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Interviews with Rogers County Preachers

by

Mary Stockton

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Information for this brief article is not the result of any single interview; it is compiled from various sources, all of which I consider reliable. Some of the people mentioned are dead, others getting well along in years, some decline to submit to any extended interview.

I has to do with early day ministers of the Gospel and the object is to "Give honor to whom honor is due" regardless of their creeds or denominational connections.

First, I shall mention a man now living. He is making his home with a son who resides near Claremore. I refer to Rev. Martin Luther King, for half a century a Missionary Baptist Minister, and for forty years resident of what is now Rogers county. He is a native of the good old state of Missouri where he was born more than seventy years ago. There he grew to manhood, wooed, won and wedded the daughter of a neighboring farmer. She was also a devoted member of the Baptist Congregation.

In early life he became a Baptist preacher, farming or working at the carpenter's trade through the week and ministering to a small congregation on Sundays.

When he was about thirty years old, a husband and father, and poor so far as the world's goods are concerned, he moved to Oklahoma, settling in the Dog Creek Hill country a few miles northeast from Claremore, later living on a farm near Verdigris and still later in the city of Claremore where he worked at the carpenter's trade for a living but did not neglect his ministering work. He preached in the rural sections, often going to and from his preaching places on foot and taking such "offerings" as were freely and voluntarily given. For many years he preached, frequently at Washington school house, converting many Indians as well as numerous white

people. He did similar duty at Willeo, south of Claremore, at Tiawah, Oologah, Blue Creek, and other places, and evidences of his work is still evident. He still preaches when opportunity to do good offers, not neglecting the out-of-way places; the highways, byways and hedges of life. He has ministered to the sick, united lovers in marriage (promoted families) and performed the last rites at the tombs. It is said that he has officiated at the funerals of half a hundred friends at Washington school house (or the cemetery nearby) and never failed to answer a call to any part of the country. A country bred and untutored man, he has certainly done a lot of good, especially to the poor, the sick, the down-trodden and broken hearted and no doubt will receive a just reward. As this writer takes it, such things are smiled on in Heaven.

Another pioneer who did his part in spreading the Gospel into the highways and byways, but is with us no longer, was Rev. George Sanders, also a native of Missouri where he, in early life, became a Methodist "Circuit Rider". More than forty years ago he, too, came to what is now Rogers County, settling near the village of Bushyhead. He continued in the work of the Master devoting much of his time to it. Years ago he united with the "Holiness Church" and was a zealous proponent of the doctrines until the time of his death about fifteen years ago.

I didn't get the exact date of his death but it was in 1925. His widow, "Aunt Agnes", now more than eight years old, lives with her daughter, Mrs. W. J. Gambel, on a farm near Bushyhead, Oklahoma. She is universally loved by friends who have known her for so many years.

Brother Sanders is gone - gone to his reward, but evidences of his work are with us and will remain with us for years to come.

Another preacher, who is now dead but whose work is still bearing fruit in and around the town of Foyil, was William Hallford, a native of

Georgia, who came to Oklahoma about 1903 and remained until his death twenty years later. He was a true "disciple of Christ" who proposed to adopt, as he put it, the New Testament as his sole and only guide, with no other doctrine or creed to guide him. He believed that the Gethsemane Prayer of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that "they (his followers) should all be as one, that denominationalism would cease to exist and Disciples would unite in a universal brotherhood, believing the New Testament, accepting its teachings, obeying its commandments and enjoying the promised rewards". He did a wonderful work during his life in Rogers County, as is evidenced by many adherents to that line of teaching now to be found throughout the County, especially in the community in which he lived in and around Foyil. A gentleman from Claremore informs us that he was a sinner and down-right skeptic, until he listened to Mr. Hallford's teachings. He and his wife "Accepted the terms laid down in the New Testament"; that his wife "lived the Life" until called to her reward and he proposed to do the same thing.

Other early day ministers who did a good work and have passed on but upon whom I have not been able to acquire much data were Rev. Thomas E. Dixon, who lived at Chelsea, Rev. McSpadden, who organized the first Methodist Church at Chelsea, Rev. Richard Parks and his son, Rev. Calhoun Parks, also of Chelsea, kept the good work going on for many years and doubtless did much good. The elder Mr. Parks has three sons, Dick, Joh, and Thad, and one daughter, Maggie, still living in Chelsea at the time this was written, April 13, 1937.

Rev. Panner, a "Campbell-ite", so called; Rev. Shanks, a Baptist and Rev. Cannon, a Presbyterian, were early day ministers around Claremore, while Rev. Fred Chadwick, Methodist, did good work in and around Inola in the years now gone forever.

Last but by no means least, were three Indian preachers, who taught their countrymen the Gospel of Jesus Christ (as they understood it) in their native languages.

They were:

Rev. Louis Wolfe, full-blood Cherokee, a Baptist. His daughter, Mrs. Jack Cochran, is a fervent worker in the Baptist Church at Wagonon, in the northern part of the county. This church was organized by Rev. Chas. Journeycake, a Delaware Indian.

Rev. rope Campbell, who died a few years ago at the advanced age of 114 years, was a Methodist minister. Although he was the grandson of a white man, a Methodist Missionary, he did not speak the English language but was fluent in the musical tongue of the Cherokee and conducted meetings among the full blood Cherokees in various parts of the Cherokee Nation. He was a minister for three quarters of a century. Rev. Campbell was the great-great-grandfather of Mrs. Lat Crow, now of Sagecyah; of Miss Hazel Harper, of Claremore; and of Mrs. Ed. Housenfluck and Miss Juanita Ross, who reside near Tiawah.

More reference to Rev. Journeycake will be found in the interview with John R. Ketchum, in this series.