



GASSAWAY, JOHN.

INTERVIEW.

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Lillian Gassaway,  
Interviewer,  
July 20, 1937.

An Interview with John Gassaway,  
Anadarko, Oklahoma.

Reverend B. F. Gassaway

B. F. Gassaway was a missionary among the Kiowa, Comanche and Apache tribes for a good many years. He died in 1928, and is buried at Higgins, Texas.

His father, George P. Gassaway, was born in Kentucky in 1805, and his mother, Rebecca Lessenberry, was born in Kentucky in 1809. The date of their deaths is unknown.

B. F. Gassaway was born in Kentucky in 1846. He came to Terral when his children were all small and so there is little earlier record. He was sent to Oklahoma by the Indian Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

In 1899 Mr. Gassaway was sent to the Indian church at what was then Sill, situated about half way between the Old Fort Sill and what is now Lawton. There were only a few dwellings, two traders' stores, and the church. One

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of these stores was always called The Red Store, and was operated by a Mr. Straus.

The parsonage was near the Red Store. This gave Mr. Gassaway an opportunity of being with the Indians almost constantly, for there were some Indians at the Traders' store all the time. He was working among the Kiowas and Comanches. This work took him to Little Washita and Mount Scott, and Sill was the central point.

The Indians were always very friendly with Mr. Gassaway and his family. When moving to Sill, when they were yet a few miles from their destination, one of the little boys fell under the wheels of a very heavily loaded wagon. His skull was badly fractured, and he lay in a state of unconsciousness for many days. When the boy came to, there was an Indian who had been a faithful help, sitting by the boy's side.

In 1904 Mr. Gassaway bought a little ranch near Higgins, Texas. Once while living in Higgins he was given appointment in the Choctaw Nation, in the eastern part of the state. The salary was so small that he couldn't take

his family with him. He had a large family, so he left them on the ranch and went to this appointment alone.

It was while Mr. Gassaway was living at Sill that the Government passed the law that an Indian man could have only one wife. Many of these Indians had as many as twenty-four wives. It was hard for the man to decide which wives to give up, and which one to keep. They would come to Mr. Gassaway to help them to decide. A man would come and bring all his wives and the one that Mr. Gassaway usually decided upon would be either the oldest one or the one he had been living with the longest. That way the question was settled with no hard feelings. In some cases where a man only had two wives who both were right old, and the Indian couldn't tell which he thought the most of, the Government let them alone. After the choice had been made, there had to be a legal ceremony.

In 1910, the same conference sent Mr. Gassaway to the church at Anadarko. The appointment covered four churches; Big Bows, Hog Creek, Mount Scott, and Anadarko.

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Mr. Gassaway made one of these churches each Sunday, going to them either on horseback or in his buggy. Hog Creek Church was only a few miles away so he need not stay over night there, but when he went to Big Bows he stayed until Monday, having gone out there on Saturday. Big Bows was some twenty miles from Anadarko. Mount Scott was about fifty miles from Anadarko and Mr. Gassaway always went there in his buggy on Friday and Saturday and came home about the middle of the following week.

Fish were plentiful in Medicine Creek and Mr. Gassaway was a great fisherman. He would stay at Mount Scott a week visiting among the Indians and fishing.

He did a wonderful work among the Indians. He had the love and respect of them all. In all his work he was very closely associated with Reverend J. J. Methvin.

As the result of the work of these pioneer missionaries there are Indian ministers at all of these appointments. In fact, we have now a whole Indian conference.

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In the early days when an Indian was invited to eat with you he took it for granted that you meant his whole family, and sometimes six or eight Indians would come on the invitation meant for one. Later they learned better, but still sometimes they would come in families without an invitation at all, stay until after they had eaten, then get up from the table and leave, without saying more than, "I go now".

One time when Mr. Gassaway was away from home with his family they came home and found that some Indians had made themselves at home and cooked dinner on the stove, but had cleaned up after dinner. The woman left some dough in the bowl, so that Mrs. Gassaway wouldn't have to make bread that evening. However, she made fresh, for this was summer time. The Indians were kind and good as far as they knew how to be.