

is recorded in it as part of the Mitchell family. When ~~my great-grandmother~~ she was 15, she had the ~~1~~ elders to baptize her. Then when they were set free she gave him money and a mule and told him to go into Arkansas and homestead because it would be better for him. ~~xx~~ Everyone around there knew and he him as a slave ~~x~~ / ~~He~~ would have this complex. ~~xxx~~ She was a very devout, righteous woman. As slave owners, they were very kind to our people. She taught him and prepared him, saying "Now wherever you go, I want you to teach the truth and baptize people and have church.

Faulkner

So he came to ~~Faulkner~~ County (~~Faulkner~~), Arkansas, about 27 miles N NW of Little Rock, Conway is the county seat. There he met and married my grandmother. Then he moved west to Plummerville, 14 miles west of Conway, ~~settling~~ settling down in a farming community and established the church. This was the second church in the state of Arkansas among the blacks. The first one was at ~~Blackton~~ Blackton, where Brother Hogan's home is. From his home, he rode a mule and traveled all over the state of Arkansas preaching. ~~He~~ He did not establish Blackton, as it was established way back before my the black grandfather, due to the efforts of/Alexander Campbell. When the Restoration Movement came to Nashville he was converted and ~~then~~ established the work in Blackson. ~~He~~ He and such men as T. H. Murchant and others preached there.

Then my grandfather established the work westward at Northway, Arkansas and that congregation still exists, only it is out in the hill country on the highway. This land which we owned and where the church was, the flood waters in '27 washed all that ~~landmark~~ landmark away. So, naturally, my mother and raised When I was was born/in the church. /At the age of 8 she moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma. I stayed there until I was 12 when she sent me back to Arkansas. I was baptized when I was 12.

B: Why did she go to Muskogee?

W: She went there to find work to take care of me. My father drowned when I was 2½ years old. She had the problem of making a living. ~~She~~ ~~wanted~~

~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ She ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and Her wage as domestic being one of the best/cooks in Conway was \$2.25 a week, for 7 days a week. So in order for me to go to city schools and to get better wages, she moved to Muskogee. They were paying \$7.00 per week there for cateresses.

B: Did she have relatives there?

W: No. She had a distant aunt.

B: Brother spoke of his preaching there ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ when it seemed there was a large black ~~xxxxxx~~ population present.

W: There was. You see, Oklahoma was not a slave state, so many of the blacks migrated from Texas and Arkansas to ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the nearest place to where they could find freedom. It was near the line of Arkansas, 87 northwest from ~~xxxxxx~~ arrived miles/~~xxxxxx~~Fort Smith. When we ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~, there was no Church of Christ in the ~~xx~~ town. To my knowledge, there was only one congregation in the state and it had six or eight members and it was near Oklahoma City. ~~xxxx~~ The Christian Church was there, but she would not join them. ~~xxxx~~ Since it was nearest to our beliefs, she did allow me to go to Sunday School. Because there was no church, she sent me back to Plummerville, to live with her brother. We had a country church which was served in those days by ~~xxxxxx~~ circuit preachers who came by once a month. Her brother was an elder in the church and the environment was very wholesome and devout. I went back, attended school and there obeyed the gospel, June 18, 19 . The church had brought in for a protracted ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ meeting a Brother ~~xxxxxx~~ Calvary. But my uncle had already taught me to be a Christian, and music. He has all us young people ready ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to obey the gospel. That is what the elders ~~xxx~~ did in those days. When a meeting was coming up, they ~~xxxxxx~~ started working on us three or four months ahead, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ getting us ready. Then we were baptized.

World War I

Then/~~xxxxxxxx~~ broke out. They wanted me to go to school and sent me to Shorter's College in Little Rock. I was in the junior high department

of this Methodist school~~x~~ which still exists today. The flu epidemic broke out, ~~and~~ people were dying so, and I took with the fever. ~~My~~ My mother heard about it, came and got me and brought me back to~~o~~ Oklahoma. I went on to high school ~~xxx~~ there. There was still no Church of Christ. My mother and I would still attend the Christian Church. In those days the Christian Church doctrine was identical to the Church of Christ, but their practices we~~e~~ were different because they were govern~~ed~~ by the United Missionary Society. so far as But/the doctrines, principles, ~~xxxxxx~~ becoming a Christian, the church as belonging to Christ, these were the same even though it was the Christian Church. So she accepted that so we could have communion and for a mere me to be in Sunday School~~x~~. When I became/16, I would come up into ~~this~~ country in the summertime, travel around, working where I could make more then money ~~xx~~ I could go to school.

B: Detroit?

W: Detroit and Flint. I did not live in Detroit.

B: Why~~x~~ here?

W: For one thing, I was very adventursome ~~xxx~~ and I like to travel and see what the rest of the world looked like. I wanted to see what people were like in different sections. My mother knew this so she permitted me to come. I had no relatives here at all. I would come and put my age ~~xx~~ up to 20~~x~~ ~~xxxx~~ of course, I was good sized.

~~xxxxxx~~ I ~~would~~ could work in steel mills, railroad shops, cook, I tried some of everything. By putting my age up I could make ~~x~~ \$3.00 per day~~x~~ in 1920. Then I went back/ home. In 1930, the _____ Blvd church

in Muskogee, Brother J. W. Brents was the minister, ~~xxxxx~~ since A. M. Burton was sponsoring Brother Marshall Keeble at that time, he got the brethren to send for him to hold a meeting.

He had held a meeting at Fort Smith in which he baptized 86 people, I believe it was. So Brother Brent got them to get Brother Keeble in to Muskogee. He came and the white church sponsored him which resulted in 204 responded--the largest number to be baptized among the black~~s~~x in history. This was done in 2 weeks.

When he came, Mama said "This is the truth", so we identified ourselves with the Church of Christ. Brother ~~xxxxxx~~ saw that I knew what the church was about. I was young and energetic, led singing, ushered, so he said he wanted me to be a preacher. He gave me a book of Brother Sewell's sermons and encouraged me to give talks. Brother Bowser immediately came over to strengthen this new church and ~~xxxx~~ he became interested in me. I already had made some talks before he got there, not preaching yet, however. The white church appointed one of their elders over ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ us, Brother J. A. Jones, a very fine man. He and his wife were assigned over this 204 membership. They would come over and be with us on Sunday and then teach on Thursday. The wife would work with the women and he would work with us. Thus the church was under the auspices of the elders. My mother did not think it was right, but since it was a new church, she held her peace. He soon appointed a "acting elders" ~~xxx~~ ⁱⁿ the church, and we had for preaching was Lorin Penny.....(?), a man Brother Keeble had baptized in Fort Smith (87 miles away) and whom he had put over the church under the white ~~xxxxxx~~ church. ~~xxxxxx~~ Penny didn't know anything about the gospel. He hadn't been in the church long enough yet nobody had been better ^{in the teaching} trained/that first year. There was not two years difference in the establishment of the churches and bot' were very large but no training programs. Brother Penny was a man with a good job and he obeyed the gospel, so they said here is a man ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ so Brother Keeble put him in as preacher. His lack of experience, knowing, no guidance--I knew more about the church & the doctrine than he did. Being a younster, I had been ~~xxxx~~ always taught to obey the older people so I was subject unto him as far as that was concerned, but my talks were a little

more advanced in the Scripture, and I'm a youngster and not
a preacher. Of course, I had been taught the Scriptures from
my youth up. Anyway, by Brother Jones appointing "acting elders"
over the church and they did not know anything either, and not
being able to govern the congregation and we were having a tre-
mendous increase of members the first year--100 baptized from
the date the meeting closed--so the church was growing, but
it was a mushroom growth. There was my mother and myself and
four other people who were members of the Church of Christ, but
the women couldn't do anything, I became very discouraged and
preaching, quit trying. Then, too, Brother Brent left and went
back to Nashville. So I had no encouragement, I had no one who
could really help me. I became very, very discouraged because
everything I tried to do that I knew, it was wrong in their
thinking because they did not know any better. I started out
doing personal work, going to the rural communities preaching.
I'd rent a truck, get some of the acting elders to go with me
but I'd take the young people to sing. They thought that was
so wrong for a youngster. I wasn't married and they couldn't
understand that. They didn't think an unmarried youngster should
be in the pulpit anyway. That was when I quit preaching.
Then Brother Bowser immediately brought Brother Hogan in and
recommended him to the church, and we accepted him on the
salary of \$10 per week. Brother Bowser started working
with me, Brother Hogan encouraged me, so I went back to work
and my ministry revived. In 1934 I became more and more active
and Brother Hogan and I established the church in Okmulgee in
1935. I led the singing and he did the preaching. We baptized
189 in 2 weeks, five preachers. I went back and forth

How was I baptized?
When was I baptized?
How was I baptized?

What was I baptized?
When was I baptized?

How was I baptized?
When was I baptized?
How was I baptized?

How was I baptized?
When was I baptized?
How was I baptized?

from Muskogee and preached for this church on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings and go back on Wednesday night and conduct Bible class. I continued that until we could get Brother Kennedy to move from Chicago to come down and take the work.

I then moved to East Texas. In that field there wasn't anything but digressive Christian Churches. Brother Bowser went down there and he got them to accept Brother Hogan. Brother Hogan went down there and we began to convert these churches. I quit my job and my business--I had a filling station and tire service--I gave up everything and I went down there. They wouldn't agree to give me any salary but they would give me every other Sunday's collection, whatever it was. First Sunday's was ~~the~~ the church, next Sunday's mine. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ But I had to work just the same, pay my own expenses. ~~But~~ I accepted it as a challenge. We began to evangelize East Texas. We began to change the church buildings, remodeling old buildings because there was ~~XXXXXXXX~~ . In this labor was where I was really initiated. I had many experiences because of the preachers--and all of the churches had one elder in the Christian Church, mechanical music, etc. I was battling and fighting with them.

B: What places in East Texas?

W: Longview, and by that I mean all around there, Gilmer, Marshall--and here this includes some 20 congregations in and around the ~~xfarming~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ communities like Hallsville, Rosebud, Athens, New Zion, Willow Springs, Oak Grove, etc.

B: How were these churches started?

W: When the digressive move came, ~~in~~ the Christian Churches rapidly in capturing these churches

B: Did they have black preachers? How were they started to begin ~~with~~.

W: Yes, you see, no work was done among the blacks, what you would call so far as ~~the~~ the Church of Christ is concerned real missionary work in ~~preaching~~ preaching the gospel/prior to A. M. Burton's

x

sponsoring Marshall Keeble along the latter part of '29--it really got underway in 1930. But the Christian Church, when the digressive move came, there were just like my grandfathery was not sponsored by the church but his mistress encouraged him the basics of the Bible. So in Tennessee, the churches that were established came as the result of slave-owners who were members of the Church of Christ who recognized that their slaves had a soul, taught him the truth. In this, the slaves formed places of worship. When the digressive move came, the Christian Church brethren, which in those days were called 'left-wingers' or 'digressives' and we were the 'conservatives' or 'right-wingers', they established a school for the blacks to educate them in the church in Edwards, Mississippi called Southern Christian Institute. They came into our community when I was just a boy 8 years old and offered free education to the blacks down there. The blacks wanted their young people to have an education because they only had an 8th grade school. We weren't allowed beyond that, I don't know if it was by law or what but that's the way it was because of the white man in Arkansas. Our school was taught in our church building and our teachers couldn't finish high school and come back and teach up to the 8th grade. So when the Christian Church came in there, our own brethren, some of the deacons, sent their children to Southern Christian Institute. Brent Herbie's brother, Fletcher, went there and Brother LeRoy Strickland, one of the elders sent his son there and his son is still down in Jackson, Mississippi. When they built this school, then they sent their preachers into our community, (My grandfather died in 1898) men like Bostick, and Matlock, Ward. These digressives did not come in arguing among the conservative congregations but they would preach and gradually digress. But our congregation they were never able to get into the Missionary Society because of the indoctrination of my grandfather which his mistress and white elders had done for him back when he was a boy. His son, Steve Mitchell, who was also an elder, he, too, would not allow it. Yet he sent his children there because it was the only place in the world where we could go and

get at least a 10th grade education. The Christian Church capitalized on this factor. Then they ~~built~~ built ~~the~~ Jarvis Christian College in Texas ~~in~~ and missionary and this gave them a preaching/base out from which they spread their doctrine throughout East Texas. Wherever they found a congregation and they were all rural except one, they captured it.

B: How is it the Brother Bowser got in contact with ~~the~~ this area?
The New Zion church

W: ~~They~~/called him by mistake. He was not there three days before he was having himself a debate. The white brethren even sent up in Missouri and got a man who ~~xx~~ came in. The brethren around there--they had Abe Young to meet him. Being a scholar that he was, he just chewed him up and made mincemeat out of him. Then he immediately arranged for R. N. Hogan, / who was then living in Ft. Worth to come in. Six months later I moved there and we began to capture those churches, moving the pianos and organs out. We changed the power structure among the preachers and the one-man elder~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ over each congregation. We changed 25 or 30 congregations in the early 30's.

B: What happened to the Oklahoma churches?

W: When Brother Hogan came, being the ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ evangelist~~x~~ he was, the Muskogee church experienced a tremendous growth to 431 members at the time that he and I left~~x~~ at the same ~~xxx~~ time. When he came he established the work in Haskell, Oklahoma. The largest work was in Okmulgee--189(then we went to Haskell, Holdenville, went into Oklahoma-- atLangston we almost captured the city~~x~~. I moved to Langston. We established the work in Guthrie. We established those works simultaneously. We baptized in Oklahoma City and Guthrie all of the most prominent people~~ly~~--the mayor, the city treasurer, the chairman ~~x~~of the council and five teachers out of Langster University. I lived at Langster and Guthrie, preaching for three churches, the ~~xxxx~~ third being Meridian, which was an old Christian Church that ~~xxxxxx~~ had been deleted and I established. I found the old building, took the bars off of it, cleaned out the bird's nest, wasps and snakes and started worshipping in it. I preached for these three churches getting

the first salary I got which was \$8.00 a week. ~~like~~ I had to travel to get to these three churches. I ~~x~~ farmed, raised watermelon, cotton, sold cosmetics--whatever I could do to makes expenses for/~~the~~ I had a wife and baby by that time.

As a result of one of the brethren there~~x~~, _____ Jackson who was with me in Muskogee, he came up to see ~~xxx~~ me in Guthrie, my wife was rather discouraged. I asked him to set up a meeting for me with the brethren at 12th and Drexel--Brother Mattox, Brother Ward of Capitol Hill and some elders. ~~like~~ I told them that we could establish ~~x~~the work in _____ and they asked how. I said the black people ~~x~~ do ~~not~~ not know the gospel. I ~~xxx~~ gave them my plan: go down into the ghetto near the fairground and put up a big tent. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "Y'all let me ~~x~~set it up, let me run it and you pay the bills." They asked if I would do the preaching. I said, "No, let Hogan do the preaching and I'll do the singing and personal work." They did. I called Hogan ~~x~~and as a result we had 98 baptisms in 2 weeks ~~x~~which established the East 7th Street church. From that other churches were established. Bob came from there. While I was there, I went into Ardmore ~~x~~and established the work~~x~~ there and Brown , Oklahoma.

B: While not taking away from yours, Brother Hogan's or Brother Kennedy's ability, since this was a new State, what were some of the contributing factors which mad~~x~~ this kind of success possible? Had the people heard ~~x~~ any kind of preaching before?

W: No. It was all new to them, but people were more religious-minded in those days. They ~~were~~ were more receptive to the truth. The way ~~x~~ we preached the doctrine was forceful, uncompromising, pointing out error in denominationalism and sectarianism such as people had become dissatisfied with anyway. We came in with the truth. We made it distinctively clear the~~x~~ difference in NT Christianity and sectarianism. ~~k~~ And people could see it more readily.

People were not as prosperous in those days as they are now. When they

get prosperous, they have the tendency to become independent, self-willed and self-sufficient. But~~x~~ the black man back then was very much under ~~XXXXXXXX~~ oppression. He believed in ~~gm~~ God and he was looking ~~x~~ for the right answer. Sectarian religion had so many things about it that ~~hm~~ people had begun to wonder about ~~ix~~ anyway. When we came in exposing and challenging ~~xthemx~~ when we came into the ~~xxxx~~ cities. We ~~w~~ challenged the preachers--we called them out. We had debates~~x~~ ~~abs~~ after debate. Our meetings were usually not less than three weeks, often from four to eight weeks, sometimes 10 ~~x~~weeks. We'd preach every night including Saturday night. We didn't have any nights off. Then during the day we'd preach ^{on} down ~~im~~/the ~~xxxxx~~ wagon ~~xxxx~~ yards or down at the court house square, sometimes on the court house steps, holding out charts, getting some boys or brethren to hold~~x~~ them while we preached. We would sometimes convert them on the court house steps. We'd be driving through a city and ~~*~~ that Ford Brother Bowser would see a group of people, ~~xxxxxx~~ he would stop/~~x~~and get out and preach to them. One time we were traveling going through Brownsville, Tennessee and we passed the court house square and ~~Bxxxxxx~~ ~~Bxxxxxx~~ black people were there on ~~x~~ Saturday and he said/" Pull her over, stop her. Look at all these people. They must hear the gospel." He got out of his Ford, looking back in it he got an old rag and I had to stand there and hold it. ~~x~~ He began ~~*~~ "Here me!" and everyone looked at that one-armed man standing up there, and he began to preach. We preached there until it got so ~~dark~~ dark you couldn't see the chart!

B: Did he go on, did he stay?

W: We preached there and got them stirred up, got some (baptisms) and located them a preacher. And there's a church in Brownsville. In debates ^{teaching them} were able to get people to see that the~~x~~ preachers were/wrong because they ~~xxx~~ couldn't even prove what he was preaching. We had/^{five debates when we est'd} ~~xxxxxxixxxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ the church in Oklahoma City with the most able preachers. As a result, we almost emptied one of those churches.

B: When the Oklahoma Territory was opened up, did many denominational churches come in and establish themselves?

W: Oh yes. They came in. Baptist, Methodist, and the Church of God in Christ ~~which~~ which is called Holiness, the Evening Light Saints, --they just flooded ~~Oklahoma City, and the state, and,~~ the state of Oklahoma, because there were opportunities for the black man, better jobs, more freedom. There was some racism there, don't think ~~w~~ there wasn't, but it wasn't like it was in other states. At least he was recognized.

He could vote. Indians and black men who came there before the run of 160 '89 received their land rights of ~~120~~ 160 acres each which made Oklahoma Negroes ~~practically~~ practically owned by Indians and ~~black~~ people. Cities like Muskogee, just about all the buildings were owned by them. Now the white man was appointed as their guardian and administrator and they could take their money and put up these buildings that belonged to them. Through this, they were finally able to wind up owning these buildings themselves. It was the biggest bunch of crooks and trickery you ever saw in your life. Conspiracy. But this is what happened. But this naturally, caused more Negroes to come in.

B: Would you talk about a typical worship service which you knew there in Arkansas.

W: We had circuit preachers which meant they preached for us once a month. They had to divide their time, there were such few preachers. On preaching Sunday, we had services all day, ~~The~~ meaning we'd meet for Sunday School, dinner on the ground, then preaching after dinner and then we would have preaching again at night. Sunday school would begin ~~at~~ at 10:00 a. m. and would last until about 11:30. Preaching was next which always lasted two hours. Then dinner on the ground. All the wagons are there with food and you'd eat. After eating, the people would come back in for prayer-meeting which lasted about an hour. After that, the preacher would preach another 2 hours. On the non-preaching days,

the elders would feed the ~~flunk~~ congregation, teach Sunday School and get up and exhort, then go home. In the evening we would come back and have an hour of prayer meeting. Sometimes another elder would exhort the congregation or maybe the same one. Singing, praying, and testifying on Wednesday Night prayer meeting. The bell would ring and the people would come. There was someone to exhort. That lasted about 2 hours. Then everybody would walk or ride their mules ~~back home~~ or get in their wagons going back home.

B: Was any literature used beyond the Bible?

W: No. They didn't believe in that, quarterlies, etc. Finally, they accepted little cards with pictures on it which we got from the Gospel Advocate that was used for us little children. But the rest of it was Bible teaching. We had just a square building. The elder would stand and teach ~~xxx~~ everybody. We/finally accepted the quarterly/from the Gospel Advocate. Then we had it into classes through young ~~xxx~~ people, but the old people always used their Bibles.

Everything regarding communion was one-cup, just one glass, there were not individual cups in the churches until long into the '30's. It was a doctrinal issue. They fought the church extremely on it. Even in my days of preaching, we would meet and debate a whole week on the communion cup, literature, collection envelopes, ~~xxx~~ collection baskets, and tuning forks.

B: I thought your people had rejected the influence of the Christian Church very early. Were their preachers around and having a direct influence?

W: Yes. There were so many of them who were members of the Christian Church and we knew they were living in error. We were pointing out the difference. Naturally, they were trying to protect their own. There were members who believed this way in the church. The Christian Church up until 1931 was very strong in Arkansas, Texas and everywhere. But they began to lose ground. As we began to develop more preachers

and establish more congregations in the late 20's and early 30's. ~~Rxxxx~~
Think about it, prior to that time, we only had one living preacher in the
state of Arkansas and that was my granddaddy. No full-time preachers ~~xfor~~
any ~~xchurch~~ until way up in the '30's. The Christian ~~xxxxxx~~ Church began
to digress more and ~~xxx~~ more to hold the people. But that a digression
for you, it never stops until it goes to the extreme. The more she digressed,
the more we challenged her. We labeled her like any ~~x~~ other sinner. She
quit preaching the doctrine of making~~d~~ disciples. She began to shake them
in, take them in any way she could get them. She joined and merged with
the Congregational church, others went in another ~~xxxxxx~~ direction, etc.

B: That was much later. I ~~xxxx~~ noticed in a directory of the church
~~xxx~~ which Sister Holt showed~~m~~ me, that in 1942 Center Point had the largest
number of members in the state. How ~~x~~ did this come about?

W: I don't know who established that work. But as in Tennessee, there
was~~n~~ no generalk effort to do mission work among the~~n~~ black people, but
when ever a ~~m~~ white member ~~had a relationship with~~ ^{knew personally} a black person, there
would be teaching done in some instances. The work in ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{Silver} Point is
one of the oldest.

B: I'm talking ~~about~~ about Center Point, Arkansas

W: Oh yes. I don't know just when it started, but it goes back to the
days of T. H. Merchant and others who were back there with my granddaddy.
Brother Merchant was a Jamaican who came over. Alexander Campbell and
Womack ~~xand~~ others preached back then. That church started after ours did.
That's where Norman Adamson came from.

B: ~~x~~ Campbell and Womack were from Nashville. Did they come over very
often to preach there?

W: Yes. This is how the church was established in Brother Hogan's home,
by brethren coming out of Nashville. Blackton in Monroe County wasn't too
far from West Tennessee. The ~~x~~ Cathey--these were some of Brother Hogan's
grands and great-grands. That's ~~x~~how the church started, It goes way ~~xxx~~
back to the time following slavery.