

METHVIN, J. J.

ELEVENTH INTERVIEW
MENNONITE MISSION

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Form A-(S-149)
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METHVIN, J. J.

INTERVIEW.

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for OklahomaField Worker's name Lillian Gassaway.This report made on (date) July 27, 1937.1. Name J. J. Methvin.2. Post Office Address Anadarko, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 709 West Alabama Ave.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 17 Year 1846.5. Place of birth Jeffersonville, Georgia.6. Name of Father John Methvin Place of birth Georgia.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mourning Glover Methvin. of birth Georgia.

Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 11.

Lillian Gassaway,
Interviewer.
July 27, 1937.

RESUME OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
MENNONITE MISSION WORK IN OKLAHOMA.

Reverend J. J. Methvin was sent to Anadarko in 1887 by the Methodist Episcopal Church South, as a missionary to the Kiowa, Comanche, and other tribes of "Blanket Indians".

This manuscript was secured from J. J. Methvin, who intended to write a history of all the missions in Oklahoma, but as only a few missions sent him the data that he needed, he gave up the idea.

The General Conference branch of the Mennonite Church began its mission work in Oklahoma, or Indian Territory, in the year 1880, at Darlington-first among the Arapaho^{es} and later also among the Cheyennes.

The Mennonites came to these two tribes upon the invitation of the Quakers or Friends.

Prior to this time the Cheyennes and Arapahoes had roamed about a great deal and had just recently come from the north. They had had frequent wars and skirmishes with other tribes and the white settlers and soldiers.

The policy of many of the whites was to settle the Indian problem by exterminating the Indians and thus coming into possession of their lands.

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Through / ^{the} influence of the Christian people of the land, the policy of the Government toward the Indians changed.

President Grant and others held the view that our duty toward the Indians was to civilize ^{and} Christianize them. To accomplish this he assigned different tribes to the various denominations.

The Cheyennes and Arapahoes, together with other tribes, were assigned to the quakers or Friends. These sent one or two missionaries to these tribes, but soon decided to discontinue the work and invited the Mennonites to come and continue it. This invitation came especially through General Miles, the Indian Agent at Darlington. Mr. and Mrs. S. S. Haury were our first missionaries. Mr. Haury had been among these tribes for several months in 1877, while looking for a mission field for our conference. After leaving, he visited the churches of the conference to interest them for the work, and during that time the quakers began the work here.

Haury then was sent to Alaska and to the Aleutian Islands in search of another field, but found every place already occupied by other denominations. Soon after

he returned from Alaska the invitation from the Quakers came to take over their field among the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.

Mr. and Mrs. Haury made the trip from Halstead, Kansas, to Darlington in a light spring wagon, drawn by two ponies. The trip lasted four days. They were heartily welcomed by agent Miles and the Indians. They soon began with the erection of a mission building to offer room for the Missionaries and a few helpers and about twenty-five Indian children. The plan was to prepare the children for practical and Christian work among their people. The school was opened in September, 1881, with seven boys, but soon it was filled to capacity. Religious work by the missionaries was also continued in the Government school. But alas, in the following February this building was totally destroyed by fire. Even most of the furniture and clothing was burned. But the greatest loss was that of four young lives—an infant son of the Haurys and three small Indian children. All died from being gassed.

In spite of this severe trial the work was continued. Soon a three story brick building was erected, offering room for a larger number of missionaries and fifty Indian

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school children. Through ^{the} influence of General Miles the Government contributed \$5,000.00 for the erection of this building and therefore shared the ownership of it to that extent.

In 1882 Fort Cantonment was vacated as a military post and at the recommendation of General Miles, the buildings were offered our mission for school and other purposes till others could be erected. This offer was gratefully accepted by our board, though it meant a large additional expense to our churches. Hourys moved to Cantonment and Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Voth took charge of the Darlington station.

In 1888 a large brick building was erected at Cantonment with a capacity for about seventy-five Indian children, besides the employees.

In order to teach the Indians farming and cattle raising, an industrial farm and cattle ranch was started with the hope that the Indians would settle nearby and receive instructions in these lines of work. Not much has been accomplished, however. On February 1, 1893, during a severe snow storm, the beautiful brick building at Cantonment was destroyed by fire. No lives were lost in this fire.

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During the following summer this building was replaced by a wooden structure. Both schools were usually filled to over their capacity and did splendid work, the results of which are often noticeable even at the present time.

The children received not only a thorough instruction in the common school branches, but also in the teachings of the Bible, which after all is the best book, not only in the matter of teaching the way of salvation, but true morality as well.

When the Government built another school for the Cheyennes near Darlington and one for both tribes at Cantonment, so that there was ample room for all the Indian children in the Government schools, the Government aid for mission schools was withdrawn. As these seemed to be looked upon with disfavor by the Government, schools remained open to the missionaries for instructing the Indian children from the Bible during one or two nights of the week and for Sunday School and other religious services on Sundays. So the opportunity of doing religious work with the Indian children was not cut off by the closing of the mission schools.

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For a number of years a private industrial school was also maintained at Halstead, Kansas, by Reverend C. Krehbiel, then the president of the mission board. This school was attended mostly by the Arapaho children and wielded a good Christian influence over them.

The history of all nations shows that education always follows Christianity, but not always does Christianity follow education; therefore, our main aim from the very beginning was to Christianize the Indians. Only through the preaching of the Gospel can this be accomplished. To preach the Gospel more effectively a knowledge of the language of the people with whom we work is very helpful. But those missionaries connected with the school work found little time left for the study of the language or the preaching of the Gospel in the camps. Therefore, some missionaries were placed at different stations to devote most of their time to direct mission work. In 1889 J. J. Kliever, who had for a number of years labored as teacher in the Cantonment mission school, began a station among the Arapahoes on the Washita River at a place called Shelly, perhaps ten miles west of where Colony is now located. Through precept and example he tried to teach

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the Indians, not only the way of salvation but also the Christian family and industrial life. After the allotments were made and the surplus land had been thrown open for white settlers, very few Indians were left at this place and after a few years this station was discontinued.

In 1891 R. Petter began direct mission work among the Cheyennes at Cantonment. After many years of painstaking effort, he mastered the Cheyenne language and reduced it to writing. Large portions of the Bible have been translated by him into the Cheyenne language. His linguistic studies and translations are an invaluable help to the other missionaries among the Cheyennes who study the language. In 1916 Reverend Petter was transferred to the Cheyennes in Montana, among whom he is still laboring.

In 1893 another station was started among the Arapahoes near a post office called Dyke, a few miles east of the present site of Eagle City. Here, A. S. Voth was the missionary. While teaching at Cantonment, he had already done some camp work among the Arapahoes. This station was discontinued in 1896, like Shelly, and for the same

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reasons. A similar effort was made by J. S. Krehbiel near the Red Hills, south of where Watonga is now located, and met with the same fate, in 1896.

In 1894 M. Horsch started a new station among the Cheyennes, about two miles east of the present location of Clinton. For two years before this time Horsch had been active as teacher and missionary at Darlington and Cantonment. He, too, acquired a fairly good knowledge of the Cheyenne language. In 1900 he was compelled to leave the work on account of the poor health of his wife. Since then three other missionaries have labored there. For four years G. A. Linscheid was stationed here and after acquiring a good knowledge of the Cheyenne language, was transferred to the Cheyennes in Montana to begin mission work there. He was followed at Clinton by J. H. Epp, who, however, stayed only about two years and then resigned on account of ill health. Since 1907 J. B. Ediger has been in charge of the Clinton station and is still faithful at his post of duty. Since his field has been enlarged toward the south as well as toward the north, it is the largest Cheyenne field in Oklahoma.

In 1898 a new station was started among the Red Moon Cheyennes, near Hammon, by H. J. Kliever. There was at that

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time also an Indian boarding school at this place, which later was changed into a day school and has recently been entirely discontinued. There are only about one hundred sixty-five Cheyennes living in this district. Mr. and Mrs. Kliever are still laboring as missionaries at this place.

In 1907 J. A. Funk began direct mission work among the Arapahoes near Cantonment. He had previously for a number of years labored in the mission school and from there also had done some mission work among the Arapahoes and had made a beginning in the study of the language. At this time the school building was torn down and some of the material was used for building the Arapaho station, two miles southeast of where Canton is now located. Also some of the material was used for the erection of a chapel for the Cheyennes at Fonda, eight miles northwest of Cantonment. Funk resigned in 1918. For a few years this station was then taken care of by Willie Meeks, the native helper. But as it seemed desirable to have a white missionary there again H. T. Neufeld, who had labored for some years as missionary among the Cheyennes in Montana and also at the Fonda station in Oklahoma, was transferred to the Arapaho station in 1921. The Neufelds are still laboring here, but are out on furlough at present.

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Since Petter left the Cheyenne station at Cantonment, in 1916, to labor among the Cheyennes in Montana, A. Classen had charge of that station till 1920, when G. A. Linscheids was transferred from Busby, Montana, to Cantonment, where they are still laboring among the Cheyennes. Their chapel has recently been moved to a new location near Lonsdale, as most of the Cheyennes of the Cantonment district now live there. They also look after the work at Fonda as a substation. We, therefore, at present have four main stations among the Cheyennes, namely at Cantonment (with Fonda as out-station), Clinton (with Deer Creek or Thomas as out-station), and Hammon; and one station among the Arapahoes, south of Canton. At each station and sub-station there is usually also a native helper employed. Our aim is to put more responsibility upon the native helpers as quickly as this can consistently be done, and as soon as possible to reduce the number of white missionaries.

The best solution of any heathen mission is that the heathen be converted to Christ and take up the missionary work themselves among their people.

During these forty-seven years there have labored among the Cheyennes and Arapahoes fifteen missionaries; of

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these thirteen have served five or more years, five, ten or more years, and three, twenty or more years. One missionary, three missionaries' wives and five children have died during this time. About five hundred have been baptized of which number only about half are still living. Many more have expressed the desire to be baptized, but upon investigation we found that they were prompted by wrong motives in this desire. In fact, there have been too many dead members, even in the small group received into the church. On the other hand, we have good reasons to believe that many of such who were not baptized have died with a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is no doubt better than to admit them into the church unregenerated and have them prove themselves to be tares instead of wheat. The experiences have been many and varied-many hardships and disappointments, but also many joys and blessings and manifestations of God's Love and power. In the mission work among the Indians we need to be frequently reminded of Paul's admonition, Gal. 6:9: "Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not". as also the word of the Lord to the prophet Zec. 4:6: "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts".