

PIONEER CHURCH ORGANIZER IN OLD GREER COUNTY

By Paul D. Mitchell*

The Reverend James Taylor Hosmer was the organizer of Methodist Churches in Altus, Mangum, Martha, and other places in "old Greer County." He founded the Mangum church in October, 1888, with eight members. At that time the charge was in the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the first preaching place was a little box schoolhouse located near the present high school building of Mangum. In 1901 the church was added to the Indian Mission Conference, which is today the West Oklahoma Conference of the Methodist Church. The present church building was erected in 1910.

The Reverend Hosmer organized the Methodist Episcopal Church, South at Martha, Jackson County, in 1889. It was then known as New Hope Church. The present edifice which houses the Martha congregation is one of the most unusual church buildings in the United States. It is unusual in size and beauty for a community as small as Martha. The building could not be constructed today for \$75,000. It was built and entirely paid for by farmers in 1926, no large gift being made. No single gift amounted to more than one thousand dollars. The village of Martha has never had more than four hundred inhabitants. Yet there is this magnificent Methodist Church, a splendid brick Baptist church, and a modern Consolidated School building in this town which has no industries nor payroll, but depends entirely upon agriculture.

James Taylor Hosmer was married in October, 1884 to Miss Mary E. Mitchell, of Baylor County, Texas, who still resides at Martha, Oklahoma. She is one of three living charter members of that church. Following the death of Mr. Hosmer, she was married to a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend McAnally, who died some years ago.

The Reverend Hosmer was born in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, October 1, 1848, the son of a Confederate Army captain. He was admitted on trial as a minister in the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1879 and was appointed to the Seymour Mission. His circuit embraced an area larger than either Tennessee, Kentucky, or Alabama. It contained 45,000 square miles, and fifty-one counties. The first four years of his labors he travelled over twenty counties, his extreme appointments being

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400 miles apart. It is said that later, when on the Amarillo circuit, his territory was defined by the Annual Conference as follows: "Bounded on the south and east by the Seymour Mission, and on the north and west by the Providence of God."

He went from camp to camp, preaching to the cowboys, sympathizing with them in their sufferings, reading the Bible to them and praying with them. The Reverend J. W. Kizziar, another pioneer Methodist minister of "old Greer County" said that cowboys would take off their hats when he passed by them, and never used an unbecoming word in his presence. He organized congregations for religious service wherever he went.

The average salary he received was \$137 a year. He was known as the "Stonewall Jackson of the Northwest Texas Conference" since he labored and died in that conference, while Greer County was still part of Texas. He retired in 1891 and died at Martha, Oklahoma, August 4, 1893. A large memorial window in the Martha Methodist Church pays tribute to his memory, as the founder of that church.

In an old copy of the former *Texas Christian Advocate* there is found the following letter written by a Doctor Harralson, a Methodist minister, describing a trip he made with Mr. Hosmer as guide through old Greer County. Doctor Harralson made the trip from Vernon, Texas in June, 1889 with other Methodist ministers to ascertain the real condition of the "wild" Indian tribes with reference to the Gospel and Christian schools. The Reverend W. H. Younger of the Missouri Conference, the Reverend R. M. Shelton, and the Reverend G. S. Hardy, both of the Northwest Texas Conference, accompanied them. They took a complete camping outfit: a good tent, a Winchester, three shotguns, fishing tackle, a strong hack and buggy, and good teams. Doctor Harralson wrote:

Our route lay through Greer County. . . . We crossed the main stream of Red River at Doan's Store and traveled up the North Fork all day with nothing special transpiring. After we had pitched our tent near Navajo town and mountains, 'Stonewall' Hosmer was seen in the distance making a straight track toward our camp, drawn by his veteran steed 'Butler'. Henceforth he was to be our guide. . . . The following day we came to the heath of the well-remembered but not loved Comanches. . . . The older Hardy brought down a fine buck. We now had venison and onward pushed our way. It fell to Hosmer to take the deer in his buggy. We had heard of the disturbed state of the Indians and knew they did not like to have deer killed in their country. Hosmer got around this by saying: "It had jumped up and one of the brethren shot it, and we are now taking it on to Quannah the Chief."

Only one school was established by the Methodist Church, the Methvin Institute, at Anadarko.

The Reverend James Taylor Hosmer gave his full time to the work among the white settlers in the "old Greer County," a work that meant much in its Christian influence in that section of Oklahoma.