

THOMAS, MATIE MOWBRAY

INTERVIEW

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Hibbs, field worker.

An interview between Mattie (Heck Thomas) and Lawrence D. Hibbs, field worker; on the early life of the Methodist Church of Tulsa.

These are a few things I forgot to mention in my other interview and I would like to relate them now as they connect up with my other story.

Back in 1887 a woman by the name of Jane Wolfe tried to lay claim to the Church building, as she claimed it was built on ground belonging to her, but on looking up the records they showed that she had no claim whatever.

In my other story, I referred to Rev. Bowden being frightened away from Tulsa, his reason for leaving came about through a Christmas Eve celebration in 1887. At this Christmas Eve celebration, they had a Christmas tree at the Church and everybody carried their gifts there to be hung on the tree as was the custom in those days. A crowd of drunken rowdies, both Indians and whites, gathered in the balcony of the Church and threw whiskey bottles at the tree and broke many of the presents. They also fired their revolvers around the Church and terrorized everyone. The house was densely crowded and everyone was panic stricken. Many thought this attack was incited to break up the Church and

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and drive the people away, Rev. Bowden was so discouraged and frightened after this that he left before the end of the Conference year, and Rev. J. M. Wood of Catoosa acted as Pastor in addition to his work at Catoosa, until a man could be secured and my father took up the work in 1888.

A number of these rowdies sent word to my father after he had preached against the evils here that they were coming and would make him dance at the point of a pistol. He sent word back for them to come on that he would be ready for them, but that he probably would not be the one to do the dancing. They did not show up, however, and things quieted down.

The next Christmas, our first in Tulsa, we had a beautiful tree and had prepared a program for the occasion. The Church was crowded. Father had locked the Gallery as it was not needed at that time and as that seemed to be the place the rowdies had gathered before.

In the midst of our celebration a drunken Indian by the name of Mose Perryman fired a shot into the floor not two feet from the head of my sister, (now Mrs. Winterringer) who was suffering a bad headache and was lying on a bench at the side wall of the Church, with her head in my mother's lap. Instantly a dozen pistols were out and waving in the air by men who wanted to protect the Church and congregation. Wm. Burgess and Wm. Sunday were Indian Policemen and both were members of our

Church and they said they would not stand for any more of this conduct. People were running through the doors and climbing through the windows. My mother was moving up and down the aisles holding out her dress and demanding them to drop their pistols in it. She had quite a large assortment of guns and in the meantime my father had been going about through the crowd trying to restore order. The Indian claimed it was an accident and that he didn't intend to fire the gun but had dropped it and it had fired. Order was finally restored and we finished our program. We never had trouble of this kind again, although at times groups of Cowboys would fire pistols over the heads of the congregation as we were leaving the Church. They said they did not do it to antagonize the Church people but that it was fun to hear the women scream.

When we first came to Tulsa and while we were living at what is now 1st street and Boulder Avenue, we were warned on different occasions to put out our lights and to go to the back of the house and lie flat on the floor as it was pay day and the Cowboys were on a rampage. They would have kegs of whiskey shipped in and would get drunk and ride up and down the streets at break neck speed, shooting and goggling as they called it. shooting out every light. All the stores and the Depot would close and all lights over town would be put

out, but they would continue to ride up and down until they would fall off their horses in a drunken stupor.

I remember one time in 1888 my younger sister was sick with typhoid fever and the cowboys were on one of their wild escapades, so we carried a mattress to the back of the house and put her on it and piled furniture and pillows against the wall. On this occasion we dug out a number of bullets out of the outer wall and the top of the fence was riddled. After this was over, father went out to the different ranches and talked to all the boys in a friendly way and told them they were liable to kill somebody. His talk did a lot of good and there was much less of wildness after that.

Another thing we had to contend with was the destruction of our gardens. We had fenced our gardens with rail fences, topped with several strands of barbed wire. There was no herd law so cattle, horses and hogs roamed the streets at will. It was a common occurrence to have our gardens destroyed in this manner, and that would work quite a hardship on the people as they depended on their gardens for most of their summer food.

I spoke earlier about the roads leading to the Church being almost impassable in wet weather and they kept men on them most of the time, and this same Jane Wolf that I have referred to before had her garden across what is now Main

Street near the intersection of Brady and she refused to open the street. They tried to buy a passage through but she continued to refuse, so one day when she was out of town several men headed by Joe Moore, who was part Indian, tore down her fence, cut the weeds through where the street should be, and Colonel Moore, who was Postmaster at the time, sent the Skiatook mail hack through and the road was open, as it was against the law to close a mail route. Every one rejoiced as it was much easier to get back forth to our little Church.

My father was followed as pastor by Rev. G. Motney who served in this capacity during 1892, then Rev. Owens served during 1893, Rev. Newman 1894, Rev. E.B. Rankin 1895 and 96, Rev. Laird 1897 to 1900, Rev. Voce 1900, and J.F. Cobb 1901 and 02. Of course the town had grown considerably by this time and many new people had joined the Church. It was the only Methodist Church in Tulsa and a number of its members lived on the South side of town and these members wanted to sell the church and property and build anew in the more fashionable part of town. This was greatly opposed by the people on the North side as they were the people who had organized the church in the beginning and had suffered the hardships to pay for it. Rev. Cobb was in favor of selling. He called a meeting of the official members and brought it to a vote and it was

defeated by one vote. Rev. Cobb then deposed the official members in favor of keeping the Church on the North side and appointed others in their places. He then called a meeting of the new board and did not notify the old board who hadn't even been notified that they had been deposed, and of course at this meeting the motion carried to sell the Church property. Wm. Burgess, George Pullett, Jack Burgess, and Wm. Sunday, all Indians, were the deposed members of the Church board.

The North elders begged for the Church and parsonage to be left for the people on the North side and if they wanted to sell the rest of the property and build another Church on the South side they could, but Rev. Cobb announced he would sell every foot of it. This left the North side without any Church or Sunday school, after all the struggle the people had to build it so a number withdrew from the Church- I think about forty.

The South Methodist had come to Tulsa in the meantime, headed by Rev. Chenoweth who had built a small building on the Frisco right of way between Cheyenne street and Boulder Avenue. This was the beginning of the Boston avenue Church. Their present home is now located at Thirteenth street and Boston avenue.

A number of people of the North side had a meeting and organized a South [North] Methodist Church in 1906 and they

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met at the Sequoyah school house which is located on north Boston. They had Church and Sunday school in this building for awhile, but the Janitor was not congenial and protested it so they moved to an old skating rink building at the corner of sixth and Boston and held their meetings there. My father paid ten dollars a month out of his own pocket for this building for six months.

The North Methodist built their new Church at the North east corner of fifth and South Boulder in 1906.