

First Baptist Church began 75 years ago in 'chapel car'

The First Baptist Church of Douglas is celebrating its 75th anniversary this week with a special service on Sunday, March 25 — 75 years to the day the church was officially organized in Douglas.

The Baptist church had its unofficial start in Douglas beginning in January 1915 with services held in a "chapel car" called "Glad Tidings." There were seven chapel cars in existence serving various places in the west. After entering a western town, the car would be parked on a siding, and the evangelist/missionary would spend his days on house-to-house visits and children's meetings, and his evenings holding services in the car.

The chapel car was equipped with a sanctuary, complete with lectern, pews for about 125 people, and an organ. One end also served as a parsonage, complete with living room, kitchenette, and sleeping quarters.

Chapel cars were the brainchild of Dr. Wayland Holt, a Baptist preacher in the late 1800s. After a tour of the west, he noticed a lack of churches in small towns. He mentioned the idea of a rail car to his brother, railroad executive Colgate Holt, who then organized a "chapel car syndicate" to raise money to build the cars.

Services were held in the chapel car until 1916, when there was a greater need for it elsewhere. From 1916 until 1923, the church rented Unity Hall for its services while funds were raised for a building on a newly purchased lot at the site of the church's present location. A new building was completed in 1923. Two additions have since been added in 1957 and 1986.

Since the time of the chapel car, the Douglas First Baptist congregation has grown from about 12 people, to more than 200. An anniversary service will be held at 10:30 a.m. at the church on the corner of Fourth and Oak Street.



A view of the inside of the chapel car "Glad Tidings" which served as the sanctuary for the Baptist church in Douglas from 1915 to 1917. The train car also included a parsonage for the missionary and his wife.