus Iste*, October 19, 2011. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.locusiste.org/blog/2011/10/liturgical-arrangement-typology>

<sup>67</sup> Loveland, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Kilde, 197-198.

<sup>69</sup> Loveland, 72.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 74.

<sup>71</sup> Willard B. Robinson, "Church Architecture," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 1, 2025,

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/church-architecture>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>72</sup> John Taylor Boyd, Jr., "The Bureau of Architecture of the Methodist Episcopal Church," *Architectural Record*, vol. 49, no. I, serial 268, January 1921, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, "Baptist," *Britannica*, January 1, 2025. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baptist>.

<sup>74</sup> Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013, 406-407.

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, *Reflections of Faith*, 176.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Wingfield, "You'll recognize these buildings all across America," *Baptist News Global*, October 22, 2024. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://baptistnews.com/article/youll-recognize-these-buildings-all-across-america/>

<sup>77</sup> Hudson, "Baptist."

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and scheduled their first statewide convention for 1875.<sup>78</sup> The Baptist General Convention of Texas is now part of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas confirms that First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana is a member in 2025.<sup>79</sup> However, church records indicate that at the time the 1918 building was completed, First Independent Baptist Church was part of the National Baptist Convention, a predominantly African American convention.<sup>80</sup> Since First Independent Baptist was not part of the Southern Baptist Convention at the time of design and construction, it's unlikely they had access to the resources of the Department of Church Architecture to aid with the design. It's also unclear if the National Baptist Convention offered such services.

**African American Ecclesiastical Architecture in Corsicana**

First Independent Baptist Church is one of several historic-age, African American churches in Corsicana: the ca. 1890 Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church (105 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street), the ca. 1890 Sixth Avenue Baptist Church (125 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street), the 1916 Wesley Chapel Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (915 G.W. Jackson Avenue), and the ca. 1945 Harmony Baptist Church (411 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street). All of these churches are in East Corsicana, the city's historically African American neighborhood, and the three constructed prior to World War II utilize simplified versions of different revival styles and detailing, following the same architectural trends as First Independent Baptist.

One block east of First Independent Baptist Church is the Bethel AME Church. The building is designed in the Italianate style with a central loggia supported by two Doric columns flanked by two three-story towers with brackets and pyramidal roofs. The sanctuary volume has a high-pitched hipped roof and features Gothic arched or square 1/1 single-hung sash windows with one paired window with tracery at the recessed entry that matches those on First Independent Baptist.

Sixth Avenue Baptist Church is smaller than Bethel AME and First Independent and features Folk Victorian and Gothic influences. The building has a front-gable-on-hip roof with a southwestern three-story tower with pyramidal roof. The building has minimal stylistic characteristics other than a smooth frieze and Gothic-influenced lancet-arched 2/2 windows.

Wesley Chapel is a vernacular wood frame church with modest classical detailing including an integrated loggia with two fluted classical columns. The chapel also features original stained glass windows. Built after World War II, the congregation for Harmony Baptist Church embraced modernist architectural elements, in keeping with Baptist traditions of building churches using styles, techniques, and materials that were popular and affordable at the time of construction. The design features a gabled shingle roof, painted concrete block masonry walls, a concrete slab foundation, and no ornamentation.

When compared to these other African American churches in East Corsicana, First Independent Baptist Church stands out as having the most elaborate architectural design. The full-height Ionic columns supporting the pedimented entrance represent a more elaborate order than the columns present at Bethel AME or Wesley Chapel. First Independent also has more ornamented windows compared to its peers. Although Wesley Chapel has surviving stained glass windows and both Bethel AME and Sixth Avenue Baptist use Gothic style windows with clear glass, First Independent is the only historic church in East Corsicana that combines stained glass with Gothic Revival-inspired tracery units. The larger size and higher style design demonstrate First Independent Baptist's relative wealth and larger congregation, providing a visual representation of the church's influence in Corsicana's African American community.

**A.L. Moore**

Alonzo L. Moore was born in Louisiana to Aurie Moore and Elizabeth Green. Although records consistently claim December as the birth month, documentation varies wildly about the year he was born, with available records claiming

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<sup>78</sup> William E. Montgomery, "African-American Churches," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/african-american-churches>.

<sup>79</sup> "State and Local Associations," Southern Baptist Convention. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.sbc.net/resources/directories/state-and-local-associations/>; "Churches," Baptist General Convention of Texas. Accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.texasbaptists.org/about/churches>

<sup>80</sup> Texas Historic Commission. [Historic Marker Application: First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana], Text, 1980.

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birth years as early as 1870 and as late as 1894.<sup>81</sup> The 1880 census, which alleges that Moore was 10 years old at the time, shows Moore living in Shreveport, Louisiana with his father and nine siblings, ranging from ages 2 months to 23 years.<sup>82</sup> By the 1900 census, Moore claimed to be 28 years old, and was living in Dallas with his wife Fannie Lyons, whom he married c. 1894, and their son Fred Tucker, age 5. Moore was also fully literate, a homeowner, and working as a preacher.<sup>83</sup>

Moore moved to Corsicana in 1906, where he became the preacher at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church.<sup>84</sup> 1910 census records report that only he and Fannie lived in the household at the time, and Fred remained with his maternal grandparents in Dallas.<sup>85</sup> In 1913, Moore became the ninth preacher for the First Independent Baptist Church congregation, where he served as their pastor until 1929. The congregation's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet credits Moore with growing their congregation by 975 members and fundraising almost \$57,000 under his tenure.<sup>86</sup> When Moore left First Independent Baptist in 1929, he initially took up more evangelical work before assuming a new position as minister of Second Mission Baptist Church (located at 909 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street in 2025) in Corsicana in 1932.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, his wife Fannie died on December 20, 1933, from a cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>88</sup> Sometime before the 1940 census, Moore (then reported to be 64 years old) married Zadie B. Hodge, a school teacher who died from coronary thrombosis on February 9, 1954.<sup>89</sup> Moore served as the moderator of the Harmony District Association, part of the Texas State Missionary Baptist Convention, from 1940 until 1956, and Moore retired from Second Mission Baptist Church in 1957. According to his death certificate, Moore died at age 64 from a stroke on November 13, 1958, however, his obituary states he died at age 81 and was survived solely by his son, F. Tucker Moore, a medical doctor in Los Angeles.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

First Independent Baptist Church is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property submission *Historic and Architectural Resources of Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas*. It meets the registration requirements under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. The period of significance is 1918-1975. The property meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it is primarily significant for its role as a community gathering place and for its architectural distinction.

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<sup>81</sup> Ancestry.com. *Texas, U.S., Death Certificates, 1903-1982* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. Original data: Texas Department of State Health Services. Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982. Austin, Texas, USA.

<sup>82</sup> Ancestry.com. *1880 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>83</sup> Ancestry.com. *1900 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900. T623, 1854 rolls.

<sup>84</sup> "Retired Negro Minister Rites Held Thursday," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, November 20, 1958.

<sup>85</sup> Ancestry.com. *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006. Original data: Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (NARA microfilm publication T624, 1,178 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>86</sup> "First Independent Baptist Church of Corsicana," Official Texas Historic Marker application, October 1979. On file at the Texas Historical Commission.

<sup>87</sup> "Retired Negro Minister Rites Held Thursday," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, November 20, 1958.

<sup>88</sup> Ancestry.com. *Texas, U.S., Death Certificates, 1903-1982* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. Original data: Texas Department of State Health Services. Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982. Austin, Texas, USA.

<sup>89</sup> Ancestry.com. *1940 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940. T627, 4,643 rolls; Ancestry.com. *Texas, U.S., Death Certificates, 1903-1982* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. Original data: Texas Department of State Health Services. Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982. Austin, Texas, USA.

<sup>90</sup> "Retired Negro Minister Rites Held Thursday," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, November 20, 1958.

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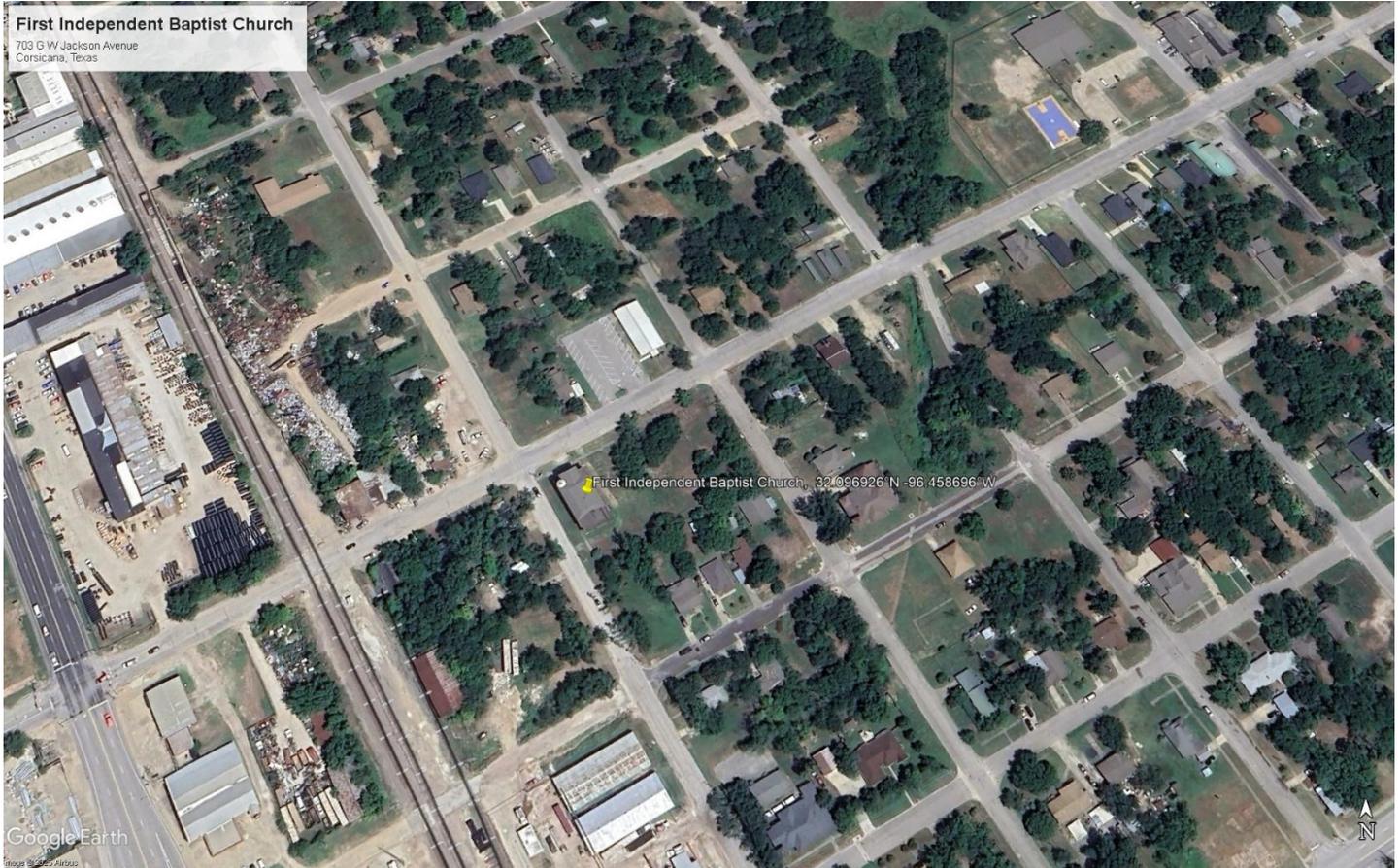
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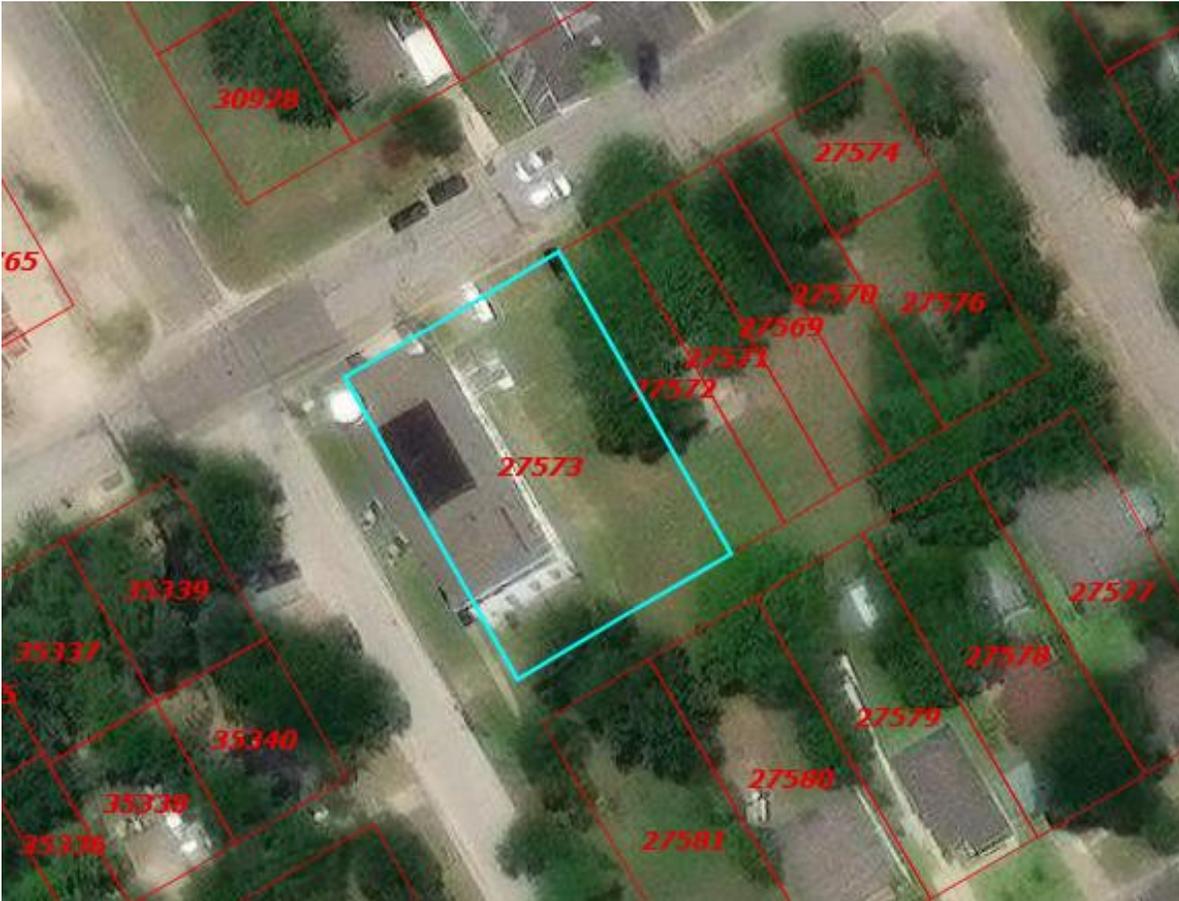
Map 3 – Google Earth Map, accessed February 24, 2025.



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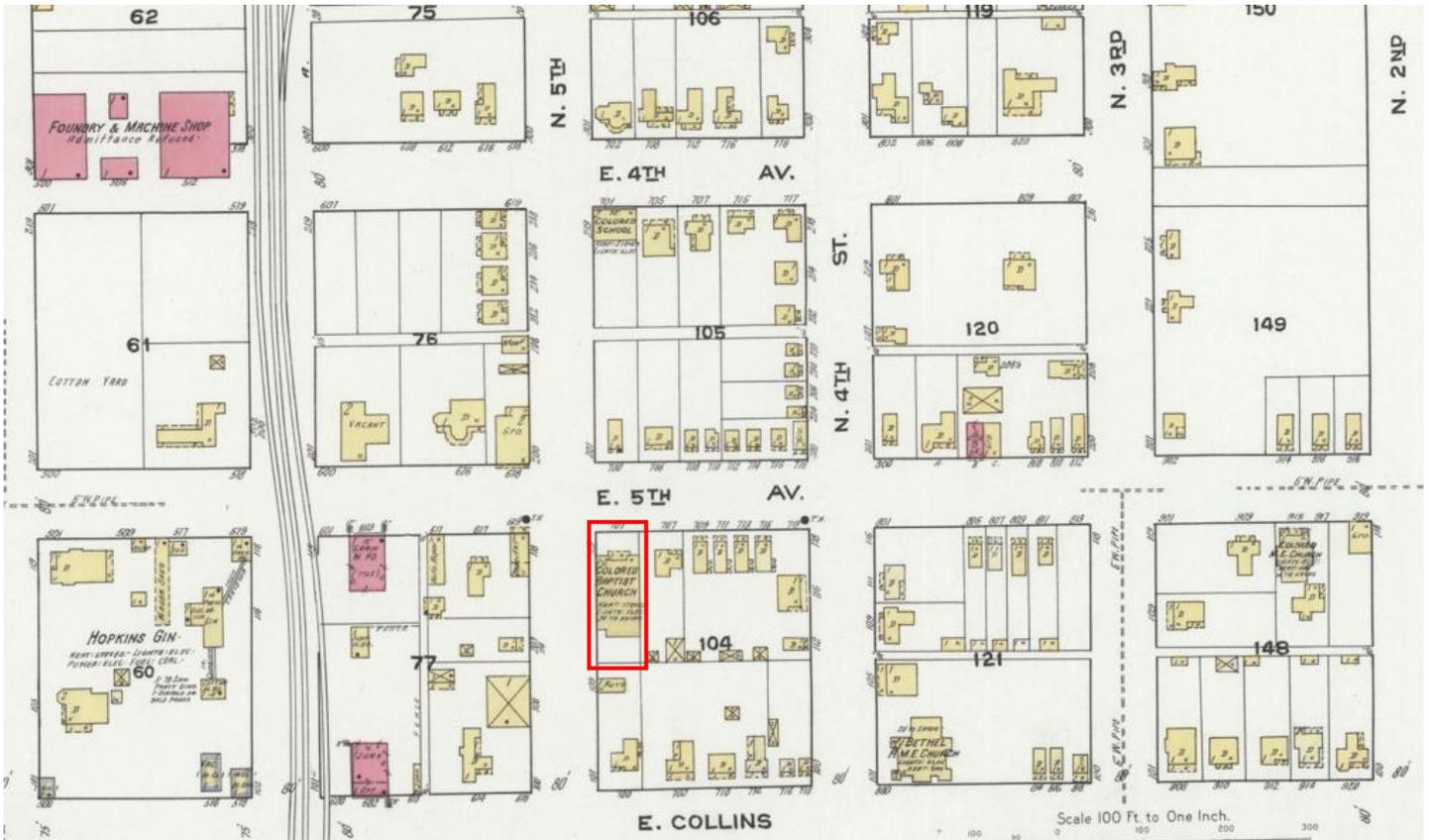
Map 4 – Navarro Central Appraisal District Map. C0000 CORSICANA BLK 104 LOT 1 & 2 .264 ACRES (100 X 115) (Property ID: 27573), Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas as recorded in the Navarro Central Appraisal District. Data accessed, February 24, 2025. The boundary follows the legal parcel and includes all property historically associated with the nominated resource.



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Figures

Figure 1 – 1921 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map, sheet 34, showing First Independent Baptist Church, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress with outline highlighting church location by Palindrome Preservation.



First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

Figure 2 – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Corsicana, 1931, sheet 34, showing church outlined in red.

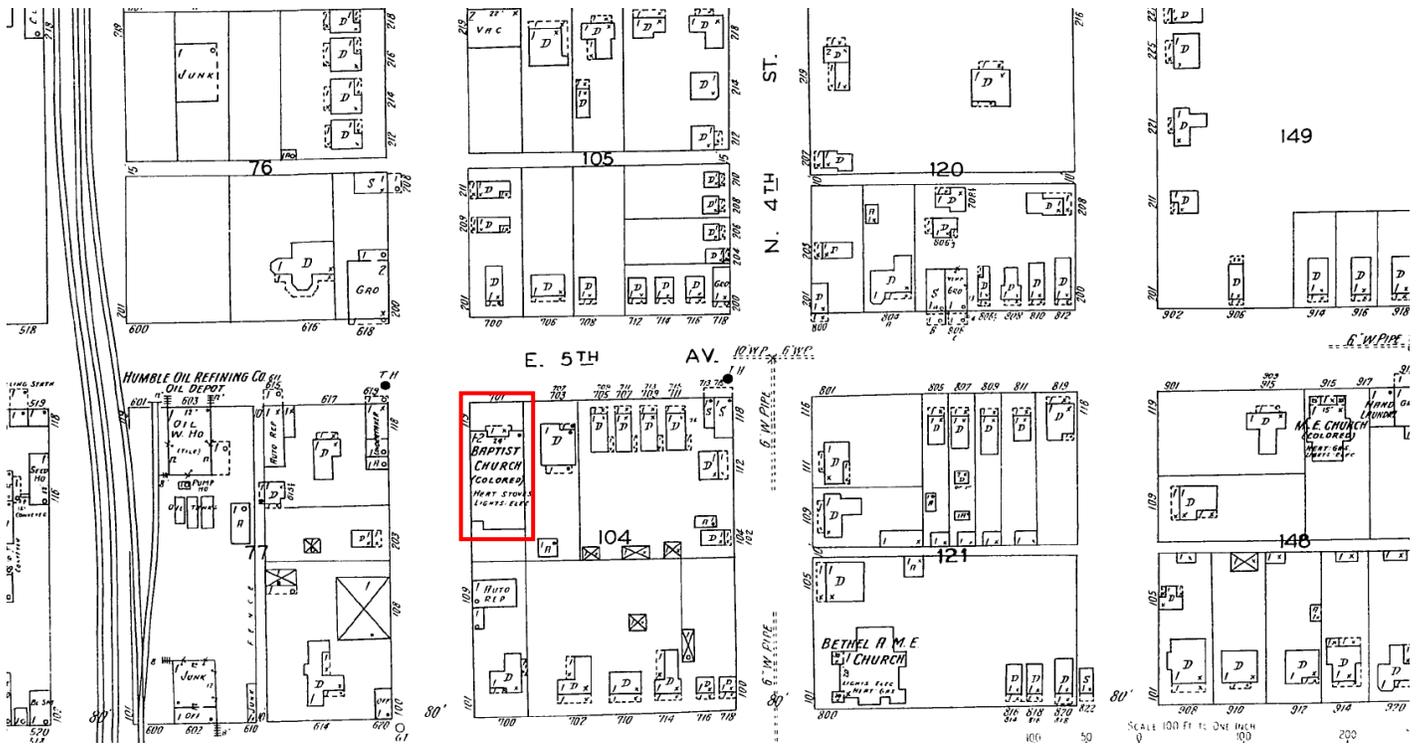
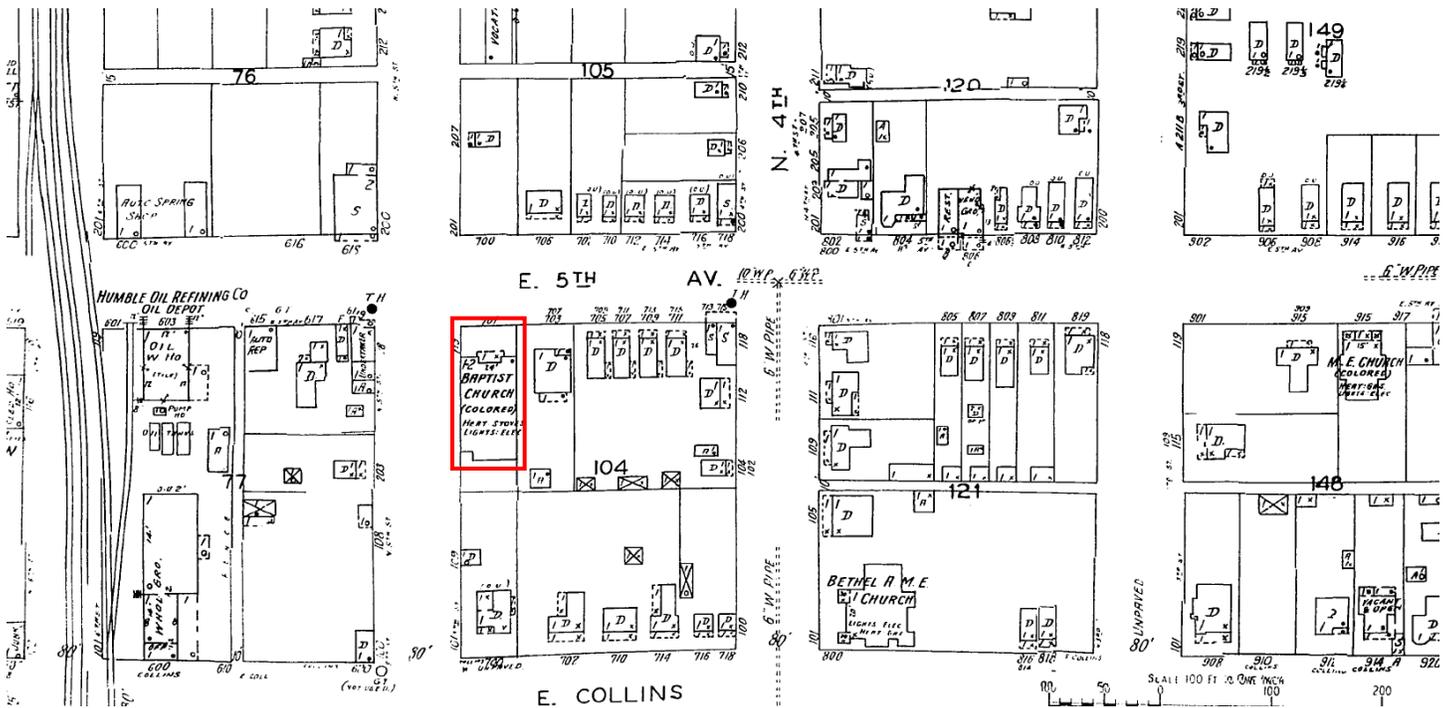


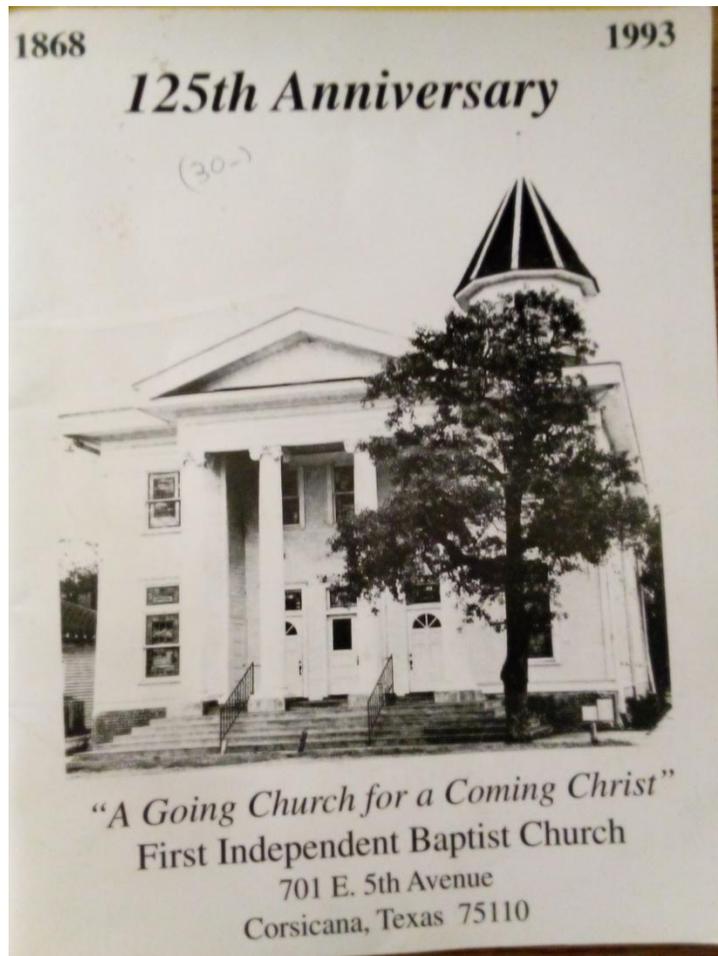
Figure 3 – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Corsicana, 1931-1948, sheet 34, showing church outlined in red.



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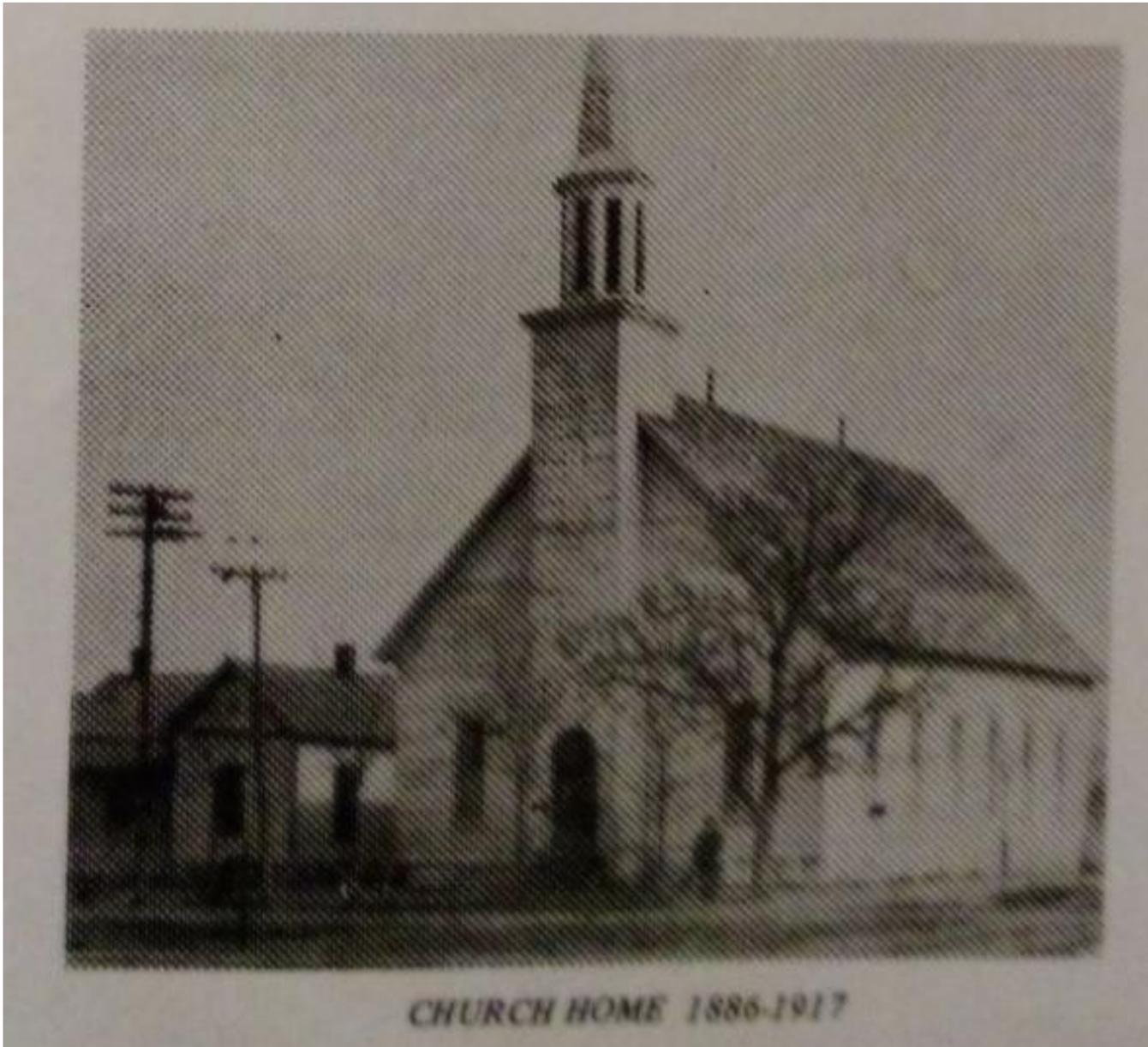
Figure 4 – First Independent Baptist Church, Image as shown on 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet, Page 1. Courtesy of Colleen Robinson.



First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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Figure 5 – The congregation’s building from 1886-1917, then called Second Independent Baptist Church, as shown on 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet, Page 2. Courtesy of Colleen Robinson, First Independent Baptist Church.



First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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Figure 6 – Cornerstone from the current church building, constructed 1918. Photograph by Connor Herterich, Preservation Texas.



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Figure 7 – Detail from a 1939 Historic Aerial showing subject property. Notice the dome that was removed later from the roof around 1950.

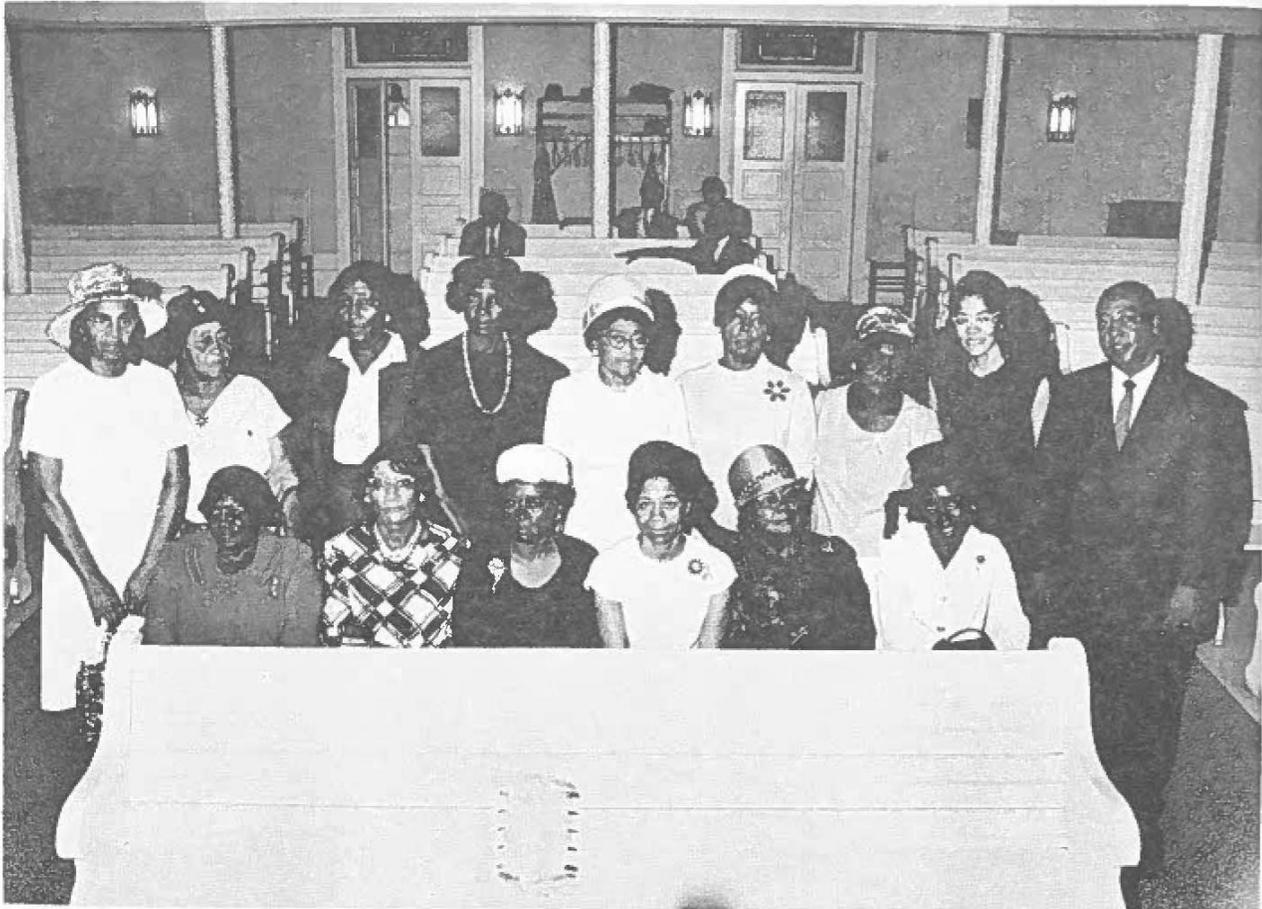


First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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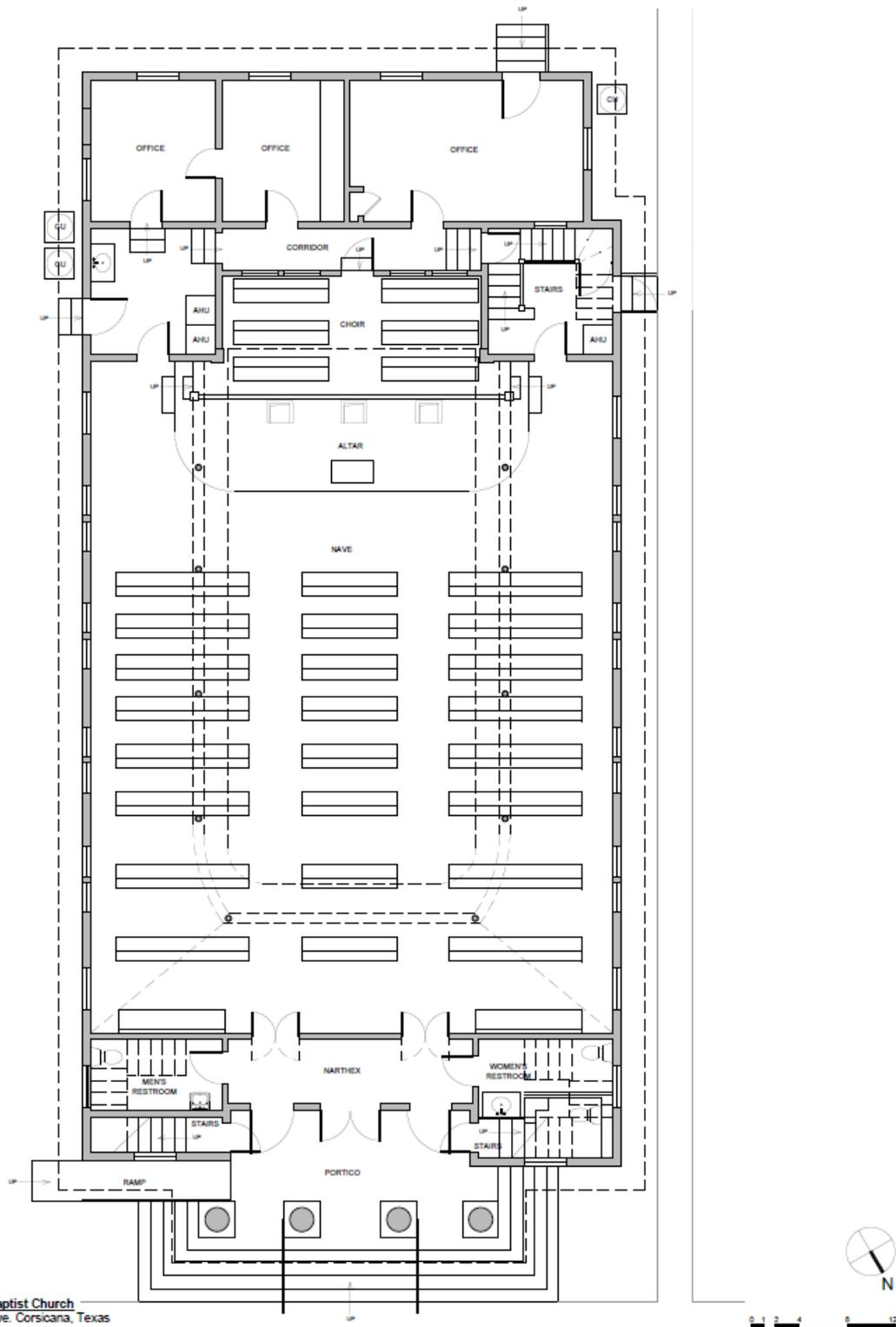
Figure 8 - C. 1965 photo published in the church's Centennial Anniversary booklet, courtesy of First Independent Baptist Church.

*Woman's Missionary Society*



First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

Figure 9 - Floor plan, prepared by Preservation Texas, October 2025.



First Independent Baptist Church  
703 G. W. Jackson Ave. Corsicana, Texas  
Recorded by Jesús Najjar on October 29, 2025

First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

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**Photographs**

Photo 1 – Landscape with church overview, view south.



First Independent Baptist Church, Corsicana, Navarro County, Texas

Photo 2 – North façade and west elevation, view southeast with sign and Texas Historic Marker.



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Photo 3 – West and south elevations, view north.



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Photo 4 – South and east elevations, view northwest.



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Photo 5 – East and north elevations, view southwest. March 25, 2025 after roof repairs.



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Photo 6 – Detail, bell tower with repaired louvers, view northwest. March 25, 2025 after roof repairs.



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Photo 7 – Detail, primary entry with original transoms and flanking single doors, view south.



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Photo 8 – Detail, windows on west elevation.



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Photo 9 – Narthex, view east with original plaster walls, chair rails, and tile flooring installed in 1967.



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Photo 10 – Narthex, view southwest with original transoms and paired doors into the nave.



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Photo 11 – Nave, view south, with 1967 lay-in ceiling, original balconies, two-aisle arrangement, seating, and 1967 flooring.



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Photo 12 – Chancel, view south, showing non-original air conditioning duct with original exterior door and stained glass windows on the south wall behind the choir loft.



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Photo 13 – Nave from balcony, view south.



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Photo 14 – Nave from altar, view north.

