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Effie S. Jackson
Field Worker
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HILLSIDE QUAKER INDIAN MISSION.

(Four miles north of Skiatook on State
Highway No. 11- One-fourth mile east.)

At the turn of the road on the slope of a hill stands Hillside Quaker Mission, a crumbling monument to the vision of good men and women who possessed the courage to dare a great adventure. A landmark of bygone days, it stands solemn guard over the pioneer dead in the cemetery of 2000 graves on the north.

A little over fifty years ago, where a little grove broke the monotony of the grassy hills, a lone white man watched a covered hack wind its way toward his primitive abode. Out stepped another lone white man, a John Murdock, first mission teacher sent by the Philadelphia, Quaker Society to teach the Indians. The stranger's first question was where he could build a church for the people. "But" said the first white man, Salmon Abbott, "there are no people except Indians." "I know", said John Murdock, "I have come to guide and teach the Indians."

Thus Hillside Quaker Indian Mission was established by the Philadelphia Quaker Society in 1883. John Murdock did not wait for a building. He held his meetings in the grove "God's First Tabernacle". With his first eight followers he built the first church house of twenty foot walnut logs, near Bird Creek. The mosquitoes ran them out and the church house was moved to the hillside in 1884. There the mission was started in one room and added to as needed.

The missionaries sent from the Society of Friends of Penn. went back and gave such glowing accounts of John's work that a check-book was sent with instructions to draw any amount needed for the progress of the work. The mission was enlarged and a teacher engaged.

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Some time later, John Watson of Dayton, Ohio, was sent by the Friends to relieve Murdock, that he might push on farther west. He brought his wife, Miss, and two daughters with him, and they established residence in the Mission. He also brought in his old "grip-sack", its roots carefully wrapped, a strip-ling from the elm tree in Penn. under which William Penn signed the treaty with the Indians. Planted in the east yard, today, from its venerable height, it seems to beckon other friends and shed its gracious blessing on the valley below. Surely, sentiment must have welled deep in the soul of John Watson.

Cherokees, Shawnees and Osages, attended, board and tuition free. Later children of white families also came. They were charged small fees. As attendance grew the size of the structure was increased until it reached four stories including a full sized basement and gymnasium, which covered the top floor. Additions were built at various times, not by plan or chart, but because more room was needed until it numbered twenty-four rooms. The building fronted north, facing the old road, the little church house and the hills.

The last addition was the bathroom. A tub, lined with zinc, was built into one of the smaller bed-rooms on the second floor. A large tank, strengthened by iron bands extending upwards an arm's reach above a man's head was built in the corner. Into this a faucet was set and presto! the mission became modern (that is if those on duty had faithfully climbed up and filled the tank, bucket by bucket). A triangular lavatory in the opposite corner placed close to the floor to overcome certain plumbing difficulties, gave the finishing touch. What matter if one was compelled to kneel before it to perfect his morning toilet. Was it not a blessing worth many sore knees to enjoy?

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The mission functioned until 1907, the year of statehood, when public schools in community centers made the mission type of school no longer necessary. When the mission retired from service, an auction was held, and all but a few furnishings were taken away. One relic left is "Aunt Liza's" rocking chair, the seat made of split hickory bark, polished by the years to a glorious shade of chestnut brown.

Salmon Abbott, now eighty-four years old, the lone white man who greeted John Murdock in 1883, now owns the land and occupies a few rooms of the old building (see biography of Salmon Moreland Abbott).

A ramble through the old structure seems like a communion with spirits—spirits who listen in vain for feet that pass that way no more, for the voices and happy laughter of a dark-skinned people and their fair-skinned leaders. But there is a pang or regret at seeing how desolate and forlorn a place abandoned in its old age can become.

(INTERVIEW WITH GRETELLE LEGRON, 901 S. DETROIT, TULSA OKLA MARCH 5, 1937)
(Mrs. Legron has recently visited Hillside Mission, checked facts of interest and taken some pictures.)

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ONE OF THE FIRST PIONEERS * S. M. ABBOTT:

Salmon Moreland Abbott, born in Fulton County, Ill., Apr 22, 1853- seems to be the first white man who settled among the Indians in the vicinity of what is today Skiatook Oklahoma. Though eighty-four years old, he is today hale and hearty, clear minded and possesses a memory keen enough to keep up his memoirs, an autobiography that should have historical significance.

Mr. Abbott, in a spirit of wanderlust went to Kansas in his youth, then drifted to the land of the Osage Indians, in 1879. He settled on Bird Creek, north of Skiatook. For a year he was a wanderer with the Osages, then in 1880 he settled down, farming and stock raising. He bought cattle and took up his abode in an Indian shack three miles north-west of the present Hillside Mission site. He was proud of the fact that in a swampy land infested with mosquitoes he escaped the dreaded and in those days fatal malaria.

The nearest trading post (1880) was Coffeyville Kansas, and trips for supplies were always full of adventure. In fact staying at home was an adventure. The first winter of his return trip from Coffeyville he found himself held up by the Jim Vaughn gang (nine of them). They wanted winter quarters and grass land for their horses. They were willing to work- possibly gald of a hideaway. The gang spent the winter as farmhands; cut poles, built two shanties, chinked them with mud-grubbed out the farm, cut 120,000 rails and fenced it in. In the spring they accompanied Mr. Abbott to the outskirts of Coffeyville and when he had paid them they rode on into Coffeyville and robbed the bank--- so Mr. Abbott tells the tale.

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In 1882 Abbott decided to build a house a little further down the slope. This was the first substantial log cabin home built in this district. It was a great event in the community. All of the Indians in the neighborhood helped and it was completed in two days. It was built in the form of a cross-five rooms, one large one in the center, arranged with a double fire-place. Real lumber was brought from Coffeyville for the flooring.

Then seven days later, as the story goes, at the full of the moon in October, the Indians came from far and near to "Abbott's Dance" Osages, Cherokees, Shawnees, Poncas- on foot, horseback, wagons and even in surreys. Mr. Abbott said that vehicles and camp equipment stretched for miles. Dancing and feasting lasted two days. Turkeys, ducks, geese and chickens were baked, boiled, stewed, to suit all tastes. Cakes and pies were baked by the bushel. A steer was slaughtered, one-half barbecued the other half sliced with potatoes in a thirty gallon kettle. The meal was served at a long table out of doors with logs for chairs. Following the meal the dancing began to the music of a bass viol and two fiddles- played in the center room. Chief Rogers was an honored guest and made a speech.

This gives some idea of the environment into which our Quaker missionary, John Murdock came in 1883. (See "Hillside Quaker Indian Mission). What a tale Salmon Abbott could tell of all those years-- watching the mission grow, converting his Indian friends, blending of whites and Indians into a prosperous community. It seems fitting that he should know be a part of that crumbling old mission, that he should pass his waning years in the livable part of it that is left. Even his log cabin has fallen into debris. The remnants stand in a corn-field

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two miles north-west of the mission. Facing the cabin, across the creek on a rise of land lies an old Indian cemetery. The headstones are broken, the inscriptions dim, but a bit of barb-wire fencing gives it a touch of privacy.

Mr. Abbott says that he has had many interesting historic relics but that he has given most of them to the State Historical Society (he did not mention what he had given). The most prized possession which he has now is a shot gun used in the defence of New Orleans under Andrew Jackson. A little spring in the stock of the gun opens the compartment where the bear grease was kept. The gun is in good condition. The history of the gun would be interesting but Mr. Abbott is rather reticent. Interesting would be the location of the secret room in the mission. Years ago, Mr. Abbott said, while putting on a new roof, discovered a room, apparently entirely walled up-- a secret room. Whether used for storage, records or for solitary confinement for some erring student, is a matter of conjecture.

It is quite fitting that Mr. Abbott should be sexton of the Hillside Cemetery. There sleeps 2000 dead, among them notable Cherokee leaders, but none more honored and revered than W. C. Rogers- "Last Chief of the Cherokees". A commanding stone memorial marks his resting place. Another monument in the cemetery is worthy of note. It is a life-size statue of an angel, and it is reported the eyes are particularly compelling- seeming to follow objects which may move in any direction. What kind of stone? Whose grave? dates? Who executed the work? Material for another story.