

OAKES, HARRIET GIBBONS

INTERVIEW

#12028

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NAME. Harriet Gibbons-Oakes.

Biographic sketch

From personal interview with the subject.

504 East Kirk St., Hugo, Oklahoma.

Hazel E. Greene, Journalist.

Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149.

November 1, 1937.

Date of birth-----1887

Place of birth-----Goodwater, about 16
miles southeast present town of Hugo.

Father -----Joseph Parker Gibbons.

Place of birth-----South Carolina.

Mother-----Mary Tolbert-Gibbons.

Birthplace-----Arkansas.

Father and mother, J. P. Gibbons and Mary Gibbons, are
lying side by side in the Goodland cemetery, about four
miles southwest of Hugo, Oklahoma.

Father died in 1918.

My father , Joseph Parker Gibbons, was born in South Carolina, but was raised in Arkansas. He went to common schools for a few years, then he attended the Arkansas College at Batesville, Arkansas, by working his way through. It is a Presbyterian College, and he prepared himself for the ministry. He married my mother, Mary Tolbert, about 1863, and immediately afterward the Presbyterian Synod sent him as a Missionary to the Indians at Goodwater Church in the Choctaw Nation, and in what is now Choctaw County, about 10 miles southeast of the present town of Hugo, Oklahoma. There was also a Goodwater church in McCurtain County but this is a different church. When they arrived at Goodwater, there was no parsonage so Thomas Oakes and his wife, Harriet Everidge Oakes , took them in their home. Here they lived for perhaps five or six years, maybe longer, when father built a house close by. But Solomon Hotema, a full-blood Choctaw Indian, so much wanted my father to come up to Goodland and live that he said he would give him a hundred and sixty-odd acres of land. As our house at Goodwater was small, only a couple of rooms, father tore them down and re-built , adding about three more

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rooms, a hall, and porches all around. This house was located about a mile from Goodland on what is now the Choctaw County Poor Farm and that house is now used as the Poor Farm home.

It is still a nice house. I think that was about 1896.

Father put a lot of improvements on that land, and then when Solomon Motema died, he lost it. It seemed that Motema had put the wrong numbers in the deed which he had given my father and when father attempted to have his deed recorded it showed only about twenty acres over in the woods about a mile away. Father didn't want that, so Mrs. Motema and the lawyers she employed got the place that we had spent so much time and money on. Then father found that he had to move, the Synod (Presbyterian) built us a home over close to the church and school. This house was to be his as long as he lived. My stepmother, Mrs. Della Gibbons, lives in it now and it will be hers as long as she lives. Then it reverts to the church. On our move from Goodwater to Goodland school and church the team got scared ran away, and broke the wagon tongue, and father had to cut a pole and make another coupling pole and wagon tongue before we could proceed on our way. Mother lost her smoothing irons and we had to go to Paris, Texas, to get

more.. Paris was our trading point. We even got our mail there for a long time; Father went over there about once every two or three months; he'd go one day and come back the next with a wagon load of flour, sugar and coffee all of which he bought by the barrel. Calico he bought by the bolt, also white "drilling" for making drawers for men. I cannot understand why we didn't get mail at Goodland post office as it was in the home of Mr. Silas Bacon, only about a mile away. Of course we never got much mail of any kind, anyway, but I remember his getting it in Paris until Grant and Goodland were built on the railroad.

I recall father going to Goodland to the Masonic Lodge. I remember once when I was just about nine or ten years old the Masons for some reason had a big meeting which included business, a banquet and a dance afterward in the Lodge hall. Father went, and took me. That was one of the most wonderful experiences I ever had in my life. My world had been right at the churches where we had always lived and ^{here} I was getting to see a dance. Father attended the business meeting and then looked on at the dance for a little while. Some of the boys wanted

to take me out on the floor and teach me how to dance and of course I wanted to try, but father vetoed that. However, my cup of happiness was brimming over with just getting to go to a town on a railroad and to the dance and banquet.

Other was in bad health and not able to go. The Synod transferred my father from the Goodwater Church to Goodland and one thing I remember about that move was father catching turkeys out of trees to take over there with us; tame turkeys. The woods were full of wild turkeys, too.

The first years my folks lived at Goodwater my father rode an old bay horse called Old Matt. Once when he was on his way from Goodwater to Goodland to preach, as he came to the fork in the road that old horse refused to go toward Goodland. He would go any way ^{but} toward Goodland. Father tried and tried; at last he gave him the reins and he returned home. A few days later he heard that there was an election at Goodland Church and that there were a lot of drunken Indians there, waiting for him to kill him. Those drunk Indians said that the reason they meant to kill papa was because so many Indians worshipped him and they did not want their people worshipping him instead of

God. They said he had gone among them preaching, teaching and doctoring them until too many of them thought him a God. He always said it was the hand of God that forced that old horse to turn back home instead of going on. Another time the old horse refused to go on and he remembered that other time so he returned home to find me very ill and in need of a doctor. There was none nearer than twenty miles so he mounted his horse again and went after the doctor who perhaps saved my life, because my father and "Grandma Oakes" with their simple remedies did not know what to do for me. Nearly every grandmother in the country practiced midwifery. "Grandma" Oakes delivered me, and named me for herself. Papa went among the Indians when they were sick, reading the Bible to them, praying, giving them pills and chill tonic, salves etc., until some of them thought he was as good as any doctor. There were so few white people around us. They were nearly all full-blood Indians who knew nothing about tilling the soil and producing something to eat. He taught them how to farm, how to take care of their sick and taught them Christianity. If any of them died he made their coffins and buried them. I've seen him make many a coffin. I have known him to walk from Goodland to Goodwater, about twenty miles, just to read the Bible

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to old Grandma Harriet Oakes, after she went blind. He got so he could not ride a horse without pain and the roads were bad for a buggy; so he just walked miles and miles. I've known him to walk to Kosoma, away up above Antlers. He'd go on Friday, preach on Saturday night and Sunday, go hunting and fishing until time to preach the next Saturday and Sunday, and then return home, and walk every step of the way. I have known him to walk thirty miles on Friday, rest Saturday, preach Sunday, and return home on Monday. In his later years he always walked to his churches.

As his oldest child, I kept house after Mother died and sometimes I would be so frightened I would be nearly sick. I'd hear drunk Indians whooping and shooting and I would put out the lights, and put the little ones to bed. There was a crazy Indian who would come to our house, too. I'd feed him all he would eat, then he would go to sleep and when he would awaken he would go away. I surely was afraid of him.

Mother died when I was thirteen. The only white neighbors we had were the Goodings, a mile away and Mrs. Gooding would come over often and help me with her motherly advice. They were the only white neighbors we had for a good many years.

I had gone to Goodland to school all my life and for the last two years had been the only one in my class so, when I was about fourteen my father wrote to my mother's half-sister who was a widow with one child, and told her that he needed her for a housekeeper and to take care of the little children because I had gone as far as I could at Goodland and he must send me away to school. I attended the Arkansas College at Batesville, and worked my way through two years. I hadn't time to specialize in anything, because I had to work so hard. Next, I attended the Texas Presbyterian College at Milford, Texas, for two years. Then I came home and married Clarence Andrew Oakes, son of Lem W. Oakes. My husband is about 1/16 Choctaw Indian. I am all white.

I remember hearing my father preach and pray in the Choctaw Language. He had to learn it because sometimes his entire congregation would be full-blood Choctaw Indians.

I remember, too, when he went to Paris, Texas, and returned with a number of lamps with reflectors behind them to hang upon the wall of the church to replace the little brass lamps that we had always had. He thought the new lamps beautiful.

The Reverend Mr. Stark was the first Superintendent of Goodland school I remember, and a Mrs. Bacon kept the

first boarders there I believe. The boarding house was a two-story log house with a long sideroom at the back, which was dining room and kitchen. The boys all slept upstairs and the girls downstairs. There were about ten in all and the most of them were orphans, though some of them merely lived too far away to come to school daily.

There were stores at Goodland church ground from time to time, but never a post office until about twelve years ago. It was established when the railroad town of Goodland was abandoned and Hugo was built at the crossing of the two railroads. I guess the post office was at Goodland railroad station for about fifteen years.

When I was a child, candidates for offices used to bring camping outfits to Goodland, camp for days and make speeches until each candidate had had his say; then they would move on to some other community where people gathered to hear the speeches. Word would be sent ahead so that everybody could gather there and hear the speeches, just like a camp-meeting.

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