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BROWNING, W. S.

INTERVIEW

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238

W. T. Holland
Interviewer
June 22, 1937

Interview with
W. S. Browning
720 So. Elgin.
Tulsa, Oklahoma

My father, Winfield Scott Browning, was a native of Indiana. He was born in 1851, at Fort Bend. He came west early in life and located at Cherryvale, Kansas, where I was born in 1876. He was a member of the Methodist Conference of Kansas Northern Church, and was sent into Indian Territory by the Conference, as a missionary. We came into the Territory in 1882 and were located at Fairland, Indian Territory. He had a circuit, consisting of five appointments which he served. He preached at each place once a month, that is, on his regular trips. This was more than fifty years ago, and of course before Statehood. It marked the beginning of the work of the Methodist Church in northeastern Oklahoma. The appointments on this first circuit were Fairland, where we lived, Afton, Wyandotte and two smaller places, whose names I have forgotten. His first work was the establishing of a church organization, as this was Virgin territory, as far as his church was concerned. Of

course there were Christian people of various faiths, both white and Indians living here. His work was to organize those of his faith into a body, and next to build a church. He in his various charges built 26 churches. Some of the places which I remember were Afton, Fairland, Miami, Vinita, Tahlequah, Sapulpa, Lenapah, Weleetka, Nowata, Blue Jacket and other places, a total of 26 churches in the northeastern part of the state. For six years, all his travel was on horseback. He had a pacing bald faced pony which could travel fast and easily. This pony, his leather saddle bags with a clean shirt and some socks in one end, his Bible and song books and religious literature, constituted his equipment. But contrary to the belief of some, his life was not a burden. While he worked hard as a preacher and at building churches, still he enjoyed it and felt as I do, that he was doing a very important and necessary work in the development of the country. He was aiding in bettering living conditions of the people, and in helping to promote peace and good will.

It seems to me now as I reflect over the early days, that they wanted my father, principally as a build-

- 3 -

er of churches. As soon as we were settled in a new circuit, he would begin the erection of a church. The erection of these buildings was made possible by the donations of the people, and free will offerings.

We lived in Afton for two years, Fairland was our first home and we lived there two years. We were at Wyandotte nine years. We lived here at Wyandotte for this period of time while my father preached here and at other points. We lived here from 1886 to 1895. Our reason for this was that father wanted to put us children in school, and as there was an Indian Mission school at this place, we stayed here. I attended that school for nine years. We children were granted every privilege of Indian children because of my father being a missionary in the Territory. However, he had no connection with the school, as a member of the faculty, or trustee. This school is still in operation, but is now known as Seneca School. My father had very little trouble with the rough element of his various churches. Of course, most every community had a few "roughnecks" who at least would make one attempt to run him off. He was a strong man physically, as well as

- 4 -

spiritually, and just wouldn't tolerate any disorder.

He had his greatest opposition and trouble at Miami.

Henry Clay King was the leader of the rough element there

and he decided a church and preaching services might interfere with his business, which was a bad business. He and his men would "bust" up the meeting and run the preacher off. They didn't succeed, as my father's friends stood by him and King didn't accomplish his purpose. I've heard my father tell amusing tales of these rough and near rough cow hands. They would often come in crowds, to his services, with the purpose of having fun at others expense, but it often turned out that they were forced, or asked rather earnestly, by one of their gang, who would pass around his hat, to dig in and come out with some money. This donation was for the building of the church in the locality where the money was collected, and in this way, a lot of money was donated by the cowboys, the collection being taken by one of their own number. All such funds collected went to the building fund and not to the pastor's salary, as he was paid by the Board of Missions, and his compensation was, fifty dollars every three months,

or two hundred dollars a year: This was all the cash he received. However, he was practically kept up by his members and friends, who would bring in all kinds of food. They brought chickens and hogs in the winter and bacon in the summer. Corn and hay for our pony and cow, fruit, fresh and canned. In fact we lived off the fat of the land and really didn't need much money as most everything we needed was furnished by his members. It took quite a lot, too, to feed his family, as he had ten children in all, ~~five~~ boys and five girls and eight are now living, four boys and four girls. His life was active enough with his preaching and building of churches and holding of revival meetings in the summer. These were usually held under a brush arbor, as it was cooler outside, and, too, sometimes there was no church building. They would have great meetings and on Sunday, they would have an all day meeting with dinner on the ground, brought in baskets by the good women.

His church buildings were all frame buildings, and their size was determined by the locality, and the number of members. The first homes of the pastors, the parsonages, were two and three room frame buildings, with enough furniture to get along with, but no luxuries were furnished. I remember our first beds were "ticks"

- 3 -

filled with prairie grass. We didn't have feather beds to go on this until after we had been here about four years. Then my mother sent to Kansas and got two feather beds. My father got his first buggy in 1888, but didn't use it all the time then, as he rode his pony. He was one of the early ambassadors, or "circuit riders", preaching, teaching, comforting the sick with visits, administering the first rites and last rites to his members, and any others in need of his services. Indians, as well as whites, were members of his churches.

The wives of these pioneer preachers deserve great credit for the part they played. I know my mother had great responsibility and too much work to do. Ten children and all the housework. A book could be written about the great, though modest women. One of the last places my father served was Sapulpa. He went there in 1900 and stayed there, I think until 1906. Then he was transferred to Kansas, after twenty-four years of service here.