Hinson Memorial Baptist Church

The year was 1857, two years before Oregon statehood, when a group of citizens met at the home of merchant Josiah Failing, later mayor of Portland, to form First Baptist Church on October 26. Fifteen years later, First Baptist saw the need to start a mission Sunday school across the Willamette River in a sparsely populated area of small farms abutting thick forests and accessible only by ferry. Classes grew in number and size, and in 1879 First Baptist granted twenty of its members permission to organize a new church on the east side. It would be known as First Baptist Church of East Portland, with Rev. R.C. White as its pastor.

A women's missionary society was formed in 1885 to stimulate interest in missions but also in more social life. Ladies Pleasant Afternoon attracted women from outside the church. By 1892, and as a result of two revival meetings, the church had more than 100 members.

The first building of the church, dedicated in April 1896, was constructed on the corner of Seventh and Ankeny Streets. Two years earlier, the name had been changed to Second Baptist Church of Portland, reflecting its growing stature as a metropolitan church.

In 1901, "a feud between members of Second Baptist Church, waged along personal lines" took place—as reported in the *Oregonian* on April 1, 1910—and the split created Central Baptist Church. Nine years later, the congregations reconciled. With a membership of 339, they named their new church—on 20th and Ankeny Streets—Eastside Baptist Church. Rev. Albert Ehrgott was pastor, and the congregation's emphasis on missions in Italy, Poland, and China expanded to The Philippines and the Hopi Indians.

Support in worldwide missions grew under Dr. Walter B. Hinson, an Englishman who had pastored churches in Montreal, San Diego, Oklahoma City, and Portland (at First Baptist) and who had served the Baptist Home Missions Society for a year in 1915. When church membership reached nearly 1,400, a larger building was acquired from Central Christian Church on Southeast 20th and Salmon. The distinctive-looking building, with outer walls of gray sandstone quarried near Tenino, Washington, is still the home of the church in 2012.

So profound was the growth of the church under Dr. Hinson that the congregation voted to rename the church in his honor on April 8, 1926, two months after his death. His dream of starting a seminary became reality with the founding of Western Baptist Theological Seminary on October 4, 1927 (begun as Portland Baptist Bible Institute in 1925) at Hinson Church.

Dr. Albert Johnson, another Englishman, arrived in 1934 and served Hinson for twenty-one years. Under his leadership, and with a successful music program directed by Lauren B. Sykes (who served from 1928 to 1943), church membership grew so large that Easter Sunday services were held in Civic Auditorium (now Keller Auditorium). Johnson was instrumental in planning Judson Baptist College, which began its classes on the Hinson campus in 1956, the year after he left to assume the presidency of Western Baptist Seminary.

Over the years, Hinson Memorial started seven other Baptist churches, including Oak Grove, Montavilla, Burlingame, North Baptist, and Seaside. Under the leadership of Dr. Donald Baker (1974-1984), the Career Singles Sunday school class regularly attracted 300 people, who gathered in the Meier & Frank restaurant above the Lloyd Center ice rink. There were three Sunday morning services.

Hinson's campus expanded to five city blocks to accommodate its programs. Since 1996 and under the leadership of Rev. Bruce Boria, the church became a participant in the Buckman Neighborhood Association, sponsors neighborhood picnics in Colonel Summers Park and coffeehouse evenings at Starbucks, and participates in the annual Hawthorne Street Fair. In 2010, Dr. Michael Lawrence became senior pastor; church membership stands at 720; and Hinson's support of missions remains a focal point of its ministry.

Written by Ulrich H. Hardt

Further Reading:

MacColl, E. Kimbark, and Harry H. Stein. *Merchant, Money, and Power: The Portland Establishment, 1843-1913.*

Portland, Ore.: The Georgian Press, 1988.

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