

The History of Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church

Robert Eanes (B. South Carolina 1805 D. Travis County 1895) – buried in the family cemetery as you enter Lost Creek Boulevard – came to Texas in 1872. He brought his family consisting of eight (8) children and one daughter-in-law. They traveled from Aberdeen, Mississippi. Where he was a merchant and founder of the town.

Robert Eanes bought land from his brother, Alexander Eanes, who had come to Texas in 1845 after Texas became the 28th state.

When the Texas Constitutional Convention passed school acts in 1871, the School Supervisor for Travis County appointed Robert Eanes a trustee to establish a school in his precinct. With neighbors helping, a schoolhouse was built in 1872 of cedar logs with benches of split logs on pegs. The school became known as Eanes School.

In 1874 William (from the Teague Indian tribe in Virginia) and Sophie Artelia Ryehag Teague (a Polish immigrant) deeded to the County School Supervisor two acres of their land for the purpose of building a school/church house, "in consideration of the interest they felt in the education and moral training of the youth of the community."

According to the wishes of the Teagues, a one-room frame building was constructed adjacent to the Eanes property and was used for both school and church. In 1896 the building was rebuilt because of a fire. This building was used concurrently as a school for 40 years (until 1936) and as a church for 35 years. Circuit riders from several denominations came to preach on Sundays.

In 1923 the Presbyterian Seminary sent a full-time minister to hold services. Later the church became a mission of the University Presbyterian Church.

In 1928 a stone church building was erected near the school. The men of the community carried stones in wagons from the Eanes-Marshall ranch and barrels of water for the mortar as they did the construction themselves. The total cost was \$1,000. Pictures show entire families helping – children gathering stones and women "spreading dinner on the grounds."

The City of Austin Fire Department gave to the church a bell that had been used to call volunteer firemen. The beautiful tone of the bell could be heard through the hills on Sunday morning. The building was dedicated December 11, 1932, and called Eanes Chapel. School classes met there also.

World War II slowed down the activities of the church. Men were called to the military service and some families moved to Austin for a time. Soon after the war the church came to the attention of the Presbyterian Seminary. Two students from Westminster Student Fellowship picked up people in the area in a jeep and brought them to the Eanes Chapel.

The women of the Eanes Chapel organized November 18, 1953. From the beginning, they had conducted services, sewed school cloths for the needy and held classes during the summer.

The village of West Lake Hills was incorporated in 1953 and growth in the area progressed rapidly. Eanes Chapel's name was changed to Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church in April 1954 when the membership was at 100 members.

Eanes Independent School District bought the stone church building and made two classrooms which are still being used. The stone church is located behind Eanes Elementary School on Eanes School Road. It is part of a Historical District and is viewed by school children visiting the Eanes History Center housed in the old rock school house next to the church.

In 1956 a new brick church was built on West Lake Drive and Bee Cave Road. The building consisted of a sanctuary and four classrooms. Men in the church worked on Saturdays and built a

manse on Allen Road. In the early 60's a two-story education wing was added to the church building and a white stone manse was built near the church. The church continued to grow and the manse was converted to extra classrooms. On April 27, 1980, a new sanctuary was dedicated, and the addition included a choir room and office space for the staff. Our present church was dedicated in October 1985. The church bell has been taken each time the church moved as part of its heritage. (Information taken from Eanes: Portrait of a Community written by Linda Vance, researched by Dorothy McRae Depwe). Once again our very old bell is ringing on Sunday mornings – thanks to the efforts and generosity of Dorothy Depwe, the bell tower design of John Harrison, the engineering expertise of Dick Clark, and the Facilities Committee (chaired by Liz Griesmyer). The Women of the Church (Circles) with Moderator, Anne Leatherman, donated the bell plaque which will be unveiled by charter-member families of the early church in our September 17 dedication.

THE MEMORIAL BENCHES

Harry Vine III was an active member of WHPC for 28 years. Throughout those years he served as an elder, taught the adult Sunday School class, and chaired the building committee for the Sunday School addition. The lovely redwood benches just outside the narthex has been given by Mrs. Ben (Esther) Riske in memory of Harry Vine. Mrs. Riske recalls Harry as a caring member of this church and community. It was her desire to honor his memory by providing this special resting place for those waiting for their car. The planters were given by the Vine family. The benches and planters were designed by Bo Spencer and were completed just before Easter 1989 under the direction of Harry Vine, Jr.

FRONT ENTRANCE

A portion of the condemnation proceeds, along with the work of Bill Petty and his Facilities Committee, have made possible our new front entrance featuring Austin stone masonry, the elevated Celtic cross, and attractive landscaping. We celebrate the delightful appeal of our new entrance in conjunction with our improved accessibility afforded by Bee Cave Road's completion.

THE MEDITATION TRAILS

The meditation trails area, located on the southern portion of our church property, is a unique addition to our church grounds, affording a natural setting for quiet walks and family picnics. Treb Praytor, Jay Furman, and Guy Dudley of Boy Scout Troop #30, under the auspices of the Facilities Committee, constructed two horseshoe pits, a volleyball court, a fireside conversation area, and an outdoor chapel in this beautiful hillside environment.

THE CHURCH BELL

This brass fire alarm bell weighing 756 lbs was cast in 1877 by L.M. Rumsey Mfg. Company, St. Louis Missouri. It was used in Austin until 1923 to summon volunteer firemen.

Given in 1928 to the new, rock Eanes Community Church (later Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church), it rang for services and on special occasions.

The church moved in 1956 and 1985 taking the bell as part of its heritage. The first Eanes Community Church was in the log cabin school in 1872.

(Plaque given by Women of Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church – 1989)