A MISSIONARY CHURCH IN A FRONTIER SOCIETY

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FOREWORD

The story of the Episcopal Church in America, and more especially the church in Western Texas, is a fascinating narrative with all the characters and events that would make a good Hollywood film. America really was a place where immigrants came in order to practice their faith in a way they desired, and Western Texas really did have Indians, Indian raids, cavalrymen and Texas Rangers chasing Indians and bandits deep into Mexico. There really were dusty little villages that grew up around military forts that sported saloons, gambling houses, and ladies of the evening. Itinerant preachers, and circuit riders did exist, and bishops traveling to far-flung reaches of the state really did travel by stagecoach, steamship, wagon, buggy and later rail car. But to understand this story one must start at the beginning, and so, that is where we start.
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN AMERICA

The story of the Episcopal church in America is deeply rooted in the story of English colonization in the new world. From the time the first English explorers read a service of Morning Prayer from The Book of Common Prayer on American soil, the English presence in the New World sought only to replicate the expression of Christianity it had inherited from the mother country. The Anglican Church grew steadily in the Colonies, and in 1671 Virginia recorded 48 Anglican parishes, which number had increased to 107 by the time of the American Revolution. Unfortunately for the Church in America, governance of their transplanted faith rested with the Bishop of London, and requests for a Bishop of the Colonies were ignored. It was on this Colonial Anglican Church that the strains of the American Revolution fell most oppressively, and those difficulties continued on into the nineteenth century. Struggling to survive after the break with England, the Episcopal Church began to consider missionary efforts beyond the boundaries of English America, and such topic was the subject of discussion in the General Convention of 1811. However, no action was taken on the matter until 1838 when Leonidas Polk was appointed the first Bishop of the Southwest.

In 1838 Leonidas Polk, an ordained Episcopal priest, plantation owner, and later a Confederate General, was handed the difficult task of advancing the Episcopal Church into an immense territory that included a part of Texas, Arkansas, the Indian territory of Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The appointment of Polk as the new bishop of the territory marked a revolutionary change in the way of thinking by church leaders. Episcopal leaders sought to redefine the role of the church in America as missionary and evangelical in scope and made domestic mission a priority. The big question, however, was how to get this new church into a territory where the Episcopal church was virtually unknown — a land with few roads or well-established towns. Yet Bishop Polk accepted the appointment and shouldered the challenge of extending the church into this vast new wilderness and set to work with vigor and optimism. A grand adventure was about to unfold in the western lands of America.

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2 Ibid., p. 37.
3 Ibid., p. 38.
A MISSIONARY CHURCH IN A HARD LAND

In 1845, when Texas joined the Union as the 28th state, the settled western boundary of the new state ran along a line from Laredo north to San Antonio, and then continued north along the 98th meridian to the Red River. West of that line lay a vast territory unsettled by the Spanish, the Mexicans, or the Anglo Americans and subject to the deadly control of the Comanche, Kiowa and Apache Indians. It was a land not only subject to Indian raids, but blocked by a thousand miles of dry, unforgiving desert, criss-crossed by deep canyons and high mountains, and characterized by oppressive heat in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. Even worse, this was a place with little water for the traveler. The territory presented a monumental challenge to anyone seeking a way west or looking for land to settle and cultivate. Yet, with the help of the United States Army and the railroads, the settlers came and established farms, ranches, and towns. With the towns came the churches, and many of the original Episcopal churches in West Texas were planted in small places on the far edge of civilization.

THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT

From the earliest time West Texas presented an impenetrable hostile human barrier to settlement and was a place the Spanish and Mexicans called “The Comancharie” due to the fierce Comanche Indians that occupied the land. It is one of history’s great ironies that Mexico encouraged Americans to settle Texas in the 1820s and 1830s because they wanted a buffer against the Comanches, a sort of insurance policy on their western borderlands. Those same Americans later revolted against the Mexicans. But the country also formed a physical barrier to settlement, as it was a vast wasteland known as the “Great American Desert,” and it was the last part of the country to be settled. However, the soil that rolled on toward the setting sun held the settlers’ hopes and dreams, and the wagons continued to move westward, even though the pioneers had been warned about this unforgiving country. The push westward played into the national policy of “manifest destiny,” and to pacify this wild territory the government set about to establish forts on the frontier to protect the settlers and encourage settlement.

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5 *ibid.*., p. 25.
6 *ibid.*., p. 39.
8 *ibid.*., p. 13.
THE ARMY SOLUTION

In the 1840s Washington politicians and Army generals knew very little about fighting Indians, and the first forts established in the Texas borderlands were poorly equipped and manned mostly by infantry on mules. The Army at the time had no formal cavalry branch, and infantry mounted on mules offered only one danger to the Plains Indians, which was the possibility that the Indians might laugh themselves to death when confronted with the comical sight of infantry soldiers on mules\(^9\). In the early days these forts never adequately served their purpose of protecting the frontier as they were too static in the face of the guerrilla war tactics used by the Plains Indians, and were too small and too far apart to respond to Indian raids\(^10\). Even so, the Army came and the forts were built from Brownsville to El Paso and north to the Oklahoma Territory. In 1845, with the help of the Army, the business of West Texas settlement began in earnest.

THE SAN ANTONIO-EL PASO ROAD

Following the Mexican War, interest in establishing a road through the vast 600-mile rugged wilderness of Western Texas from San Antonio to El Paso gained national importance. That interest intensified when gold was discovered in California, and prospectors were looking for a fast way to get to the gold fields. In 1849 two separate expeditions set out to find a safe route across West Texas. One route, known as the lower road, would become one of the major corridors of travel across Texas, and thousands followed the road west to New Mexico and on to California. However, those travelers moved in constant fear of attack by Apache, Kiowa and Comanche warriors\(^11\). The lower road also opened the land for settlement by farmers and ranchers, and small towns sprouted up along the way and close to the protection of the Army forts. Settlements became villages and villages became towns, and with towns came stores and schools. By the 1850s all the elements were present for the planting of churches in West Texas and the spread of God’s gospel to this new land.

\(^10\)ibid.
THE ARMY CHANGES THE GAME
-1855-

By 1855 the U. S. Congress had had enough of the frontier violence in Texas, and on May 4th of that year authorized the formation of the Second U. S. Cavalry Regiment, specifically designed for service on the Texas frontier. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis hand picked the best horses and best horsemen, supplied the unit with the latest equipment, and set out to take the fight to the hostile Indian tribes of Texas. The unit left Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri, on October 27, 1855 and crossed into Texas on December 15, 1855, at which time the command was divided into two units. Major William Hardee took a detachment of four companies to establish Camp Cooper on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River in present day Throckmorton County, while the larger contingent continued on to establish headquarters at Fort Mason in present day Mason, Texas. Over the next six years the Second Cavalry had more than forty engagements against Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, and Mexican marauders, and conducted scores of scouting expeditions in west and northwest Texas. The Second Cavalry was known for its outstanding officers and produced sixteen officers who later served as generals in the American Civil War.

THE FIRST EPISCOPAL SERVICE IN TEXAS

On Christmas Day in 1838, Caleb Smith Ives, an Episcopal priest, celebrated the Holy Eucharist at Matagorda, Texas, a village situated at the mouth of the Colorado River where the river enters Matagorda Bay. This is believed to be the first time such a service had been celebrated in Texas according to the Episcopal rite. Rev. Ives, a native of Vermont, arrived in Texas in 1838 and established an Episcopal Church in Matagorda, although he was a true missionary priest and held occasional services in Brazoria and organized St. John’s Parish in Victoria. Caleb Ives continued to hold the pastorate at Christ Church, Matagorda, where his wife operated Matagorda Academy, said to be one of the best academies in Texas at the time. When Christ Church, Matagorda was organized it was the most southern and western Protestant Episcopal Church in America. Caleb Ives became ill in 1849 and returned to Vermont to recover but died on July 27, 1849.

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12Fehrenbach, op. cit., p. 496-497.
13The Handbook of Texas, Austin : Texas State Historical Association, 1952.
THE MISSIONARY DISTRICT OF THE SOUTHWEST
-1838-

During the period when Texas existed as an independent republic from 1836 to 1846, it was placed under the Missionary District of the Southwest and its new Bishop, Leonidas Polk. However, when Texas joined the Union, the new state was shifted to the Domestic Missionary Field of the Episcopal Church. Significant progress had been made in Texas by that time, and in 1849 the Diocese of Texas was formed with six organizing parishes. Unfortunately, over a period of time two separate men were nominated to be the first bishops of Texas, and both declined, and it was not until 1859 with the nomination and acceptance by Alexander Gregg that the diocese had a leader. Texas continued as a single diocese until 1874 when The Missionary District of Western Texas was established by Good Shepherd Episcopal Church of Corpus Christi and thirteen other Episcopal churches. With this new alignment came a new leader when Robert Elliott was nominated and consecrated as the bishop of this new missionary district.

THE MISSIONARY DISTRICT OF WESTERN TEXAS
-1874-

In 1874 the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church set apart from the Diocese of Texas the Missionary District of Western Texas as a vast territory in the mission field extending from the Texas Gulf Coast all the way to El Paso. This area was bordered on the south by the Rio Grande River, and in this territory a number of small settlements had already grown up in the shadow of the Army posts along the U. S. and Mexican border. By 1874 an Episcopal presence was well established in those communities. Robert W. B. Elliott, the new Bishop of the Missionary District, was reported to have worked tirelessly to start new churches wherever the railroads were built but did not hesitate to evangelize in areas where the only transportation was horse-drawn. Bishop Elliott addressed the Diocesan Conference in 1878 and reported that he had visited Fort Clark on July 15, 1877, to conduct services there and then went on to Eagle Pass to hold church services in a school room the night of July 18, 1877. Sadly, this hard-working young bishop died in 1887 at the age of 47. A year later James Steptoe Johnston became Bishop of the Missionary District of Western Texas. During his tenure as bishop, Johnston is remembered for establishing the West Texas Military Academy (now TMI - The Episcopal School of Texas), for admitting a congregation of African-Americans as St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, and for helping to found St. Philip’s College.

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\(^{15}\)David White, Diocese of West Texas Archivist, *Report on Our Bishops.*
By 1904 great progress had been made in the Missionary District of Western Texas, and the district was admitted to General Convention as a self-governing diocese. The new subdivision of the Episcopal Church took the name Diocese of West Texas and at the time stretched from Brownsville all the way to El Paso. Bishop James Steptoe Johnston was elected as the first bishop of the new Diocese of West Texas. In 1911 the area west of the Pecos River became part of the Diocese of New Mexico, later renamed the Diocese of the Rio Grande.

REDEEMER EPISCOPAL CHURCH, EAGLE PASS
-1887-

One of the first of seven United States Army posts established along the U.S.-Mexican border between 1848 and 1849 was Fort Duncan. Established at a crossing of the Rio Grande River at present day Eagle Pass, the fort was built to protect settlers from Indian raids and bandit activity. Fort Duncan opened on March 27, 1849, when Captain Sidney Burbank occupied the site with the First U. S. Infantry. Army Chaplains at Fort Duncan held Episcopal services in the area from the earliest times, and an Episcopal presence continued in the Eagle Pass area from the arrival of the Army until a formal church was built in Eagle Pass. More important, just as Army Chaplains undoubtedly held the first Episcopal services in the area, Army families formed the foundation of the frontier Episcopal churches and contributed much to the life of those mission churches in the early years.

Eagle Pass, in those early days, was a fairly typical border settlement. It was described at the time as “a good specimen of a frontier town - no Lord’s Day and no churches, but a spirit of improvement, moral and religious as well as material, is now taking possession of the minds of many of its people. There is at least a desire to have churches as well as barrooms and gambling saloons”.

Eagle Pass and the village of Eagle Pass were ready for respectability. As stated earlier there was a strong connection between the citizens of Eagle Pass and the Fort Duncan chaplains, and those men played a major part in the religious life of Eagle Pass. It was reported that Chaplain J. C. Laverty, U.S.A., Fort Duncan, had held regular Episcopal services in Eagle Pass.

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16 D. White report.
Pass. We also know that Rev. Herbert S. Smith was appointed Chaplain of the Third U.S. Infantry at Camp Eagle Pass, and at the time Redeemer Episcopal Church had no rector, so Chaplain Smith served as rector of the church for three years. On June 17, 1883, the Rt. Rev. Robert Elliott visited in Eagle Pass, and using a $500.00 donation made by the Eagle Pass Ladies Aid Society, purchased a plot of land on St. John Square (now Plaza San Juan) and began plans to erect an Episcopal Church. By 1887 the church building was completed. The Reverend A. H. Noll became the first resident priest of Redeemer Episcopal Church, and initiated services in February 1888. Bishop James S. Johnston consecrated the new church building on Ascension Day, May 15, 1890, and by January 1895 Redeemer was designated a parish of the Missionary District of Western Texas. Redeemer Episcopal Church is not only the oldest Protestant church in Eagle Pass, but one of the oldest in the Diocese of West Texas. In 1892 it was reported in the Galveston News that Redeemer Episcopal Church of Eagle Pass, Texas was “one of the most elegant on the frontier, and services are well attended.” The beauty of the little church in Eagle Pass continues to this day and is a joy to behold. Because of the frontier history of Redeemer Episcopal Church and its connection to the military, there are many intriguing facts about the church. A large set of steps separates Madison Street from the sidewalk and the entrance to the church. The church was built in the days of horses, carriages, shays, and wagons, and the approach to the church was constructed in such a way that a buggy or carriage could pull up in front of the church and the ladies disembark onto a step level with their seat in the buggy or carriage. Undoubtedly, many a horse passed a pleasant hour on Sunday morning waiting for the master to return from church.

Redeemer Episcopal Church was important in the lives of Army soldiers stationed at Fort Duncan and Camp Eagle Pass, and the beautiful grounds of the church provided a frequent opportunity for social events as well as spiritual purposes. One of the memorials donated to the church was the three-pronged altar candlesticks given by soldiers of Camp Eagle Pass in memory of Helen Francis Warren Pershing and Anne and Margaret Pershing, the wife and children of General John J. Pershing. A tragic fire took their lives when their home at the Presidio in San Francisco caught fire and burned. Probably the most unusual memorial in the church and the only one of its type in the diocese is an icon of the Virgin and Child that hangs near the sacristy door and was presented to the parish in 1918 in commemoration of the first service held in the church by the Greek Orthodox Branch of the Holy Catholic Church. Finally, one of the unusual distinctions of Redeemer Episcopal Church is that among the rectors that served the church over the years, two became bishops.

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20 Worrell.
21 Burroughs, p. 3.
22 Texas Historical Commission Plaque - 1978.
23 The Galveston News, February 8, 1892.
24 Worrell.
25 Simpson, Mary Reed, Dedication Ceremony Speech.
The Reverend R. E. Dicus served as rector and then became Bishop Suffragan of the Diocese of West Texas, and the Reverend E. L. Browning served as rector and became Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.26

ST. ANDREW’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, BRACKETTVILLE
-1867-

Perhaps the most important of picket forts established by the United States Army in the Texas borderlands was Fort Clark, at present day Brackettville, Texas. Fort Clark was the largest of the forts along the border, and was designed to connect to the line of forts going north all the way to Fort Worth. It was surveyed to be located on a bluff overlooking the Chihuahua Road west of San Antonio where it met the Las Moras Springs, and the U. S. government leased 3,866 acres of land from Samuel A. Maverick for $600.00 a year. The Indian menace in the area was so bad at the time that the general in command made a requisition to Texas Governor Elisha Pease for six companies of Texas Rangers to be stationed at the fort to assist in patrolling the region and to conduct campaigns against the hostiles. The colorful history of Fort Clark is the stuff of books and Hollywood movies and was commanded by a veritable Who’s Who of U. S. Army Generals, with names such as MacKenzie, Bullis, Patton, and Wainwright.27 After Fort Clark was established in 1852 the village of Las Moras built up near the fort and around a store owned by Oscar B. Brackett. The town, renamed Brackettville for the store owner, became a stop on the San Antonio-El Paso Road and was said to be one of the “liveliest burgs in West Texas, where night life could only be compared to the saloons and gambling places that existed in the early days of gold excitement in California and the Klondike”28. With sin of all sorts available in the village, some thought it was time for a more wholesome environment, and with the help of Army chaplains, religion came to this little piece of the wild west, when St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church was established. Some churches mark their beginning from the time the first congregation was formed, and some from the date the first church building was dedicated. St. Andrew’s proudly declares that it is the oldest church in the Western Convocation of the Diocese of West Texas and one of the oldest in the Diocese as the church was formally organized in 1867 under the leadership of the Rev. T. C. Stanley, an Episcopal priest and U. S. Army chaplain stationed at Fort Clark.29 The first services were held in a hospital tent, and from that time it was called St. Andrew’s. In 1870 Chaplain Eglington Barr reported that services were being regularly held “in the open air, in a house, in hospital tents, and frequently in a picket building with a grass roof” near the present day Kinney County Courthouse. Because of “annoying” background noise during Sunday services caused by

26 Texas Historical Commission Plaque.
28 ibid.
29 Interview with Lisa Conoly, St. Andrew’s Secretary and historian.
horse racing, the community began closing businesses and ending horse racing on Sundays³⁰.

The relationship between St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church and Fort Clark continued from the earliest days of the U. S. Army presence in Brackettville to the date the fort was abandoned after World War II. Chaplains serving at Fort Clark also served the St. Andrew’s congregation. On October 9, 1890, a decision was made to erect a building for the church, and by May of 1891 services were held in the new St. Andrew’s church building. St. Andrew’s was not only the first Protestant church in Brackettville but also the origin of the first school in the community when Chaplain Barr and Mrs. Agnes Ballantyne, a member of the church, organized a day school for the children of the community.

The building of the railroads can be a blessing or a curse to a community. To Bracketville it was the latter, when the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railroad was built in 1883 as a part of what would become the Southern Pacific line and the second transcontinental railroad. It bypassed Brackettville twelve miles to the south and through the tiny village of Spofford. With that decision, what had promised to be one of the major cities west of San Antonio, Brackettville instead became a small town. However, one of the places that benefitted from the new railroad was San Felipe Del Rio, as the line connected to the small farming village thirty miles to the west of Brackettville³¹. One more example of land surveyors and railroad bosses, with a simple decision, determining the future of two communities.

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³⁰Haenn., op. cit., p.
St. James Episcopal Church is another of those churches that was and still is strongly connected to the military. The town originally known as San Felipe Del Rio was the location of San Felipe Springs, the second largest springs in Texas. Good water, good location on the border and proximity to the San Antonio-El Paso Road encouraged the Army to maintain an outpost in Del Rio called Camp San Felipe (later re-named Camp Del Rio). In 1871 U. S. Army Chaplain D. Engleton Barr, an Episcopal priest stationed at Fort Clark, conducted the first Episcopal services at Perry’s Store just west of San Felipe Creek. Perry’s Store still stands today, and in 1871 the store was the largest store between San Antonio and El Paso, and served as a courthouse, Masonic Lodge, store, saloon and post office. Visiting ministers continued to hold services in the Pafford House until a school house was built for the community. In 1883 a school house was built in Del Rio and on the first Sunday in March, 1883, the Reverend J. T. Hutchinson celebrated Holy Communion in the school house. The service marked the beginning of St. James Episcopal Church in Del Rio. By 1884 Captain Randlett, commander of the Army Garrison at Camp Del Rio, and the Del Rio Episcopalians began plans to construct a church building. That new church on Garfield Street was completed the same year, and Bishop Robert Elliott was to arrive by railroad the next day to officiate at the dedication festivities. Unfortunately, a cyclone hit Del Rio the day before the ceremony and leveled the church. Still, Bishop Elliott arrived in Del Rio and conducted services in the ruins of the church and confirmed three persons. It took two more years for a new church building to be erected, and that building was dedicated by Bishop Elliott assisted by the Rev. A. W. Burroughs, the mission priest at the time. By 1919 St. James had become a self-supporting parish, and in 1922 a new brick church building was built at the present location of the church on Greenwood Street in Del Rio. The 1922 church is now Prosser Hall and serves as the parish hall.

As stated earlier, St. James Church is still strongly connected to the military. Del Rio is home to Laughlin Air Force Base, the largest air training command base in the U.S. Air Force. Air Force officers, enlisted people, civil servants and Air Force families continue to make St. James Episcopal Church and School their spiritual home.

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32 Texas Historical Commission Plaque at site of Camp Del Rio- 1968.
33 La Hacienda, p. 68
34 La Hacienda, p. 68
35 Interview with Rev. John Fritz, Rector of St. James, Del Rio and Liz Miller, Church Secretary and Historian.
CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, LAREDO - 1881 -

Christ Episcopal Church of Laredo is a church that can trace its origins to both the U. S. Army and the railroad. Fort McIntosh was established in Laredo in 1849, and from the beginning Episcopal services were held at the fort and in the town. The first vestry of Christ Episcopal Church included Fort McIntosh officers Colonel Calvin G. Brewster, Captain Wells, and Major Sam Sumner. Bishop Robert Elliott came to Laredo on February 20, 1881, via a newly-constructed narrow gauge rail line from Corpus Christi to Laredo and, on that occasion, held services in the jail courtroom (where the La Posada Hotel now stands), baptized two adults and five children, and confirmed several other church members. That same evening $1,000 was raised to build a church and one William Adams donated a lot on Farragut Street for the building. Bishop Elliott encouraged the building project but requested that “no card playing or raffling” be allowed in the fund raising campaign. The building was completed in 1883, and a stained glass window of Christ the Good Shepherd was ordered by Good Shepherd Episcopal Church of Corpus Christi, but mistakenly shipped to Laredo where it was installed and dedicated. Even though Christ Church outgrew its facilities by the 1960s and was moved to the present Lane Street address, the original building still stands today in downtown Laredo.36

When Bishop Elliott first visited Laredo in 1881, he fell in love with the church and the town and even spent a six-week vacation in Laredo in 1882. Bishop Elliott donated the rose window to the church which, even though it has undergone extensive repairs, is still a part of the church today. Also, Bishop Elliott spent considerable time in Laredo during two yellow fever epidemics and during that time served as rector of Christ Church.37

Christ Church, Laredo, has a common interest with St. James, Del Rio, in that both had a strong connection to Army chaplains and their work to establish Episcopal churches in the community, but both also have a strong connection to the United States Air Force. Just as Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio continues to provide many military families to the St. James congregation, Webb Air Force Base of Laredo offered a church home to many Air Force families. Even though Webb Air Force Base closed in the 1970's, many former air force families continue to maintain contact with Christ Church.38

36 The Laredo Times, Wednesday, September 5, 1962.
37 Interview with Rev. Paul A. Frey, Rector of Christ Church, Laredo.
38 Ibid.
ST. PHILIP’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, UVALDE
- 1881 -

It has been said that wherever the railroad was built, Bishop Robert Elliot would go to establish churches. However, it is known that to get to the Rio Grande Valley in the early days of his tenure there was no rail service to that region, and Bishop Elliot had to get to Corpus Christi first, then take a steamship from Corpus Christi to Brownsville in order to establish churches and serve congregations in the Valley. Even more interesting was the adventure Bishop Elliott enjoyed in establishing St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Uvalde. In setting up forts to protect the western frontier of Texas, the U.S. Army worked up the Rio Grande River and west out of San Antonio. Fort Lincoln was built in 1849 near present day D’Hanis and was commanded by Captain James Longstreet (later of Civil War fame). When the frontier moved past Fort Lincoln, the fort was abandoned in 1852. West of Fort Linclon along Leona Creek and next to a high hill just south of present day Uvalde, Texas, the Army built Fort Inge in 1849. Fort Inge remained active until Fort Clark, forty miles to the west of Fort Inge, took over the protection of the frontier. By 1880 Uvalde was a small frontier community of approximately 500 residents, and efforts began to establish an Episcopal church in the area. In 1881 a group of communicants from Uvalde County appealed to Bishop Robert Elliott to set up a church to serve the community. In July of that year, Bishop Elliott and his Chaplain, Wallace Carnahan, set out from San Antonio in a covered wagon to travel to Uvalde to begin the process of planting an Episcopal church in the area. The journey west took three days of hard travel, and they camped along the way. By July 10 they reached Uvalde and conducted services. St. Philip’s Episcopal Church marks its beginning from that 1881 trip, and by 1882 the little congregation had erected a church. The Reverend T. C. Stanley became the first priest to serve St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, and Doctor Stanley also served as the town doctor. St. Philip’s Episcopal Church still occupies the same property upon which the original church was built in 1882.

39 Interview with Rev. Don Lee, Archdeacon of the Diocese of West Texas.
CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION, MONTELL
-1889-

One very interesting place in the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas is the little community of Montell, Texas. As early as February of 1762 there was a Christian presence in the Nueces Canyon area around Montell. The Spanish mission Nuestra Señora De La Canderlaria was established there in 1762 by Franciscan missionaries for the protection and conversion of the Lipan Apaches. Unfortunately, due to the “insincerity” of the Indians and devastating Indian raids by the Apaches and Comanches, the mission was abandoned in 176741. However, Christianity did not disappear from the area, and the Nueces River Canyon was on a patrol route from Fort Clark just thirty miles to the southwest, to Fort McKavett to the north42. In addition, the canyon became ranch country, and in the 1880s local ranchers established an Episcopal presence in the community. In 1880 Bishop Elliott held the first Episcopal services in Montell, and shortly thereafter, donations from “around the world” allowed the Rev. Richard Galbraith and the little Episcopal congregation to build the Church of the Ascension. The first services were held in the church on Christmas Day in 1890, and the church was consecrated by Bishop J. S. Johnston in 189143. The Episcopal Church of the Ascension is the quintessential “church in the wildwood.” What makes it especially interesting is the beautiful Tiffany window behind the altar, donated to the church by John Jacob Astor. A Sunday morning service of communion at Ascension Montell is a wonderful experience44.

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41 State of Texas Monument, 1936.
42 Cusack and Prittle, op. cit., p. 64.
44 Interview with Rev. Casey Berkhouse, Vicar of Ascension Episcopal Church, Montell.