PIONEER PREACHER

By Jerry B. Jeter

In the long line of homesteaders who pioneered the Republic of Texas there are none more worthy than the families from which descended the parents of Elias Daniel Jeter who may as justly be called teacher, and preacher as Elias of old. He was born October 22, 1868 in the deep back wood of East Texas, to Allen William Jeter, ex-confederate soldier and his wife Susan Seale Jeter. He learned the three r’s in a log school house and continued his studies until he received a certificate to teach, but at twenty an inborn spirit of adventure urged him into coming to the then unsettled Territory of Oklahoma, where the population was only blanket Indians on reservations.

It was in 1888 when he drove the passenger coach regularly from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, covering the entire distance south and across Red River at Charley Crossing and on into Henrietta, Texas in one day and on the following day made the return trip. This was accomplished by driving at a gallop when the roads and the weather permitted and changing the six horse teams at Charley Crossing and way stations along the route.

He did not participate in the run for land in 1889 but came to Oklahoma City on the day of the opening and went to work for a livery stable owner who catered to prospectors and cross country travelers. His work as guide took him into all sections of both Oklahoma and Indian Territories where he learned well the topography of the entire country. He knew the short cuts across the prairie and the cut offs from one trail to another, where the rivers meet and where the end of the valley, covered with post oak and elm glide gently upward then break abruptly toward treeless mountain caps of solid granite. He learned the Indians by tribe and characteristics, from the sedate old Choctaw on the east to the wild Comanche on the foot hills of the Wichita mountains. He learned the white settlers too and their various beliefs, and religions. Though he did not know it at the time, by making friends with the white people as well as with the Indians he was molding his future with the mingled peoples who were then populating their promised land.

1. Jerry B. Jeter, a son of the Reverend E. B. Jeter, makes his home in Oklahoma City and is a member of the Crown Heights Baptist Church. Mr. Jeter wishes to make acknowledgment to the Reverend H. F. Gilbert for his valuable assistance in compiling this article.

2. See Appendix A for letter from The American Baptist Home Mission Society, New York City.
In the Spring of 1890 he returned to Van Zandt County Texas and was married to his childhood sweetheart, Miss Arrie Smith and settled down to teach school and study. Yet he saw himself, in the future, returning to Oklahoma in the role of a physician. He borrowed text books from his older brother and spent his spare time studying. Later he attended the Memphis Hospital and Medical College at Memphis Tennessee from which he graduated in March, 1894 and began the practice of medicine at Rockwall, Texas. The desire to return to Oklahoma remained with him through the years that followed. In 1901 he moved his family by wagon train, across the Red River at Charley Crossing and into Oklahoma over the same trail where he had driven the stage twelve years before.

Being on Indian reservation land, it was with the permission of Quannah Parker, Chief of the Comanches that he and his party of three wagons were allowed to make camp at the foot of Mount Scott, near the present location of Lake Lawtonka, from which Lawton, Oklahoma and Fort Sill get their water supply. It was in 1901, just before the opening of Lawton, that he became the assistant missionary at the Deyo Mission located about fifteen miles southwest of Fort Sill.

The Reverend E. C. Deyo, having been sent by the American Baptist Home mission Board at New York in 1893 to establish a Baptist mission in the Comanche Country, had not been home since that date. He was called to New York and left the mission in the charge of Doctor Jeter. Upon his return he found that the work had progressed so well that he persuaded the young doctor to remain at the mission and assist him in his work with the Indians.

The mission dwelling house of Mr. Deyo burned in the winter and along with the house were burned the records of the mission and the personal letters of the missionary. Mr. Deyo and his wife lived with Doctor Jeter and his family in the small house by the side of the mission Church house until a few of the white settlers and some Indians hauled rock from the Wichita mountains a few miles northwest and built the square rock house which can still be seen from the Lawton-Cache highway. The large old barn, a few years later was struck by lightning and burned. And many years later the inside frame work of the square rock house burned again, but this time the solid rock walls were as good after the fire as they were before and a new framework was rebuilt within those timeworn walls. The little mission Church house was rebuilt and remodeled in 1929 and stands as a memorial to the life work of the Reverend, Mr. Deyo and his missionary wife, who both served there in Baptist work among the Indians from 1893 until their

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passing. All that remains unchanged at the Deyo mission is the small plot where the Comanches are still given a Christian burial by their remaining friends and the Reverend H. F. Gilbert who until this day preaches to the Indians through an interpreter.

In 1901 an epidemic of small pox took the lives of ten of the family of Comanche Jack, a sub-chief under Quannah Parker, and they were buried in a plot selected by him for a family cemetery. In 1903 a citizen committee at Lawton prevailed upon him to move his family cemetery out of the limits of the new townsite and Comanche Jack consented. He came to Doctor Jeter for help. Unable to get the graves moved for the emotional Peyote Indian of the Comanche Tribe and knowing his characteristics, Doctor Jeter, after consulting with the Reverend Deyo and deciding that it would be the best of their work with the Indians, agreed to undertake the task himself. He was given a check for one hundred dollars, drawn on a Lawton bank and signed by the sensitive yet subtle Indian, to move his family who were buried there from the City of Lawton to the Deyo Mission cemetery. He dug the grave himself in the hard red clay in the cemetery just south of the mission Church yard.

With slender hands the young doctor wiped his brow. The long hard task of digging was done. He could not hire help for the excavation, but now after days of drudging work, the cemetery was in readiness. The fresh earth mound over the empty grave cast a shadow against the rays of the low hanging sun almost tipping the rim westward on the prairie. At four o'clock the next morning he started for Lawton where arrangements had been made for help to excavate the bodies. Daylight came as the bend of the road turned east and his wagon jostled over the bumpy pony trail. It was the 5th of February and the season's chill wind, came biting down, from the Wichitas, tossing the knee-high, brown prairie grass in to swishing waves. Heavy cold clouds hovered northward shadowing the rocky caps of Mount Scott and Signal Mountain, and northward still was Rainey Mountain on the other side of which was the Rainey Mountain Mission of the Kiowas. Granite-gray rocks of the rim cragged an outline as the sun came up dimly through the haze, blue, cold and threatening.

Until now the young doctor had given little thought as to what might be buried in the graves with the Indians. He remembered that Comanche Jack, in his youth had been a worrier, yet also he remembered that Comanche Jack in later years had made a trip to Texas and upon his return had introduced the name of Jesus into the Peyote members of the tribe. But others of the Comanches may have made friendly contributions at the burials. He knew that there would be other things in the graves than bodies.

4. See Appendix B for letters from the Reverend H. F. Gilbert.
When he arrived at the Lawton cemetery workmen had already begun their task. They struck the first object as he arrived. It was the pumel from a saddel, the kind used by the early Texans. He directed the loading of the bodies, but there was little of them to load, only bones, yet well preserved bones from the protecting tight clay. The articles placed into the graves by friends and relatives was the greater load. Beside the piece of a saddel there was a copper bucket, beads, a heavy chain from some distant logging camp, an axe from Spain hand wrought, flint arrow heads and spear points and carvings in wood that out date the modern Indian. There were steel and hard flint tomahawks with raw hide thongs that curled around what had been wooden handles. All these were loaded into the wagon with sideboards, along with the remains of the family of Comanche Jack. All through the day he supervised the loading and as night came he headed his team toward the Deyo Mission and dreaded the fifteen miles of cold loneliness. And with the darkness the rain came as if the clouds had been waiting for just the proper time. It came in dark drenching cold that clattered against the wagon sideboards and on the canvas stretched taut across the top. His delicate hands were in big mittens and his broad black hat sheltered his eyes as he peered into the darkness. His team was not visible nor was the white canvas wagon sheet covering his grim load.

Suddenly as he thought of what he hauled and the desolate loneliness through the prairie, there was a sound from the side of the wagon; a sound familiar to all drivers. A foot had been placed on the brake in front of the left rear wheel. Someone was riding with him. Curlicues danced in the cold on his neck and his teeth chattered. "Who's there?" He called brokenly, but there was no answer. It was an Indian, he guessed from the silence and the fact that he stepped on the left brake. A white man would have been on the other side of the wagon, but not an Indian. He spoke in Comanche and still there was no reply. Only the sound of feet scraping over the wet canvas, coming toward the drivers seat. He stood up and poised for an attack in the darkness. "Stop!" he yelled, "or I'll shoot." He hoped the bluff would work and it did.

An Indian grunted, "Uh."

"What do you want?" The driver demanded.

"Indian ride with dead Indian." Came the answer as a shivering old Indian with a wet blanket climbed over the back of the seat to sit with the young doctor. But he might have just as well been alone for not another word could he get from the old Comanche during the two jostling hours they rode into the black night.
Doctor Jeter never learned why the Indian rode with him that night. As they crossed the creek a mile from the Mission the Indian climbed back over the top of the seat, clambered over the wet canvas wagon sheet and with the familiar grunt stepped off the wagon brake on the left side and was gone into the dark from whence he came.

During his stay at the Mission, Doctor Jeter helped conduct the encampments of the Comanches and the Kiowas. Literally hundreds of each tribe assembled at the same time and pitched their tepees, facing the east on the Mission grounds. Church, with reports from the converts and sermons from some of the Indian preachers were heard daily. All Indians came, from the chiefs to the most humble, and all attended the services and participated in the singing. And daily a beef was killed to feed the encampment and this daily slaughter became almost as important as the church services. It is believed by some that here was started what later became the popular so-called barbecue which climaxed its popularity perhaps with multitudinous attendance of the spectacular celebration at inauguration of Governor J. C. Walton.

At the time of the opening of Lawton, Doctor Jeter helped to organize the First Baptist Church and was a charter member. His being ordained into the ministry by that Church on January 1, 1902, started him out on the career that was to make him one of the outstanding figures in the early history of the Baptist Church in Oklahoma. His first sermon was preached to a semicircle of blanket ed Indians, in the shelter of a cliff on the banks of Blue Beaver Creek in the Comanche reservation near Lawton. The lone white man, also wearing a blanket was the interpreter.

Shortly afterward he organized a church at the Deyo Mission for the white people and started a mission for white people at the settlement of Walters, Oklahoma, twenty miles Southeast which he organized into a Baptist church on the third Sunday in October, 1902, and became its first pastor.

By diligent work among the white people six new churches were started within the Comanche Country and with these six churches an association was formed. They called it the Comanche County Baptist Association and named Doctor Jeter, then a preacher, as the first missionary to the white people in the association. By giving half his time to the new church at Walters where he was pastor and by devoting the other half of his time to missionary and organization work, it was not many months until there were churches at Temple, Hastings, Randlett, Cache Apeitone and many other places which were remote at the time. He had little time for the practice of medicine.
He was living at Walters when the great cyclone came to Snyder, Oklahoma leaving in its wake many dead and injured. Reverend Jeter was one of the doctors who were rushed to the devastated City to care for injured and it was there that he saw the need for work for the orphan children.

He remembered that it was just a year before that a tiny baby was left in an Oklahoma City laundry wagon and that Reverend A. J. Scott, state Baptist evangelist had taken charge of the baby. Mr. Scott, with the co-operation of the Washington Avenue Baptist Church employed Miss Winnie Mitchell to take the baby along with two others who had been left in the community and they started the Baptist Orphans Home. Doctor Jeter became its financial secretary and toured the territory for the purpose of raising funds for purchasing land and erecting a home for the orphans. It was in 1905 and the orphans home board re-organized and Doctor Jeter was elected as the first Superintendent of the Oklahoma Baptist Orphans home. His friend I. M. Putman, a real estate dealer in Oklahoma City and a deacon in the First Baptist Church, donated twenty acres of land northwest of Oklahoma City and the building which can still be seen was started.

It was also in 1906 that he was a delegate to the joint session of the Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory Conventions in Shawnee, Oklahoma out of which was formed and organized the General Baptist Convention of Oklahoma. The Reverend J. C. Stalecup was elected the secretary.

At the next meeting of the board after the first organization assembly, Doctor Jeter tendered his resignation as Superintendent of the Orphans Home, but was persuaded to continue with work until a suitable successor could be found. He continued with the work for a time but insisted that he be relieved in order that he might return to missionary work. The Baptist Board named the Reverend W. A. McKinney to succeed him and, the preacher, Doctor Jeter was elected state missionary to work in the Comanche Country at the same board meeting. The Comanche Country included the Big Pasture.

When the Big Pasture was opened for settlement in 1907, Doctor Jeter attended the lot sales at Randlette, Kell, Itchita and other places and lots for church purposes were secured from the Government and temporary church buildings were erected. In his work in the Big Pasture Country, he had the help of the State Sunday School Superintendent, Dr. W. D. Moorer and Churches with Sunday Schools were organized in almost every settlement.

For many years he was a member of the Board of the Oklahoma Baptist General Convention and terminated the office when
the Oklahoma Baptist University was located at Shawnee over his protest.

In 1909 the cities of Oklahoma City and Shawnee were the two contesting bidders. Oklahoma City offering forty acres of land, Shawnee offering sixty acres of land and $100,000. Regardless of the cash offer from Shawnee, Doctor Jeter determined that Oklahoma City was the best location for the future of the University and made long and earnest pleas before the board of which he was a member. But Shawnee was elected by a five to four vote and he resigned from the board.

During World War I, in 1918, at the request of the Oklahoma Council of defense, Reverend Jeter again took up the practice of medicine to help with flu epidemic. Later he continued to practice medicine in Oklahoma City, Shawnee and Longview, Texas. But he did not neglect his preaching. After moving to Oklahoma City in 1920 he continued to preach at churches in small towns adjacent and organized churches and missions in communities remote from large churches for convenient attendance. One of the missions he assisted in is the Northwest Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and another is the Crestwood Baptist Church at 16th and Villa in Oklahoma City. Their fine buildings and lively organizations are the out-growth of his early start in the community.

The prolonged illness and death of his wife in 1936 and the strenuous work of his missionary efforts broke his health and forced him into retirement for a short time but inactivity weighed heavily and in 1937 he again took up the work with small town churches, some of which were Moore, New Castle, Medford, Ponca City and others.

In 1938, he married the capable Mrs. N. E. Marshburn of Atlanta, Georgia, and moved to Plaquemine, Louisiana, where he took charge of the Achafalaya Baptist Hospital and Mission. The combined position of superintendent, physician, and missionary proved too strenuous and after three years, he gave up the work and moved with his wife to Inverness, Florida, where they now live, contented with the memories of his many accomplishments from the time of pioneering to his present age of seventy-eight.

5. Minutes of the Board of the Oklahoma Baptist General Convention cited by Prof. Fred G. Watts, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee.

APPENDIX A

COMANCHE

Information furnished by Coe Hayne, The American Baptist Home Mission Society, 212 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

Work among the Comanche Indians of Oklahoma began when The American Baptist Home Mission Society sent Rev. E. C. Deyo in 1893, and was uninterrupted for nearly thirty years by change of missionary for Mr. Deyo remained with that mission until a weakened physical condition made it necessary for him to relinquish his chosen work.

Rev. Elton C. Deyo passed to that other room in his Father's House on August 8, 1926, at Lawton, Oklahoma. He was born in Wyoming, New York, in 1851, and attended the Middlebury and Leroy academies. When thirty-eight years of age he was converted and left the farm for a two-years' course in the University of Rochester and two years at Colgate Theological Seminary. In his senior year a woman missionary spoke in the chapel on the great need of the Blanket Indians of the West. That night a letter was sent to Miss Anna Mullen, a teacher in the public schools of Rochester, New York, to whom he was engaged, asking if she would accompany him as a missionary to the Indians. After his graduation they were married and were appointed to labor among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma, forty miles from the nearest railroad station.

Ground for the Comanche mission was secured by Rev. George W. Hicks, himself a Cherokee Indian, who went to Chief Quanna Parker of the Comanche Nation and obtained the right to locate a mission among his people. He not only granted the right but told Mr. Hicks to go out anywhere on his reservation and select a place just so it was not near his (the Chief's) own home. Mr. Hicks selected what has always been considered an exceedingly fine location in every way—but later because of changed conditions the original location had to be abandoned for the present one. (Deyo Mission) A church was organized in 1895.

Mr. and Mrs. Deyo did a beautiful work at Walters where he labored until the closing days of his life. He was known as "Jesus' brother" and had the great joy of founding a strong Christian church and being the instrument in God's hands of developing a high type of spiritual life among the older Indians and among the children, who accepted Christ as he preached the gospel of redeeming love. He taught his people how to cultivate the soil, selected their farm machinery, and became their business agent, nurse, doctor, and undertaker. The Christian Indians frequently brought their sick people to the parsonage, and even persons sick with smallpox were not denied entrance to his home. Mr. and Mrs. Deyo often made coffins and dug graves in order that their people might have Christian burial. When Mr. Deyo laid down the joyful burden of his work he recalled with delight that his entire ministry had been devoted to the same tribe in whose midst he had established a vigorous, self-reliant, self-propagating Christian church. The older members of his church had passed all the distance between pagan savagery and Christian civilization, and their love for Christ made them devoted to the spiritual welfare of tribes with which they formerly were at war and to the extension of the Kingdom of God among all the peoples of the earth.
APPENDIX B

My dear Mr. Jeter

The very day you wrote your last letter, I chanced to be calling north of Lawton with Deacon Hoto. We called at the home of Sarah Pohocsucut who has been caring for the long grave you are interested in. Deacon Hoto's wife, Lula, happened to be the very one to aid Sarah in giving a complete list of those in the grave. The information may not be of great value to you but it brings out facts of interest.

Sarah says her family were camped near Lawton (that is the present site) when white men in wagons drove up and camped near by. As a child she watched them and waited for them to leave. She says "I have been waiting ever since."

The date must have been 1903 for I have just found in Mr. Deyo's cemetery book a list of names all under Feb. 6, 1903, eleven in number, which corresponds to the list given by Sarah and Lula from memory. One of these Tah-pay-tea, aunt of Lula, had died during smallpox epidemic which according to Mr. Deyo's record occurred in 1901.

This burial plot on the Lawton town site was the family plot of Comanche Jack Permamsu father of Sarah. I have heard him spoken of as the sub-chief who first, after a trip to Texas, incorporated the name of Jesus into the Peyote religion still held and practiced by the old Comanches (and many other tribes)—The worship of the Peyote button the dried bud of a certain cactus which is chewed or drunk and produces intoxication and dreams.

The Lawton Chamber of Commerce according to Sarah appealed to her father Comanche Jack to move the bodies. At his own expense Comanche Jack moved these bodies to the Deyo Cemetery Feb. 6, 1903, according to Mr. Deyo's record where the grave has since been cared for by Sarah. The grave as described to me (I have never noticed it but will now look for it as I know its location) is 2 or 3 times as long as the usual grave. The bodies of the eleven were evidently deposited at short intervals along the bottom of the grave and not laid end to end as one might suppose.

Here is the list given by Sarah and Lula.

1. Comanche Jack's brother, Tahpony
2. Infant son of Comanche Jack
3. " daughter of "
4. Mother of Sawayke
5. Mrs. Hovahrithka “Coffee Drinker"
7. Tahpayte Aunt of Lula
8. Infant baby of above
10. Eesquetah Granddaughter of no. 9.
11. Unknown body supposed to be that of a Kiowa buried in Lawton plot before others were.

Here is Mr. Deyo's list following
Feb. 6, 1903

1. Mrs. Hovahrithka

I became missionary pastor of Deyo mission. I found $2500 donated by the Indians during the years and kept by Bro. Deyo for a new church. Other donations were secured and we built the present brick structure in 1929 at a cost of $4060.00 the next year we tore down the “eating house” and built the present “Community house” for $1000.00. Several years later the old stone residence in which Bro. Deyo lived alone so many years was completely burned out. This was rebuilt with the insurance money.

The present cemetery is part on Deyo Mission property and part on the “Cemetery forty” west of the Deyo mission property. Donations were secured and the present lawn fence (iron) and brick pillars were put up.

All preaching services are still interpreted, and will probably be interpreted for another 10 yrs.

I enclose a picture of Pacheka a fine Christian taken at Deyo mission see back of picture.

H. F. Gilbert.

P.S.

The Deyo Ch. building is a memorial to Rev. and Mrs. E. C. Deyo as stated in slab on front wall.

In 1929 my first wife Mabel Moon Gilbert died. A year later I led in building the “Brown Church” the Mabel Moon Gilbert Memorial 4 mi. south of Walters at a cost of $4500.00. (brown brick) I am now missionary pastor of both churches.

H. F. G.

Dear Bro. Jeter—

I closed the letter concerning the graves as I thought you might want to file it. It is to me an interesting fact that your father baptized you in East Cache. I have baptized my own daughter and many Indians in East Cache. The present Baptist Church has a beautiful Baptistry. (I will try to enclose a picture of church) Although our mission is northern Bapt. we cooperate with the local church. Recently is (its?) pastor and people generously and with no appeal from us gave $35 to help us purchase a piano at the Brown Church Indian 4 mi. south of Walters.
I should be interested in seeing the letter from the A.B.H.M.So. which you mention and could probably give you a brief statement of facts I have knowledge of to correct or corroborate the statements of the letter.

I am glad to make this present contribution to the cause of history.

Sincerely

H. F. Gilbert

Dear Mr. Jeter:

I am interested in your information on how the 11 bodies were interred. Shall continue inquiry to satisfy my further curiosity.

This immediate answer is caused by the fact that this past Sunday was our annual rally known as "Deyo Day". Having just received this sketch of Mr. Deyo I used it as the basis of my sermon. The church is very much alive. At this service we dedicated a file of 20 tithers pledges. This will mean much as our people receive a fair income from land and work.

Sincerely

H. F. Gilbert.

P.S. Yesterday we celebrated the 50th anniversary since Rev. Deyo came. In 1945 we intend to have the Indian Asso. meet with the Deyo Church and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Church.

H.F.G.