

1958

WYNNE CHAPEL





PHOTO COURTESY OF JANET LOWRY

by Dara McCoy

50TH ANNIVERSARY

S

Sara Bernice Moseley, wife of Austin College president *emeritus* John D. Moseley, remembers watching from her home on Grand Avenue as a crane lifted the Sam Houston bell and steeple atop Wynne Chapel in 1958. This year, Wynne Chapel celebrates its 50th anniversary. The College's connection to the Presbyterian Church and the Wynne Chapel's usage have evolved dramatically since the building's construction. Yet, its presence still serves as a reminder of the College's Presbyterian history, an important tie to the church, and the nexus of religious and spiritual life on campus.

It was a generous gift from Toddie Lee Wynne, Sr., a well-known Texas oilman, civic leader, active Presbyterian, and former chair of the Austin College Board of Trustees, that funded the construction of Wynne Chapel. Mrs. Moseley remembers the excitement on campus of having a new building with a 900-person seating capacity for lectures, musical performances, and religious activities. On September 15, 1958, Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives, delivered the keynote address at the chapel's dedication. Mrs. Moseley said the chapel's construction also had great significance to President Moseley, who led Austin College from 1953 to 1978.

2008

"It was so important in his thinking that the College had a chapel, a building that was centrally located, and the fact that it faces the Administration Building was a very significant thing," she said. To the leaders who today enter Caruth Administration Building and make decisions concerning the College's future, the chapel's location provides a clear reminder of historical roots and modern ties to the church.

In 1958, Wynne Chapel was an important symbol of the College's Presbyterian history, tracing all the way back to Presbyterian missionary the Reverend Daniel Baker, who helped found the College, and to its legal ties. When the chapel was built, the College was a legal entity of the Presbyterian Church. In 1962, Dr. Moseley proposed redefining the legal link between the College and church in order to create more of a non-sectarian liberal arts college. Four years later, the Synod of Texas and Austin College severed legal ties and established a covenant relationship.

According to *Austin College: A Sesquicentennial History 1849-1999*, President Moseley described the covenant as "revisions designed to anticipate and avoid future problems in Church-State relationships by providing a broader base and flexibility of support through trustee leadership, recognizing that the regular benevolent budget of the Church cannot provide the increased necessary funds for maintaining a pace-setting institution."

The mid-1960s also saw a broad shift in attitude from students and faculty who criticized the long-established mandatory chapel services, held in Sherman Hall prior to Wynne Chapel's construction. The issue was hotly debated and eventually chapel service requirements were terminated, further denoting the College's shift to a non-sectarian institution.

WYNNE CHAPEL TODAY

Fifty years later, Wynne Chapel still stands watch over students and faculty as they cross the campus, a reminder of the Presbyterian Church ties and the opportunities for spiritual growth and outreach for all students. "How Great Thou Art" or some other hymn rings out from the chapel's Carillon bells at 4:45 p.m. each day, one of many tangible ways the chapel touches modern day campus life.

Despite the altered relationship with the church and changing attitudes about religious life in general over the past 50 years, Wynne Chapel remains an important fixture at Austin College. Opening Convocation, Family Weekend worship, and the annual holiday Service of Lessons and Carols are just a few College-wide events held in Wynne Chapel. The chapel is an important venue for campus music group performances, Austin College Leadership Award recipients, and special speakers such as Robert Engel, recipient of a Nobel Prize in Economics. Every year, the chapel is filled with young people who utilize the campus for Presbyterian youth events.


The building's evolution also is evidenced in the small chapel, which accommodates yoga classes, provides indoor practice space for the Aussies Dance Team when bad weather strikes, and hosts the

A bronze likeness of
Toddie Lee Wynne hangs
in the foyer of
Wynne Chapel.



Muslim Student Association prayers. "It's a space for the whole student body, the whole college community," said **John Williams '84**, college chaplain and director of Church Relations.

Though the chapel opens its doors to various activities within the student body, traditional Christian worship and activity in Wynne Chapel occurs regularly through midday prayers every Tuesday, communion and worship every Sunday night, and as a headquarters for ACTivators, a campus Presbyterian mobile youth ministry. "We're not going to hit you over the head with the cross, nor are we going to apologize that there's a cross on top of the steeple," Williams said. "Our commitment as a church-related institution is to take all students and their spirituality seriously."

For 50 years, Wynne Chapel has embodied the religious underpinnings of Austin College. The activities held within its walls, from mandatory chapel service with assigned seating to belly dancing classes, exemplify the transformation of church relations, religious thought, and the enduring relevance of the building. Mrs. Moseley, who has experienced the evolution of Wynne Chapel and church relations at Austin College, still feels as excited about the chapel as she did 50 years ago. "There's such activity coming out of the chapel," she said. "It's a real, live connection to the church." 



WEBXTRA
magazine.austincollege.edu

Ties to the Presbyterian Church Remain Strong



HAPPY 50TH

IN CELEBRATION OF WYNNE CHAPEL'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY:

- ❖ September 26 - November 16: Austin College **Archives Display** in the small chapel illustrates the 50-year history of Wynne Chapel.
- ❖ September 28: **Parent and Family Weekend Worship Service** at 11 a.m., with a sermon by the Reverend **Kary Wilshusen Rawlings '78**.
- ❖ October 26: **Homecoming Weekend Worship Service** at 11 a.m., with a sermon provided by the Reverend **Nancy Duff '73** at 11 a.m.
- ❖ November 13: Austin College **A Cappella Choir Concert** at 7:30 p.m., featuring the premiere of a choral work by Austin College's first lady **Anna Laura Page**, commissioned for the anniversary.
- ❖ November 14 - 15: **Grace Presbytery Meeting**, including the 2008 **Cunningham Lectures** by Dr. Cynthia Rigby, professor of systematic theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
- ❖ November 16: Official Worship Service in **Celebration of the 50th Anniversary** of Wynne Chapel's Dedication, including an A Cappella Choir performance of the choral piece commissioned for the anniversary and composed by **Anna Laura Page**. The Reverend **Laura Shelton Mendenhall '69** will speak at the 11 a.m. service.