

The History of Independence Baptist Church

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Independence Baptist occupies an important place in the history of Texas Baptists for several reasons. (1) It was one of the earliest churches organized in Texas. (2) It was the church of early Baylor University. (3) Well known Texans, most notably Sam Houston, belonged to the church. Today, the church continues its historic mission through weekly worship and through its fine museum of Baptist history.

Founded earlier as Coles Settlement, Independence was renamed in 1836. It is located in Washington County, twelve miles northeast of Brenham.

Thomas Cox and Thomas Spraggins organized the Independence Baptist Church in 1839. The membership grew to fifteen in its first year. The early church building burned in 1872; members built the current sanctuary in the same year. They later added a beautiful bell tower and an educational building.

In 1845 Union Baptist Association secured a charter to establish a university. Several communities made bids, and Independence was chosen. In 1846 Baylor began its coeducational program of instruction and remained in Independence for forty years. The church was closely associated with the university. Students and faculty attended church there, and Baylor presidents preached there.



Notable members in the history of the church include George W. Baines, ancestor of President Lyndon Baines Johnson; R. C. Burleson, longtime president of Baylor; Ann Luther Bagby, pioneer missionary to Brazil; and Sam Houston, Texas soldier and politician. Burleson baptized Houston in Rocky Creek, near the church, in 1854. Houston's wife, Margaret Lea, and her mother, Nancy Lea, are buried across the road from the church.

Today the church houses the Texas Baptist Historical Center-Museum, a superb little collection of Texas and Baptist memorabilia, including a splendid collection of pictures. Visitors may see Houston's seat in the church and also the nearby original campuses and ruins of Baylor University. Stately old live oaks cover the historic church grounds.

Since 1959, the church has annually hosted Texas Baptist Elder Statesman Day when the Baptist General Convention of Texas honors a retiree who has made a notable lifelong contribution to Texas Baptist education.

Independence Baptist is a small church in a quiet little town, but it may be judged the spiritual center of Texas Baptists.



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