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By - Miss Ella Robinson, Field Worker.

LIFE AND HISTORY OF A PIONEER MINISTER.

One of the outstanding pioneer ministers of the Methodist Church South in early Territory days, was Reverend G. W. Atkins. He was born in Rockingham County, North Carolina, September 20, 1831.

He moved with his parents to McNairy County, Tennessee in 1851. There he was married to Miss Sarah Pratt. They were the parents of five children. His wife and three children died there.

In 1857 he united with the Methodist church and was licensed to preach in 1860. In 1867, he was ordained Deacon, and in 1878, was ordained Elder at Jackson, Tennessee, by Bishop Pierce. In 1877, he was married to Miss Mollie Surratt. To this union there were born seven children, two of whom are living.

As the call for ministers to go west was urgent in 1879 he responded and was admitted to the Arkansas Conference. In 1883 he transferred to the Indian Mission Conference, of which he was a member for 15 years. During that time he experienced all the hardships and trials incident in the life of a "Circuit Rider". That was before the trend of population from the country to the towns had begun, and

the circuit was considered the most important work of the church. While the population of the towns was more or less shifting, the citizens in the country were permanent, being Indians who owned and lived on their own farms. Reverend Atkins served on numerous circuits, including Canadian circuit that extended from the Creek line on the west, to the Choctaw line on the east. He also served on the Flint and Tahlequah circuits. He, with his team of strong ponies hitched to a buggy especially constructed for rough country driving, was a familiar figure as he drove from one appointment to another, sometimes a great distance apart. He possessed a pleasing personality, good humor, and a keen sense of wit, that made him a welcome guest at the homes of his members, where he often spent the nights. His work was hard, the trips long, and he would be worn in body and soul, but never a word of complaint came from him.

While serving on the Canadian circuit he built the parsonage at Brushy Mountain, a good substantial house which he with his family occupied. That was a convenient stopping place for travelers who always received a hearty welcome. While living there he revised the custom of holding yearly camp meetings at that place. Prior to that time there had been no permanent building provided

in which to hold the meetings. He first erected a frame work of poles with a roof of straw but that was not altogether satisfactory, particularly in rainy weather. As much interest was manifested in the meetings, he saw the advantage of a permanent structure. As the meetings were always held in the summer time, an open arbor served the purpose. He then had a large, frame structure erected with a good board roof. The two last weeks in August were set apart each year for the meetings. The pastor of the Muskogee station always assisted. As that was an ideal camping ground the hills around were dotted with camps. After serving four years on that work, he was assigned to the Tablequah circuit. Then to the Flint circuit where he also served four years at each place. When Stilwell became a town and had a local church, he went as pastor to that church, preaching to many of the same people who had been members in the country; in fact, the foundation of the town churches were the members who had moved from the country. Realizing the time was fast approaching when he would be incapacitated for active work, he provided a comfortable cottage home for his faithful wife and two children. With

the exception of one year when he was granted a super-annuate relation he was an active minister in the church. His brother ministers always said of him: "the harder the work, the better he liked it". His health had been failing for some time, but when the time came for the district conference to convene, he, against the protest of his wife, attended, expressing the thought that it might be his last opportunity to meet with his brother preachers. He returned home at 7:00 P.M. on July 4th, and passed away at 5:00 A.M. July 5th, 1898.