



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

IN THE 1850s, METHODISM SPREAD ACROSS SOUTH TEXAS AND INTO NEW BRAUNFELS. MANY GERMAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS IN COMMUNITIES LIKE NEW BRAUNFELS WOULD BE CONVERTED TO METHODISM. IN 1853 A CIRCUIT RIDER, REV. HENRY P. YOUNG, ESTABLISHED THE NEW BRAUNFELS CONGREGATION AS PART OF A CIRCUIT WHICH INCLUDED OTHER GERMAN-SPEAKING CONGREGATIONS IN THE AREA. THIS ACTION WAS FOLLOWED BY THE APPOINTMENT OF REV. J.W. DEVILBISS AS THE PRESIDING ELDER OF THE GERMAN DISTRICT WHICH COVERED ALL OF TEXAS. LIVING IN NEW BRAUNFELS, DEVILBISS TRAINED MINISTERS AND GATHERED GERMAN-SPEAKING CONVERTS TO METHODISM. IN 1858, A CHURCH BUILDING WAS CONSTRUCTED IN THE COMALTOWN AREA OF NEW BRAUNFELS ON UNION STREET. AMONG THE CONVERTS WAS THE KARBACH FAMILY WHO STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE GROWING CHURCH COMMUNITY BY HOSTING SUNDAY SCHOOL, PREACHING AND HOSTING CAMP MEETINGS ON THEIR RANCH. BY 1913, THE METHODIST COMMUNITY HAD GROWN AND A NEW CHURCH BUILDING NAMED KARBACH MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH WAS CONSTRUCTED ON WEST SAN ANTONIO STREET. IN 1916 THE CHURCH WAS NO LONGER ON A CIRCUIT. OVER THE NEXT DECADES, THE CHURCH MOVED FROM GERMAN-SPEAKING TO BILINGUAL TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING.

BY 1952 MEMBERSHIP PASSED 500. THAT YEAR A NEW SANCTUARY WAS BUILT ON THE SAN ANTONIO STREET SITE AND RENAMED FIRST METHODIST CHURCH. BY 1980 MEMBERSHIP SURPASSED 1000. IN 2005, TO CONTINUE ITS MISSION OF OUTREACH, THE CONGREGATION SPONSORED A DAUGHTER CHURCH, GRUENE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. TODAY BOTH CONGREGATIONS ARE THRIVING AND CONTINUING TO SERVE GOD AND THE PEOPLE OF THE AREA.

The People Called Methodist

CONTEXT: The people called Methodist have been making history by serving God and humankind in the New Braunfels area since 1853. First United Methodist Church, the first home of the Methodist in New Braunfels, is the fourth oldest congregation in the city. Methodists believe God was incarnate in human form so that He could communicate with human beings, so the church must bring the gospel of Christ to humans in their language and in their community. The people called Methodist began their work in New Braunfels in the German language. The church formally began when Rev. Henry P. Young (Heinrich Jung) was appointed to serve the New Braunfels mission circuit consisting of five churches (1853). By 1858 a frame church building was erected in Comaltown on Union Street (now part of New Braunfels) for worship and Sunday School. In the early history of the church one minister and one layperson's contributions stood out: Reverend John Wesley DeVilbiss and Johann Friedrich David Karbach. Rev. DeVilbiss was appointed Presiding Elder (District Superintendent) for all the German speaking congregations in the Rio Grande Conference (Southwest Texas) of the Methodist Church (1856-60). He felt it necessary to learn German and to center his work in New Braunfels. He shared the ministry of the German speaking pastors whom he supervised, met with Methodist Societies, conducted prayer meetings in people's homes, and preached at camp meetings. It was in that setting that David Karbach was converted to Methodism. Over the years David, the name he preferred, along with his family, especially his sons Fritz and John, became the backbone of the Methodist movement in the area. Karbach Settlement on the Karbach ranch was the center of worship and Sunday School activity in the area well into the 1900s. The congregation so revered the contributions of the Karbach family that in 1914 when a new brick church building was erected at 572 W. San Antonio Street, it was named Karbach Memorial Methodist Church. At this new location the church would gradually change from the German language to the English language to better meet the spiritual needs of the community. Through the years of congregational growth in membership and mission, this address would become a big campus with a large Sanctuary, Education Building, and Gym/Fellowship Hall all built to meet the evolving spiritual needs of all the people of the community. Beginning in 2003, First United Methodist Church would begin the process

of mothering a new congregation, Gruene United Methodist Church, so that more people might know Christ. As in the past, the people called Methodist continue today to make history through their members and changing mission in New Braunfels.

OVERVIEW:

The History of Methodism in the New Braunfels Area

The Methodist movement

In the beginning, Methodism was a renewal movement within the Church of England. It emphasized conversion, piety, and discipline. After conversion, persons became members of Societies which meet weekly to pray, study, and practice discipline in their every day piety. The Societies emphasized that persons were justified before God by faith alone, but that this act of faith entered a person into a Christian life that demanded prayer, study, witness, and good works that reflected Christian principles. These acts of discipline, after conversion in Methodism, became known as “moving on to Perfection”. To this day the book of church law of the United Methodist Church is known as “*The Discipline*.”

The movement, which swept England, came to America through the people who emigrated. The movement’s leader Rev. John Wesley, a well educated Church of England cleric, maintained oversight of the movement in both England and America until his death in 1791. Because of the shortage of trained and ordained clergy in the movement, Wesley began using lay preachers who were more like apprentices. They were required to continue to study, maintain a Christian lifestyle, and be under the discipline of the movement’s organization. In 1784 when the movement in America became the Methodist Episcopal Church at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, these preachers were ordained with the authority to preach and celebrate the sacraments. As the movement became an American church it would become different in many ways than its sister church in England.

It was not unusual on the American frontier, and especially in Texas, for Methodist Societies to form even before there was a formal appointment of a minister. Methodist ministers, both lay and ordained, tended to preach anywhere they could draw an audience with the hope of bringing persons to Christ. As a response, the people would

be instructed to form a Society and then a formal church would be formed with an appointed minister, then hopefully a church building, etc.

Work of the Methodist Church in Texas among the Germans

Dr. Gilbert Jordan wrote this background information on the Methodist movement in Hill Country of Texas:

“Much of south-central Texas was settled by German immigrants. Those immigrants who came to Texas directly from Germany around the middle of the nineteenth century were Lutherans, Catholics, and reformed Evangelicals – certainly not Methodists. Within a few years, however, some of the newly arrived settlers were won over to the Methodists through the ardent endeavors of missionaries, partly because there were not enough Lutheran ministers and Catholic priests available to serve the religious needs of the people on the Hill Country frontier. German speaking missionaries...filled the spiritual vacuum for some of the people. Their preaching appealed to the pietistic immigrants.”



Methodist Camp Meeting on the
Karbach Ranch late 1800s

In the early 1800s, most of the Methodist Church work among Germans was around Cincinnati, Ohio. But by 1844, both New Orleans and Mobile had German Methodist mission churches. The first German Methodist preacher who can be identified in Texas was Rev. Henry Young (Heinrich Jung) who was transferred from the German Mission in New

Orleans to Galveston by Bishop Soule at the Mississippi Annual Conference of December 1845. It is claimed that about a month after his arrival, Young preached to 1,000 Germans on the shore of Galveston Bay. By April, Rev. Young organized a church and by November built a church building at 19th Street and Avenue H in Galveston. It became the largest German Methodist church in the state. Rev. Young was born in Germany, but we do not know much about his background. From 1853-1856, he was appointed to serve in the New Braunfels circuit which included New Braunfels, Castrovilla, Cibola Settlement, Four Miles Creek (Solms), Gebirge (Mission Hill above Landa Park) and Schumansville. There is a high probability that other German-speaking Methodist pastors had come through New Braunfels and begun the work in preceding years. Methodists in New Braunfels' sister community, Fredericksburg, had formed a Methodist church by 1849. New Braunfels was the staging area for all of the early residents traveling to Fredericksburg and many of the residents of Fredericksburg had close ties with New Braunfels.

The second minister appointed to the New Braunfels circuit was the Rev. Gustav Elley (1856-57 and later 1861-63), who was born Gustavus von Elterlein on June 10, 1816, in Mittelschmiedeberg in the kingdom of Saxony. He left Germany in his teens and came first to New Orleans and then to Texas. Upon arrival in America he dropped his title of "baron" and anglicized his last name to Elley. He fought in the Texas Revolution

and was captured and imprisoned in Mexico. Upon his return to San Antonio he was converted to Methodism by Rev. John Wesley DeVilbiss. Along with seven other people he and DeVilbiss began a church that eventually became Travis Park Methodist Church in San Antonio. In 1854 Elley was accepted on trial, the first formal step into ordained ministry in the Methodist church. Elley was also mentioned in the records of the first and sequential Quarterly Conferences of the New Braunfels church, so he must have also been instrumental in starting the church.

Rev. John Wesley DeVilbiss

John Wesley DeVilbiss was born August 18, 1818, to Alexander and Priscilla “Devilbissin” in Graceham, Maryland. The family later moved to Licking County, Ohio. In 1833, while learning the saddler’s trade in Tiffin, Ohio, he went to a Methodist camp meeting and had a conversion experience that turned him toward the ministry. After attending Methodist College in Augusta, Kentucky, he joined the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1840. He received his ministerial training by riding the circuits as an assistant to experienced preachers.



DeVilbiss (as he now wrote his name) was admitted into full connection and ordained a deacon by Bishop Thomas A. Morris in 1842. Then he was recruited with five colleagues as a missionary to Texas. The party left Cincinnati in November 1842, traveled by steamer to Natchitoches, Louisiana, and then by horseback until they reached Texas in December. On his second appointment to the Gonzales circuit he organized a congregation in Seguin and reportedly preached the first Protestant sermon in San Antonio in 1844. He was ordained an elder in 1845 by Bishop E. S. Janes. In 1846 he was assigned to San Antonio to develop the ministry further there. During the following two years he organized a congregation which became Travis Park Methodist Church. When assigned to be the Presiding Elder (District Superintendent) of the German District (1855-1858) he moved to New Braunfels and learned German. He was an important mentor to many of the German lay preachers who were in the process of becoming ordained ministers in the area. He was also instrumental in converting many of the Germans to

Methodism through his preaching, society gatherings, and camp meetings. One of his converts that was so important to the Methodist in New Braunfels was David Karbach.

Rev Friederich Vordenbaumen, wrote this about Rev. DeVilbiss upon his death:

“He was much beloved by our German people. He was a good man, a good preacher and an industrious, good pastor: a great friend to children. Our work prospered during his four years administration as presiding elder. In order to acquire a more ready knowledge of the German language, he moved to New Braunfels, a German town in Comal County. While there, he learned to speak, read and write ‘the German language’ tolerably well. He was much beloved, even among the infidel class in that city. He would study his sermons and write them in English, then translate them into the German tongue: then he would read, and re-read them in German, until he could read them to the edification of his German congregations.”

Rev. DeVilbiss would preach his first sermon in German about a month after moving to New Braunfels. On January 11, 1856, he wrote in his journal that he preached at Antioch Chapel on Clark’s Creek which was the predecessor of Hope United Methodist Church in Lavaca County near Yoakum in the community of Hope. He had written the sermon in English and then had someone help him translate it into German. His effort was greatly appreciated by those gathered.

Rev. H. A. Graves a close and dear friend wrote this about Rev. DeVilbiss:

“Whether Mr. DeVilbiss was of German parentage, is not known to me: but his name, and his general physical build and complexion would, it seems to me, indicate a German descent. He was quite staunchly built, of light hair and fair complexion. His name, “Devilbiss,” which was its original pronunciation, must have been German; the stress of accent put upon the first syllable — Dev. ...The accent is now laid upon the second syllable, Vil, and is pronounced De-Vilbiss. It is no discredit to any man to be descended from the “Tueton” race. Their present offspring has given to modern history the largest class of profound thinkers in

science and theology. They are now a robust, hardy and industrious race of people; more so, perhaps, than any other race of modern times.”

DeVilbiss would go on to serve the church as presiding elder of the following districts: Helena, (1859); San Antonio, (1860–61 and, 1865); Corpus Christi, (1870–72) and as an agent of the American Bible Society (1866–69) and as agent of Southwestern University (1875–76). He was three times president of the Rio Grande Conference and was a delegate to the General Conference in 1866. He died on January 31, 1885, and was buried in Oak Island Cemetery.

Background on the Johann Friedrich David Karbach family by Alton J. Rahe

In December of 1845 Johann Friedrich David Karbach and his second wife, “Karoline, nee Meve”, with eight children, three of whom were Mr. Karbach’s children from his first marriage, set sail for Indianola, or Carlshaven aboard the *Johann Detthardt* from Sieden-Bollendin, Germany. They arrived at Indianola in the spring of 1846 to join Prince Solms’ colony.



David
Karbach

David Karbach was born on September 8, 1803, in Nedderin, Mecklenburg Sterlitz and his second wife, Karoline, was born on October 14, 1811 at Wegelzin, bei Dramburg, Mecklenburg. They married in 1833. David married his first wife, Elisabeth, nee Hagenmeister, in 1824 and she died in 1832.

Karl, the oldest child from David’s first marriage, contracted dysentery and died near Victoria during the first year, leaving only two children with the family from this marriage, Caroline (1825) and Mina (1827). A six-year old, Fredericke (1880), from the second marriage died at sea while later two children were born to them in New Braunfels. The remaining six children from the second marriage were: Louise (1835), Friedrich (1837), Johann (1841), Wilhelm (1843), Sophie (1848) and Emilie (1851).

The 1860 census lists David Karbach’s occupation as a blacksmith. It was in this business that Mr. Karbach initially became a contributing member of the community.

Each settler was given one lot in town (New Braunfels) and ten acres outside of town to grow vegetables and feed. Mr. Karbach was delighted to find his ten acres in a little fertile valley adjoining the Comal Springs. Another reference states that according to deed records the Karbachs lived on six acres of the Prince Carl land which later became a part of the Locke Nursery. Comal County Clerk's Records show that the Karbachs lived on five acres of a 100 acre plot known as Acre Lot # 189.

The six children from David and Karoline married as follows:

- (1) Louise married Carl Julius Leopold Voelker in 1851.
- (2) Friedrich (Fritz) married Emilie Erck in 1865.
- (3) Johann (John) married Sophie Klingemann in 1867.
- (4) Wilhelm (William) married Mathilde Kappmeier in 1873.
- (5) Sophie married Ludwig Erck, and after he died, she married Ulrich Steiner (Methodist minister).
- (6) Emilie married Fritz Klingemann in 1871.

The article in *The Cattlemen* implies that in 1858 the Karbach family bought ranch land located about five miles north of New Braunfels (along the current FM 306). However, deeds in the Comal County Clerk's Office support the statement in Oscar Haas's article that the Karbach's lived on the six acres of the Prince Carl land until in 1866 when the family began buying acreage on the Orilla Russel survey on the Hancock Road that eventually came to be known as the Karbach Settlement.

The move to the ranch gave David Karbach and his family an opportunity to experience the out-of-doors and engage in the cattle industry. The outdoor experiences were so much enjoyed that in time, the Fritz, John, and Emilie (Klingemann) families settled in the same area. In fact, the Herman Weisser family was included when Lydia Boyd defined the Karbach Settlement.

How big was the Karbach Settlement? How many children did the area serve? How much land did the Karbachs own in that area? Records show that originally David bought about 500 acres in the area. In time, Fritz and John Karbach and Fritz Klingemann bought more land. The local "Karbach historian", Carolyn Karbach Barry, has two pages of land transactions by the Karbach family members. It is difficult to say how much land was in ownership at any one time since the families kept on buying and selling land.

Based on land ownership in 1926, she estimated that there were about 2300 acres in the Karbach Settlement. The large families in the area had at least a total of 40 children eligible to attend Sunday School at the Karbach Settlement.

David Karbach died on December 6, 1888 and his wife, Karoline died on June 12, 1878. Fritz Karbach died on January 2, 1910 and his wife, Emilie, died on October 27, 1927. John died on January 21, 1930 and his wife, Sophie, died on August 18, 1923. All are buried in adjacent plots in the Comal Cemetery in New Braunfels.

Methodism and the Karbach affiliation by Alton J. Rahe and Jim Wright

The David Karbachs had been members of the Lutheran Church like most Germans in their area of Germany before coming to America; however, the family began to attend meetings held by Rev. John Wesley DeVilbiss (1855-58) a highly educated Methodist minister. The details of David and his family's conversion to Methodist are not known, but the David Karbachs were very influential in spreading Methodism in the New Braunfels area during the late 1850s. The Karbach families were very loyal members of the Methodist Church for many years.

As has been mentioned before the church's early beginnings was under the leadership of Rev Henry P. Young (Heinrich Jung), probably Gustav Elley and a number of lay people who might have already known Rev. Young from his ministry in Galveston. The record of the first formal meeting begins:

According to appointment, the first Quarterly Conference for the New Braunfels German Mission (Methodist Episcopal Church) was held in the house of J. Hirschleber in Comaltown on the 7th of March, A.D.1853.

Persons attending were: J.J. Hof, K. Koepsel, J. Hirschleber and Ch. Koff (all were listed as church stewards), Henry P. Young, (missionary, chair and pastor in charge) Gustav Elley, (local minister); and Rev. C.A. Grote (visitor). The Presiding Elder (District Superintendent) was not able to attend, so Rev. Young was appointed Chair and Rev. Grote was probably asked to be an observer or advisor or both. This March date of 1853 makes the church the fourth oldest church established in what is now New Braunfels: First Protestant Church, (1845), St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church (1850),

“Evangelical Lutheran Church of San Martins...in Neighborville (Hortontown)” (January 8, 1853—no longer a congregation) and First United Methodist Church—Comaltown (March 7, 1853).

At the time of this first meeting Rev. Young was appointed to the the New Braunfels Circuit which not only included the Church in New Braunfels but also included Castroville, Cibolo Settlement, Four Mile Creek (present-day Solms), Gebirge (Mission Hill above Landa Park), and Schumannsville. It was quite a ride on horseback but Rev Young made every point on the circuit on a regular schedule. Of course all services and other activities were in German.

Five years later, in 1858, the first Methodist Church was built on the corner of Union and Common Streets. Oscar Haas had the following to say:

8 January 1858

Abram M. Gentry of Harris County and Conrad Seabaugh of Comal County, owners and developers of “Braunfels” in Comaltown, “in benevolence and good will and in consideration of \$1 conveyed 2 lots corner of Union and Common streets, to Carl Koepsel, Chr. Koch, J. J. Hof., Hy.

Klingemann, Melchoir Amacher, Adam Wuest, and Julius Hirschleber, trustees of the German Methodist Society at New Braunfels (Comal County Deeds, Vol. F, 142).



Methodist Church on Union Street 1888

“David and Caroline Karbach” formally joined the church on September 16, 1859. The pastor was August Engel. The first record of David serving in a church office was in September 31, 1865, when he was elected to the Administrative Board as a Steward. David would serve as a Steward and Trustee for the next several decades.

The Civil War era from 1861-65 was hard on Comal County and the church. Most of the German residents of the county were divided on all the actions leading up to the

Civil War. Slavery, Secession, States Rights, and the division of the Methodist church in two bodies—North and South in 1844, left many confused. Many Germans were against slavery. The Methodist church in England and much of the US was opposed to slavery. Methodist ministers had always be banned by the church from owning slaves. When the secession vote was held, a large majority in Comal County voted for secession, but the heavily German counties of Blanco, Gillespie and Mason (all with close ties with Comal County) were some of the 18 counties in the state who voted against secession.

The discourse in the Karbach family probably mirrored what happened in other church families. William argued often against slavery, but his name appears on the roll of Captain Julius Bose Comal County Volunteer Infantry CSA. In the *Cattlemen* article from interviews with the family, they stated that he ran away and joined the Union Army. Whatever the fact, he would lose an arm in battle Fritz on the other hand volunteered for Captain Gustav Hoffman's cavalry company and would fight with them throughout the war. The family prayed that the brothers would not meet in battle and they didn't. John also wanted to enlist in the Confederate Army, but he was too young. He settled for hauling freight for the war effort from Bastrop to Indianola and Matamoras.

Hard money was in short supply during and after the war. The church found a pragmatic way for ranchers and farmers to pay their pledge for ministerial and mission support—they could give cattle. In 1861 the “German Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Comal Town” registered a brand with the county—a capital M with a tent ^ over it. Church elders were in charge of branding and caring for the cattle. A set of rules called “A Constitution” was passed detailing the acceptance, ownership, care and sale of cattle on behalf of the church. On October 18, 1862, church records show that a report on the cattle was asked for, but sadly was not made.

After the war, there must have not been a lot of hard feelings about the war among the Karbachs. Fritz had the company band of the union troops stationed in New Braunfels play at his war-delayed wedding to Emilie Erck. That must have been quite a celebration at the old church on Union Street.

Fritz Karbach did not join the church until April 28, 1867. It seems that in 1872 he was elected a trustee and began his long years of service. From then until his death he would serve as steward, trustee, Sunday School superintendent, confirmation instructor,

religion teacher, district representative and Annual Conference steward. He was present at almost every Quarterly Conference meeting of the circuit until his death on January 2, 1910.

The Karbachs did more than just serve on the Board of the church; they offered their homes as a place for Sunday School, preaching and prayer meetings. At times the Karbach Settlement, as the cluster of homes on the ranch was called in church records, was like a point on the New Braunfels circuit. In 1892 a proposal was even made to tear down the church building in Comaltown and move the church to the Karbach Settlement. This did not happen.

The Karbach Settlement Sunday School activities are first mentioned in 1881 in the church records. The first Sunday School was held in Fritz Karbach's home. Although at the time it seems that there was more interest in confirmation classes than Sunday School among the young people. Fritz would serve as Superintendent over the Sunday Schools at Karbach Settlement and keep it alive until his death in 1910—almost 30 years. Preaching services and the Wednesday night prayer meetings were also held in the Settlement. Both were rotated from one house to another since the Settlement had no church building. Sunday School was conducted every Sunday at 2:00 p. m.

John Karbach seems to have delayed being a formal part of the church until several years after his father David's death. Records show that he became a member of the church on June 11, 1890. He hosted the Quarterly Conference in his home on June 20, 1891, was elected Steward to Annual Conference in 1893, was a delegate to the District Conference and was elected a Steward in 1894. He would hold various offices from then until his death in January 31, 1930.

Church life between the Civil War and the First World War

Many changes came to New Braunfels from the 1870s to the 1900s. New manufacturing operations were built, electricity became more and more available and the railroad changed transportation forever. Railroad transportation made travel easier, commerce more profitable and brought more new people to town. Permanent bridges were built over the Comal and Guadalupe rivers to accommodate flood-free travel between all parts of the city. A public water system made water plentiful and safe.

The church met these changes in many different ways. One way was to constantly realign the circuit. In 1873 the New Braunfels circuit included Elm Creek, in 1874 Long Creek and in 1878 Hortontown, West Fork and Seguin. In 1882 it would include Kegelhill and West Fork, but later in the 1890s it would also include Maxwell, all in Caldwell County. York Creek in Gillespie County was also added to the circuit in the 1890s. In the 1900s, Hunter would become part of the circuit for a time. Because of the distances and number of churches in the charge, it would cause Rev Gustavo Mueller in 1883 to reflect the feelings of many of the pastors who served, “It’s too much of a distance from one preaching place to another, so I can’t visit as much as I’d like to, or spend enough time in the services. For New Braunfels alone, I would need all the time by itself.”

To gain members in a new generation, to serve people around the world, and to give young adult members and women a place of service, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South encouraged churches to have three programs, one old and two new: Sunday School, Women’s Society, and Epworth League.

From the 1860s on, every pastor tried to get active Sunday School programs going in every church in the circuit and to some extent they were successful, but the numbers were never great. In 1860 all 5 churches in the circuit had 3 Sunday Schools, 3 Superintendents, 8 teachers and 68 students. In 1863, Schumannsville had 2 teachers and 25 students. In 1879, New Braunfels and Hortontown had a joint Sunday School of 30 pupils. In the 1880s Kegelhill had a very active Sunday School with 3 teachers and from 15-18 students. The strongest Sunday School and longest lasting one was at the Karbach Settlement. It is first mentioned in church records in October 15, 1881, as being held at Fritz Karbach’s home and is last mentioned at his death in 1910—30 years of continuous operation. The first Sunday School in English was at Westfork in 1882 where the church partnered with the Baptist. Even though Confirmation and Confirmation classes were not suggested by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South literature, the church in New Braunfels and most of the rest of the circuit regularly conducted confirmation classes which often were included in Sunday School. Confirmation testing was done orally in front of the congregation.

The Woman's Home Missionary Societies were founded in 1890 in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Women's Society in New Braunfels would not be organized until 1912, but would come and go until becoming permanent in the 1920s. Also in 1890, the Epworth League for young adults was adopted by the denomination from the model developed by the northern church. An Epworth League was started in Karbach Settlement 1896 with 13 members, but would slowly die out by 1902. It would be revived in 1920 in New Braunfels.

The New Church Building



Karbach Memorial Methodist Church from a 1925 post card

In a bold move the church acquired property on one of the main streets of New Braunfels, and with matching funds from the general church, built a new brick church in 1913. The new address was 572 W. San Antonio Street which gave Methodist greater visibility. The imposing red brick building was named Karbach Memorial Methodist Church in honor of the family who had been so instrumental in the churches early life. The church had steep front steps that led to double doors that led into a sanctuary that sloped down to the center of worship, the table and pulpit. Beautiful stained glass windows lined the sides of the sanctuary. In 1929, through the efforts of Dr. E.G. Bielstein, a pipe organ would be installed up front to the left of the altar area. The new church building signaled a new day for the congregation and represented a real leap of faith.

The First World War and the German Language

New Braunfels went through culture shock leading up to and with the entry of the United States into the First World War. Many persons had close ties with Germany and it

was hard to accept Germany's responsibility for the war. "There was extreme prejudice against Americans of German ancestry all through the war. Children in particular were aware of this prejudice, for the language in which they were taught at school was suddenly against the law."

The church, which was a mission to persons who spoke German, had an identity crisis. It was true that as early as 1882, the circuit had an English language Sunday School at Westfork. Also in 1896, Rev. J.A.G. Rabe had started a second service in English in the New Braunfels church on Sunday afternoons—a tradition that seems to have continued. Second services in English were also started in Hunter and York Creek during that year. English was becoming so prevalent that in 1904, church property and membership was transferred from the Maxwell church on the New Braunfels circuit-German Mission Conference, to the English speaking Pleasant Grove Methodist Church, an English speaking congregation of the West Texas Conference. In 1911, even the records of the Quarterly Conferences began to be written in English. The final blow to the congregation's mission identity was in 1918 when the German Mission Conference (established in 1874) that they had long been a part of, was merged into the West Texas Conferences during the war hysteria of the time. What was their mission? Slowly the congregation became an English speaking congregation—with German roots.

Dr Gilbert J. Jordan who wrote about the German Methodist experience of moving from the German language to the English stated:

"The transition from German to English worship services was... traumatic...especially for the elderly people... It is one thing to learn to speak and understand a new language, but it is something else again to preach and pray in this acquired language...No matter how much they might have said, 'Lord, teach us to pray in English,' it did no good at all because the Lord continued to speak in German to the people, and they spoke to him in the same language."

One of the attempts to be more inclusive and move to the English language was an appeal to the West Texas Conference evangelist to hold a revival in New Braunfels. It

must have worked because the next quarterly conference 24 new members were reported and most of them had non-German names.

The main mission to the community and source for new members continued to the Sunday School that was probably in English by this time. In the years 1915-19 the Sunday School enrollment would hover around 100 and average attendance would be above 50% in a congregation that did not reach 100 until the mid 20's. The hot summers always drew the average attendance down.

The 1920s and 1930s

The 1920s were not exactly roaring nor were the 1930s a complete bust in New Braunfels for the church. For the first time, the church began to experience the problems of migrating people as they followed jobs. The membership in the 1920s would stay around 100. As old members left, new members would replace them. One bright side in the local economy was the building of a textile mill that is most commonly known as Mission Valley Mills (1921-2004). It would employ over 1,000 persons at one time. The church would canvass Mill Town to see the needs of the families and the next quarter would report 21 new members and an increase in Sunday School membership.

Because the agricultural depression started in the 1920s, there were financial problems in both of the decades. Comments in the pastor's report speak of the need for more giving and being short on mission giving. The depression and its affect are mentioned numerous times especially in the 1930s. By 1931 even necessary expenses were not being met, so the church had a barbeque plate dinner and raised enough to pay their outstanding bills.

The most important development of the two decades was the music program. With some starts and stops, the choir and other forms of music became well established. In 1921 an orchestra had a short life. A pipe organ was added in 1929. Methodist and Cokesbury hymnals were purchased for every pew during the 1930s.

1940s and 1950s Decades of Change and Growth

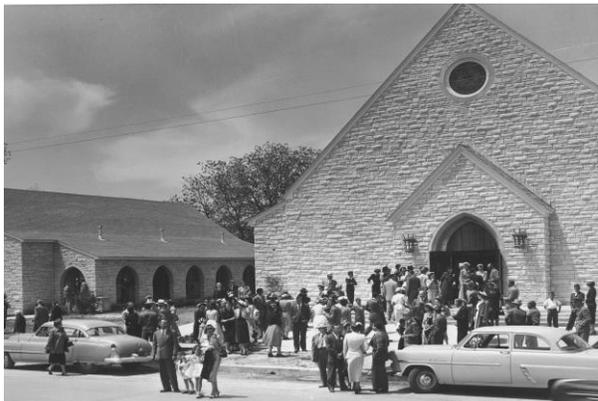
In 1939 The Methodist Church would be formed by the three largest branches of the Methodist movement coming back together: The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church. One of the results of the national union was local churches merging; especially ones who had been

German mission churches. The local Methodist church lost its “mission” designation and the financial support for the pastor’s salary, etc., from the national church. In recognition of this change, in 1940 the church was renamed “Karbach Memorial First Methodist Church”.

The church saw unprecedented growth in membership and programs during these decades. 56 new members, a record, were accepted in 1945 making the total membership 250. To serve the growth in members and programs, the congregation had to build a new education building which was opened in 1948 as Phase I of an ambitious building program.

With a membership of 504, three worship services, and a Sunday School bursting at the seams, the congregation took a leap of faith and decided to build a new sanctuary on the site of the Karbach Memorial building. The first worship service in the new building was held on Easter Morning 1952 with a record attendance of 1007.

During the construction, an accredited kindergarten for 4 to 5 year olds opened in September of 1951 with 18 students. This and similar programs for the community have been carried on until this day. In service to the community, a sponsorship of a Boy Scout Troop and numerous other programs were started by the church.



The new Sanctuary 1952

In 1955, Phase III of the building program was begun giving more education and fellowship space. By 1958 the church would have five choral groups actively supporting the worship services. In 1960 the membership climbed to 755 and the Church School

would have 650 students on the rolls.

1960s and 1970s Growth While Looking Outward and Inward

The 1960s were tumultuous for the nation, the community and the congregation. The church’s first response for the things happening especially in the world was to increase their mission giving “above and beyond” their normal giving. United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men had numerous projects and fund raisers for missions.

When the president was assassinated November 22, 1963, members became very introspective and called on their faith. “How could this happen?” Rev. Roy May reflected in a sermon and many agreed. This was only the first in a string of tragic events in our nation that the congregation would say, “how could this happen?” Even the devastating flood in 1972 in New Braunfels was a “how could this happen” moment. But the church could and did concretely respond to this tragedy.

Church growth continued demanding facility improvements. In 1960 the membership was 755 and in 1980 it had grown to 1049. A master plan was adopted and a new education building was opened in 1966. Renovations of the Adult Building and the air conditioning of it and Wesley Hall occurred in 1967 and 1968.

1980s and 1990s Increased Mission through Continuity

Larger numbers of Christians calls for organization, coordination of tasks, and allows continuity in programs that endure. By 1984 the congregation reached 1138 members and the need for more professional staff became evident. In that year the first fulltime associate pastor was assigned to New Braunfels. Throughout the two decades different staff arrangements were made to meet the needs of the congregation. Staff helped enhance a large two-track church school program, a two-level youth program, weekday child services, an enlarged music program, and of course worship. Programs like Walk to Emmaus (1990), a contemporary service with a praise band (1998) and by the end of the decade the Stephen Ministry became sustainable. Longer pastoral appointments were also significant in continuity of programs.

Major art projects also were accomplished during the two decades. In 1983, volunteers made over 3 million stitches to produce the beautiful needlepoint kneelers with biblical themes that still adorn our sanctuary. In 1990 volunteers designed Chrismons (Christian symbols) to hang on the Christmas tree during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

The two decades also saw more construction and renovation to the church plant. The sanctuary was renovated and reopened in 1982. A new Wesley Hall was completed in 1987. Parking spaces were added as land became available. A church foundation was formed for lasting gifts.

2000 A New Century

When terrorists attacked the World Trade center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the congregation had another “How can this happen?” moment. Rev. Jon Lowry would comfort all those who flocked to worship, “Remember, God is with us and good will overcome evil.” This was the congregation’s introduction to a decade in which they would celebrate their 150 birthday.

That same month a Long Range Planning Task Force reported that some decisions needed to be made about the church’s long range future in light of present and projected growth of the congregation and the area. In time 19+ acres were acquired at the corner of FM 306 and Common Street for the future. After long deliberation it was decided to mother a new congregation on part of the property. An associate pastor and a number of families were commissioned to start the new congregation to further the Methodist movement and meet the spiritual needs of that growing part of New Braunfels. The new congregation would call itself Gruene United Methodist Church.

A 150 year celebration was held culminating with Bishop Joel Martinez preaching on March 3, 2003. A catered meal at the Civic Center followed the morning services. Former pastors were honored and they shared special memories of their time in New Braunfels.

With a membership of over 1700 members, First United Methodist is looking forward to the continuing on its mission in a challenging new day.



Top: 1888 Sunday
School Class
Middle: Last worship
service in Karbach
Memorial Church
Bottom:
Worship in the New
Sanctuary

SIGNIFICANCE:

For over 160 years the people called Methodist and the congregation of the First United Methodist Church has been an intricate part of the New Braunfels community. The first mission of the Methodist movement was to bring and live the gospel for those who came from Germany and to speak of God in their native language. In a new land there are new

challenges of faith and the Methodist were there for all. In time the world would change and the church would become English speaking and helped the community become diverse and inclusive by directing persons through spiritual truths. In each change that came to the community, the church was able to give guidance and a comforting word. It offered programs of spiritual guidance, and compassionate comfort to all in need during every challenge. The church and its people weathered wars, depressions, growth, technological changes, and natural and man made disasters and still managed to serve their fellow humans in all that they did. The church and its people share a proud history and look forward to a future in which they can continue to serve God and their fellow human beings for many years to come.

Acknowledgements:

We are indebted to Alton Rahe, Janet Kaderli, Trudy Lambrecht, the Sopheinburg staff, and many others for their help in putting this narrative together. An unpublished marker narrative prepared by Alton J. Rahe *The History of Methodism in Comal County and its Relationship with the David Karbach Family* 2003 for the Comal County Historical Commission was also used freely with the Commissions permission. Many sections were verbatim for this document. The section, **Background on the Johann Friedrich David Karbach family** was written by Alton with some editorial changes. The section, **Methodism and the Karbach Affiliation** was written by Alton J. Rahe with significant new material added by Jim Wright. Janet Kaderli compiled a booklet for the 150 year celebration for First United Methodist Church. It was the first comprehensive history of the life of the congregation. It was used freely in this document. The quarterly conference record from 1859-1911 of First United Methodist Church of New Braunfels were translated from German by Trudy Lambrecht and transcribed by Janet Kaderli over several months from 2002-2003. Without these original materials this document would have been impossible. Trudy Lambrecht gave freely of her time and expertise in translating these records. A native of Germany, Trudy moved to New Braunfels in the early 1950s. Friends invited her to sing in the choir at the Methodist Church, and she served the church as a choir member over forty years. Her unique background suited her

perfectly for this task. This narrative was edited and/or written by the Rev. James K Wright (or Jim) a retired United Methodist minister of the Southwest Texas Conference.