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An Interview with Saphronia Catharine Raburn,
Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Rt. 1.

As a rule, the pioneer families were deeply religious. Of course, all newly-opened territories have their share of outlaws and evil characters. But the men with families, the backbone of the country, were pretty likely to be members of some church organization.

I came to the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, about forty-eight years ago. At that time people lived on scattered farms, and it might be ten miles or more from a man's cabin to the country church house, but nevertheless most people attended church services when they could. It was a colorful sight when the settlers began to gather at their little church houses; they came in ox carts, farm wagons, buggies, on horseback, and afoot.

The people were serious, hard-working folks. They led hard, often lonely, lives and they needed the comfort and assurance of religion. And their meetings afforded them a chance to associate with neighbors, to gossip about their crops and the weather. Their church life afforded them important social contacts.

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When we first moved to the Territory we settled three miles from Poteau. There was a church house about three hundred yards from our cabin. It was a one-room log building, about twenty feet by sixteen, and it had been built for a schoolhouse. School was still held there for short periods each year. It was a subscription school, and the teacher was a Mr. Lee. The building also served as a church house.

We lived so close to the church house that the preachers nearly always stayed with us during meetings. One, I remember, was named Johnny Miller. Another was named Harris. Preachers were scarce then; one preacher often cared for four churches. He would preach at one place one Sunday, another the next; and the fifth Sunday the preachers of the district would meet and hold what was called a "preacher's meeting."

My husband and I belonged to the Missionary Baptist church and that was the kind of church that was so close to our house there near Poteau. We brought our letter of membership from the Mt. Nebo Church near Hackett City,

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Arkansas. There were other churches, too, in our community; the Church of Christ, called "Campbellites" by others, Methodist; Presbyterians; "Hardshell" Baptists.

There were thirty or forty members of our church. We lived in a place called "Brother-in-law Hollow;" nearly all the men in the community, it was said, were brothers-in-law. This was more or less of a joke, but there was a lot of truth in the saying, too. An old fellow named Fulger had a house full of daughters, and every time he raised a young man to help in the crop, one of the daughters would marry him. Old Fulger had lots of land; he'd set up each married daughter and her husband with land for a farm, and help to build a log cabin. Jess Adams, John Blackard, Nath. Foster, and Bister Bridges were all brothers-in-law.

On Saturday before the preacher was expected the following day we church members would get at the church at eleven o'clock in the morning, and again at eight in the evening. We held services, reading from the Bible and

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praying, but the main reason for meeting was to discuss
our church business. There was a collection of money
also. I remember the names of each business
meeting, remembering the date of the meeting at the
beginning of each week.

When the next day, Sunday, the preacher would be
present. We had a Sunday school at 10 o'clock;
for that matter, we had a Sunday school every Sunday.
Whether our preacher was present or not. After Sunday
school came a short intermission. Then we had services
at eleven. The preacher usually preached for about forty-
five minutes, but I have seen him preach for an
hour and a half. Then we had a collection at 1 o'clock for
night services.

We didn't go in to church with much money and
~~we didn't go in to church with much money and~~
clean and neat. The women wore dresses of plain linen
or cotton. The men wore suits. In colder weather, we
wore coats and excellent fur hats. Some of the men
wore heavy grade jeans cloth, and some wore it as a matter of
what they could afford or happened to have. But there were

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no class distinctions; we were all just neighbors.

Every Thursday night, when the next conference cities
 to sick folks and some other people, we let at the
 church did all prayer. At that time the prayer service
 would be held at the pastor's house; the next at the home
 the next week at another house, and so on. We took no
 notes and no minutes, besides the order of prayer, and need a
 chapter in the Bible for the content of it. Then, he would
 pray. We'd sing a few songs, and another member would
 pray.

We had Bible classes, too. They were held at night
 during the week. We would assemble on Sunday night to pray
 most convenient for everyone; the lectures were held at the
 houses of the members, in rotation. These classes were
 organized, with a president, a secretary, and a treasurer.
 We had a pastor and a reverend, and several members would take
 talks on prepared subjects. When possible we held these
 meetings once a week.

As I have said, we tried to have a Sunday school every

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Sunday. The old folks attended and had their own classes, but the main purpose of the Sunday Schools was to teach the young folks. We felt that it gave them a religious background and served to keep them away from places that would exert a bad influence. As a further incentive we let them have frequent Sunday School picnics. They went on the picnics a day or two the week, and at dinner time sat out on the lawn under the trees. The older people went along too, of course, and two or three families would spread their blankets out. The picnic area would usually be somewhere near the church building.

Our preacher lived in our community and served a little when his religious duties permitted. On the Sundays that he preached at his own church he would come over on horseback the night before. He said anything whatever we could; sometimes with organ, tent, or tables, or hymns. He tried to be self-sufficient as much as possible.

I have seen some mighty good preachers, men who talked with fire and conviction, who could not read. They got some member of the congregation to read a chapter from the Bible

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for them and they would do the preaching.

All our music was vocal; we just didn't have any kind of musical instruments. Years later some of the churches got able to buy organs. Even song books were scarce. Often our reader would get up and read two lines of a song; then the congregation would sing it after him. Then he'd read two more lines, and the members would sing that, and so on.

One of our members, a man named Morris, told me he got it all in for so many years before he found it. He was a queer man; if he announced that he would preach on a certain night at eight o'clock, he would start preaching at eight even if only one member were present.

Another preacher, a "Hardshell" named Peter B. Long, preached that God's people were born to be saved and some to be lost. He thought that a time could be lost that way and I still remember the arguments that he and my husband used to have on the subject.

Some of the church members, especially those living

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at quite a distance from the church, might not be able to attend all the prayer meetings, the Bible classes, and the like, but they all had Bibles at home, and the father of the family would usually read a chapter every night and have family prayer. It was our custom to return thanks before every meal. These practices kept the pioneer families from forgetting religious things.

So that as a community would have Union Sunday School, and this was a good thing according to my ideas. By "union" I mean that all the people of a community, no matter of what church or denomination, would attend Sunday School together. Special literature was procured called "union literature". I think that this was good, because it brought neighbors together and served to create a more broad minded.

Once a year, usually after crops were laid by, we had protracted meetings, or revivals. They sometimes lasted two or three weeks, with services at eleven o'clock A. M., and at eight P. M. every day. They were strict.

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spots in the lives of us backwoods people. People come from miles around; the high church order would always be filled. Sometimes these revivals would be "down"

affairs. When I revived the church in my own part was born, forty-seven years ago, and my husband went to the meeting and was a member. I came out with him.

That was when we lived in Pittsburg. And the church was at the end of the street. There were some that were not like to the church.

There was a meeting was held in the church at the end of the street, and the church would hold a new a sale. All the people would attend; the Baptist, Methodist, etc. Conventions were the leading of the church. I was a member, and some of the converts were baptised in the river.

... families. It was a... together... neighbors... of the... daily lives.