

FALL INTO ARTS FESTIVAL

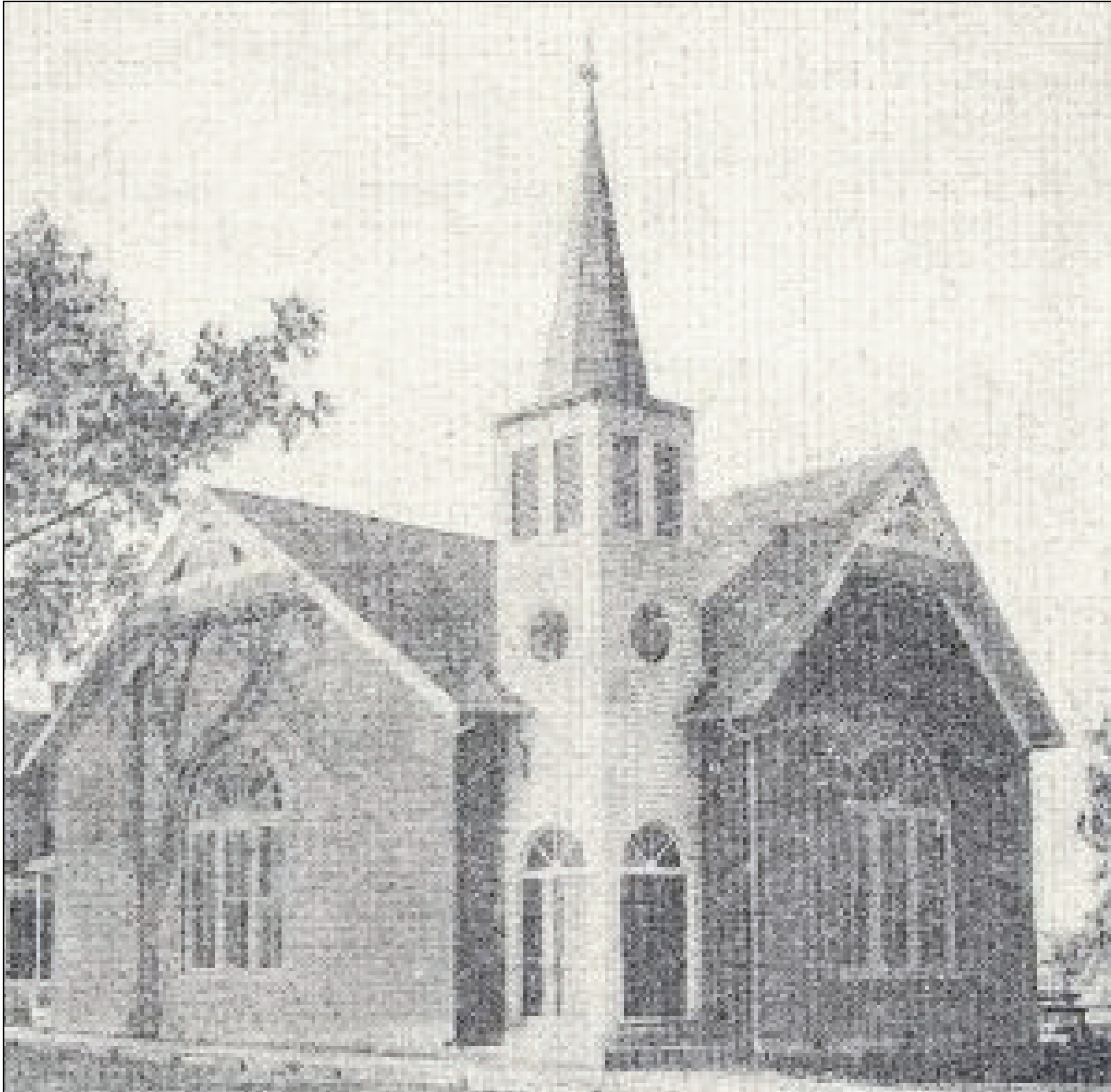
Step Back in Time: Kennett Courthouse Square & Beyond Historical Walking Tour

First Baptist Church - Established 1887 - Current Building Completed in 1920

300 St. Francis Street

History

The history of the First Baptist Church is a tale of dedication, faith, and growth that spans over a century. It began in 1883 when Reverend M.V. Baird started preaching in Kennett once a month, holding services in a humble two-story house located south of the downtown square. This building served a multifaceted purpose, with the first story hosting school, church gatherings, political meetings, shows, and other public events, while the upper story housed a public hall.



The seed of a Baptist congregation was planted, and after four years of prayers and dedication, seven Baptists from the region came together to formally organize the First Baptist Church in Kennett on October 2, 1887. This marked the official beginning of their journey as a faith community.



Elders J.M. Blaylock, A.B. Webster, E. J. A. McKinney, J.H. Peay and A. Nunnery built upon the foundation which Brother Baird had laid 'gold, silver and precious stones', enabling the church in 1906 to rise from the day of small things to build the most beautiful and comfortable church in Dunklin County.

*Cooper, M.B. Manual of the Baptist Church, Kennett, Missouri
Harris G. E Elton, Historical sketch of the First Baptist Church prior to 1916.*



In August 1887, the Baptists joined forces with the Masonic fraternity to construct a two-story wooden structure at the corner of St. Francis and Jackson, with the church occupying the first floor and the lodge the second. By around 1900, the church had acquired full ownership of the building.

Building for the Future

However, the growing congregation soon realized the limitations of their existing space. In September 1904, the decision was made to build a new church building. Construction began, and in November 1907, the new church building was completed at the same location.

The congregation continued to flourish, but in December 1916, a devastating fire destroyed the cherished church building. Undaunted, the congregation met at the Palace Theater and courthouse until March 1917 when they rented the old Methodist house while awaiting the completion of a new building, which was finished in the spring of 1920.

The building project was financially supported by J.A. Hemphill, who not only contributed generously but also provided lumber at cost through his lumber mill.

This present-day building was constructed at the corner of South Jackson and St. Francis.

The journey of growth and expansion did not stop there. In 1953, 1960, and 1973, educational buildings were added to the church campus, further enhancing its capacity to serve the community. Then, in 2001, the church acquired 28 acres on the corner of the South By-Pass and Southwest Drive, where the Family Life Center was completed in 2009.



The church contains many beautiful memorial stained-glass windows. "Jesus Knocking at the Door," is a subject taken from an English painting by William Holman Hunt. The painting is dark, with light only from the halo and a lantern in Jesus' hand. The lack of an exterior latch on the door symbolizes the need for faith to open the door to Jesus' knock.

Twenty-five men have pastored First Baptist Church since 1887.

Today, the First Baptist Church in Kennett, Missouri, stands as a testament to the unwavering faith and dedication of its members throughout its rich history. From humble beginnings in a two-story house to its modern, expanded campus, the church has remained a pillar of the community, serving as a place of worship, fellowship, and community outreach for generations of believers in Kennett and beyond.

First Baptist Church	
REPORT OF FINANCIAL BOARD FOR YEAR 1919.	
Current Expenses for the Year:	
Pastor's Salary	\$1,500.00
Rent on Building	150.00
Janitor Salary	120.00
Incidental Expenses	63.86
Total for Year	\$1,833.86
Collected During the Year	\$1,971.14
Paid Out	1,833.86
Balance in Treasury, Jan. 1, 1920	137.28
Missionary Work:	
Apportionment for the Year, Dist. Missions	252.75
State, Home and Foreign Missions, Etc.	250.00
Total Apportionment for Year	\$ 502.75
Contributed and paid to Missions	\$ 618.09
To Philanthropy, Etc.	254.65
Total to Missions, Etc.	\$ 872.74
Sunday School Report:	
Current Expenses	\$ 143.00
Collected for Same	163.00
Balance in Treasury	20.00
Contributed to Missions, other objects	213.50
Grand Total for Local Expenses:	
Collected	\$2,134.14
Paid Out	1,976.86
Balance in Treasury	157.28
Grand Total for Missions Collected and Paid Out	\$1,086.24
Respectfully Submitted, J. A. HEMPHILL, Secretary. MISS HETTIE WILSON, Treasurer.	

Sources: Dunklin County News, First Baptist Church, History of Dunklin County; History of the First Baptist Church Kennett MO 1887 to 1947 written by Pastor Owen M Sherrill.

"Gospels in Glass, Stained Glass Windows in Missouri," Ken Luebbering and Robyn Burnett, 2000.

Special thanks to the Kennett Ministerial Alliance and the Dunklin County Genealogical Society.

