

THOMAS, MATIE MOWBRAY

INTERVIEW

119

Mr. Grant Foreman

Hibbs, Field worker

Indian Pioneer History S-149

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An interview between Mrs, Matie (^{Mowbray} ~~Hook~~) Thomas and Lawrence D. Hibbs, field worker, on the early days in the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

As I told you in a previous story of our coming to Indian territory, my father came here as a Methodist Missionary and took over the work of the Methodist Church in March 1888.

At the time my father came to Tulsa, there was a little old frame building which sat at the corner of Brady street and Main for a church building. This was known as the Methodist Episcopal Church and was built by Rev. Bowden in 1887. Rev. Bowden was frightened away from Tulsa by a bunch of rough-necks and my father was appointed to take his place. The Church building consisted of one large audience room, a small class room and a gallery- my father closed the gallery as that was the point of vantage for these rough-necks.

Rev. James Murray of Baldwin, Kansas, had been Superintendent of Missions for a couple of years and was acting in that capacity when we came here. He had

Interview with Mrs. Matie (Heck) Thomas 121

2

don'ted a pretty circular window on the front of the Church, and had secured a bell, which they had hung in a belfry built on the roof of the Church. He also had secured a small Organ from friends in Kansas for use in the Church. We had unpainted benches, coal oil lamps and a large coal heater for our heating system.

J. P. Gouner of Coal Creek (now Dawson) was the Sunday School Superintendent. We had a nice little Sunday school and the attendance increased with each Sunday.

There was no public school of course, at this time. The Presbyterians had a Mission school located at the place where now stands the Atlas Life Bldg., between Fourth and Fifth streets on Boston avenue, and this Mission employed three teachers. Of course where the children attended day school they would naturally attend Sunday school. We were anxious to increase our Sunday School so I taught a Mission day school. I was only a little past fifteen but had passed a very creditable teacher's examination in Pennsylvania at the age of fourteen.

Interview with Mrs. Matie (Heck) Thomas

3

I had a motly crowd of pupils from beginners to twenty-one years old. Hardly two books alike and a number of Indian children who did not or would not speak the English language. I bought a number of books out of my own pocket money so it would not be so hard to teach the classes.

The attendance was very irregular and hard to hold. If they wanted a picnic or to go fishing, they stayed out of school; but I finally worked up more interest and I think in my small way did some good. There are a number still living in Tulsa who attended this school. I taught this school two years without any compensation and the third year the Mission board gave me a salary of fifteen dollars a month. I also did the janitor work at the church or the most of it. I carried hundreds of scuttles of coal in winter as it was a large stove and its maw was never filled. I cleaned and filled about nineteen coal oil lamps every week and swept up buckets of dirt. There were no side-walks and the mud that was tracked in after

Interview with Mrs. Matie (Heck) Thomas.

4

a rain was almost unbelievable. I taught from April 1888 to 1891 at which time I was married to Mr. Heck Thomas. After I married, my father left here and others carried on.

We did not have any way to raise funds for the church, only by giving church suppers and festivals. The cow-boys and the ranchers were always cake and pie hungry, their fare being mostly beans and "Sow-belly" and corn bread. When we would plan one of these suppers my father would notify the different ranches, they being the Halsell ranch on the edge of the Osage Nation and several smaller ones. We always had a program at these suppers. We delved into trunks and boxes and searched out old song books and we would sing such songs as "Gathering up the shells from the Sea Shore", "Do they Miss me at home", "The Old Oaken Bucket", "Twickenham Ferry" and dozens of others. We also would have dialogues and tableaux to help entertain. The cow-boys came in droves and we would serve them

Interview with Mrs. Mattie (Hook) Thomas

5

with Chicken, pies, cakes and all the provisions we could gather up. The cow-boys would always buy what pies and cake were left and take back to the ranches with them. They appreciated the programs and if a song appealed to them they would call out "sing it again". We would often sing it over and over and finally they would join in with lusty voices and as they rode their broncs back to the ranches, the old songs would echo back. My father has told me of times that he would be driving over the prairie, miles from habitation, and could hear these old songs being sung by some lonely cow-boy riding the range.

A number of the cow-boys attended the church and they always seemed to like the music. The Dalton boys were frequent attendants at our church, this before they joined the wild bunch.

There was quite a large debt on the church when father came here and took it over, but through these suppers and entertainments we were able to just about pay it off by the time father left.

Interview with Mrs. Mattie (Heck) Thomas

6

Our home was a Mecca for preachers traveling through the country, not only our own denomination but all others. We had to give up our beds many times and sleep on make-shifts.

From March 21, to March 25, 1889 we entertained the first Methodist Conference ever in Indian Territory, as it was held just before the opening of Oklahoma. It rained incessantly during the Conference and as the little creeks were almost impassable in rainy weather and you could hardly get through the mud along the roads, we were compelled to entertain the most of the Conference at our tiny home. Cots were put in the gallery of the church and the fire was never out in our cook stoves.

Bishop Waldon of Cincinnati, Ohio, presided and there were several other notables here, their first visit to this part of the country. All eyes were turned to Oklahoma, "The Land of the fair God". During this Conference men were appointed to take places at towns in this new country to be opened up.

My father traveled over the country a great deal, opening up new churches and holding quarterly meetings, in addition to taking care of his own pastorate here.

Interview with Mrs. Natie (Heck) Thomas

126

7

My mother often traveled with father and was loved by every one. She was an Angel of mercy among the sick and they often traveled fifteen or twenty miles to visit some sick parishoner, and mother was seen on the streets here almost constantly with her little bowl of soup and glasses of jelly and always a bouquet of flowers from her garden at home, going to see some sick person.

The only church here at that time, besides ours, was the Presbyterian. We would go to church and Sunday School at both our church and the Presbyterian church, which had been organized a few years before we came here.

Frequently when we would be going home from church, a bunch of boys would ride up behind us and start shooting over our heads. They would not mean any harm, but said they just wanted to hear the women scream.

There was no law enforcing officers stationed here at that time, but ^aU.S. Deputy Marshal passed through occasionaly Ft Smith, Arkansas, being the Court seat having jurisdiction over this part of the Indian Territory and the Paris, Texas, court having jurisdiction over the Southern part.

We endured many hardships and were deprived of many things, but it was a clean hard life and out of it came a race of sturdy men and women to carry on,

THOMAS, MATIE MOWBRAY

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