Origin and Growth of Austin Assembly, 1894 until 1953

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In the year of 1894 Austin, Illinois was a small village just west of Chicago.

In the Spring of that year two brethren came from Avondale (Winsor Chase and James K. Pea) to explore the possibilities of establishing a testimony in the Village, which was at that time inhabited by a church-going community composed chiefly of Lutherans, Baptists and Methodists. Incidentally, at that time there were no saloons in the village, nor was there a Roman Catholic church in the vicinity in which the Austin Gospel Hall is presently located. In the fall of 1894 the two brethren, named above, moved to Austin with their families — this opening up the way for the establishment, in a small way, of an assembly in Austin. In the meantime the Gospel had been proclaimed at street corners; and among those who took an interest in this work, was that doughty pioneer Preacher Donald Ross, who spoke in the open air several times, and also visited the homes at which he left Gospel tracts. Early in the year of 1895 the families of William Pea and Forsyth Frazer came from Avondale; and were later joined by three Swedish families (Matson, Anderson and Hagland) who had been in fellowship with those known as exclusive brethren. The seven families decided to rent a Store at what was then called Ontario Street (now known as Ohio Street) and Parkside Avenue. There they observed the Lord's Supper, conducted a Sunday School, Gospel meetings on Sunday nights and also meetings during the week.

Gospel campaigns were conducted in the hall by Donald Ross, James Harous, Mr. Honeypenny, John Smith, Donald Munroe, Alexander Marshall, C. F. Rose, W. J. McClure and others. Tent meetings were also conducted in the district, and the meetings in the hall and tent resulted in conversions among the unsaved and in edification of saints. A small store was rented at the corner of Laramie and Chicago Avenues in 1900, and children's meetings were conducted there by Mr. Soper, Mr. Cole and Mr. M. Capp; some of the children were converted and added to the Assembly. About this time two of the leading brethren were taken from the little company of believers — Winsor Chase going to Evanston, Illinois on account of the removal of the business he was engaged in, and the other went home to be with the Lord after a few months illness. From 1901 until 1902 the believers were united with the West Side Meeting, located on Colorado Avenue near Madison Street. Early in 1905 the Austin Believers decided to return again and set up a testimony in their neighborhood, and this they did by renting Nissen's Hall which was located about four blocks East of Laramie Avenue on Chicago Avenue. The year of 1907 found the believers meeting in a store a few doors East of Laramie on Chicago Avenue, and in 1908 they were located in an upstairs Hall located at 419 N. Laramie Avenue. The leading brethren at this time were Tom Bendelow, G. N. Barnes, D. Stubbs, D. M. Kerr and Alec Anderson. The younger set were composed of John Duff, Robert Houston, Jr., William Murray, James Brown, Ralph Barnes, Elizabeth and Ann Gilmour, Mary and Alice Pea.

A short time later, Mr. Robert Houston, Sr., and the remainder of his family came from New York. Mr. & Mrs.

Robert Murray came from Kilmarnock, Scotland, and helped to swell the number of those in fellowship. Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Gilmour and the remainder of the family came in the year of 1912, and by this time there were about forty or fifty in fellowship. At this time there was a fairly good sized Sunday School, and Mr. C. F. Atwood, well known to the elder brethren, and who had associated with the assembly late in the year 1908, was appointed superintendent of the Sunday School. The Lord's Supper was observed each Lord's Day at 10:30 A.M., the Sunday School was conducted at 2:30 P.M. and the Gospel was proclaimed at 7:45 P.M. each Lord's Day evening. Various Evangelists preached in the Hall at 419 N. 52nd Avenue (as it was then named) from 1908 until 1915 when the believers occupied a newly built hall at 748 N. 51st Court (now named N. Leamington Avenue). Prominent among the Evangelists at this time was Mr. Robert McMurdo, who with his family had taken up residence in Austin, and at various times conducted a series of meetings, preaching the Gospel and ministering the Word with results following. Local brethren from time to time proclaimed the Gospel on Lord's Day at 7:45, and ministered the Word on Tuesday evenings at 7:45 P.M. These meetings, with speakers' names, were advertised in a local paper called the Austinite which was published and widely read throughout the community, and which give considerable space to Church news. A meeting was held on February 17, 1915 at AUSTIN GOSPEL HALL, 419 N. 52nd Avenue, and corporate name was adopted, viz., AUSTIN GOSPEL HALL INCORPORATED. Alec Anderson, Thomas Bendelow and C. F. Atwood, Trustees.

Plans were made for the securing the property at 746-748 N. 51st Court, and the erection of a Hall thereon at an estimated cost of $6500. The Assembly was to pay rental of 5% of cost to the Incorporated body.

Land was purchased as of March 15, 1915 for $1260. Building was contracted for in the month of May, 1915. Seats were purchased at a cost of $500.00 and other furnishings were donated. The building was erected at a cost of about $5250.

The opening Conference was held in the new Hall on Saturday August 16, 1915, and whereas a few minor details in connection with the building had to be attended to these did not delay the formal opening of the hall.

Those in Fellowship with the Austin Assembly were asked to lend money at 5% interest, and a sum of $6455 was subscribed (sufficient to cover the indebtedness), and an agreement was signed by all Note Holders, permitting payment of any or all notes at any time. These notes were taken up from time to time so that by June 1916, all notes were paid and indebtedness on the property was cleared. Incidentally Mr. C. F. Atwood took up approximately $5000.00 of the outstanding notes in order to make this possible. This action on the part of Mr. Atwood resulted from brotherly love, and a high attainment in CHRISTIAN

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Associated in fellowship with the Austin Assembly in early days were Mr. & Mrs. George Mizen, Mr. Eugene Peterson (now of Toronto), Miss G. Skinner, Mary & Alice Pea, Mrs. A. Houston, the Cameron Family, Mr. & Mrs. Fred Mizen, Mr. & Mrs. Ernie Bendelow, Mr. &

Mrs. W. Duncan, Dr. W. Scott. Later on came Mr. & Mrs. C. R. Welsher and a number of others from the Kostner Avenue Mission. The Skinners, from Elgin, the Simpsons from Kansas City, and influx of families from overseas helped to swell the number in fellowship to about 200.

A number of those in fellowship went over to the Irving Park district, held Gospel Meetings in a Store, aided by H. H. Harper they grew in numbers, and finally decided to build a Hall at 5614 Dakin Street. Another off-shoot of the Austin Assembly may be found in Norwood Gospel Chapel, even though they came directly from the Irving Park Gospel Hall. Mr. J. Willard Hoyle and others who are now in fellowship in Norwood Gospel Chapel were originally in Austin, and though separated geographically they are still in fellowship with those who meet in the place from whence they went out. Thus from a small beginning there are now three Assemblies in happy fellowship with one another.

The influence of the Austin Assembly will be far reaching in effect for some have gone from our midst to distant parts of the earth in order to proclaim the GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE BLESSED GOD to those who SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH. The following brethren and sisters were commended to the Lord's service at different times by the Austin Assembly:

Mr. Maitland — Angola (presently at home).

Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Davies — India (presently in England).

Harold H. Harper — U.S.A.

Mr. & Mrs. Edwin Gibbs — Natal.

Mr. & Mrs. Aden Ferguson — Natal.

Alfred P. Gibbs — U.S.A.

Mr. & Mrs. James Kenny — South America.

Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Rogers — Fr. Eq. Africa (presently at home).

Mrs. Alice Hey — France.

Mr. & Mrs. Ken. Engle — Philippines.

Violet Hendrickson — India (presently at home).

Mr. & Mrs. John Duff, Mr. & Mrs. James Brown, Mrs. Elizabeth Murray are the only ones remaining who were in fellowship in the early days, and after spending 45 years in Chicago, Mr. & Mrs. J. Brown are about to leave for Toronto, Canada.

Trustees at present date are John Duff, James Brown, C. R. Welsher, Donald Anderson and Henry T. Moffat.

The above written by JAMES BROWN.