BAPTIST PIONEERS IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA

By Herbert Miner Pierce

The first white Baptist Association¹ in Oklahoma was the Short Mountain Baptist Association, organized at Cowlington,² in what is now LeFlore County, on October 24, 1884. The first presiding officer, known as Moderator, was Reverend V. V. McCarty. There was frequent interchange of pastoral leadership between the churches of the Short Mountain Baptist Association of Eastern Oklahoma and the Buckner and Concord Baptist Association of Western Arkansas, and also the Baptist General Association of Western Arkansas. The Short Mountain Baptist Association eventually included forty or fifty churches that reached from the Arkansas border west to Haileyville, north to Cowlington and Whitefield, and as far south as Bengal in Latimer County.

Three men that figured prominently in the work of the historic Short Mountain Baptist Association were Reverend L. F. Patterson, Reverend J. W. Hulsey, and Reverend J. H. Muse. These heretofore unwritten facts of their lives are now given to the public.

LINDSEY F. PATTERSON
1846—1924

Pioneer preacher, Columbus Lee Barnes, described L. F. Patterson as “one of the greatest souls that I ever knew.” He was born in Walker County, Georgia in 1846, and three years later came with his parents to a place near Hartford, Arkansas. At the age of eighteen, he was baptized into the Friendship Baptist Church, Lawrence County Missouri.

Brother Patterson had little opportunity to gain a formal education, but God equipped him with a good mind and an attractive personality which he used to the full. Deacon Dave Nowlin described him as a medium size man with long whiskers. He frequently stayed in the Nowlin home. Nowlin recalls that the preacher was mindful of his horse’s well being and carefully instructed the boys to feed the horse ten ears of corn each night.

Early in his ministry he was preaching in a home near Pleasant Valley, Western Arkansas. The floor was made from split logs.

¹ An Association is a unit of Baptist work that includes the Missionary Baptist churches of one or more counties, in voluntary cooperation.
² The community of Cowlington appears to have been first called Short Mountain, named after an interesting geological formation of table-like proportions with precipitous sides north of the present town. Later the community took the name of Cowlington after a pioneer resident, A. F. Cowling. The Short Mountain Baptist Association was organized in the home of this Mr. Cowling because the church house was not yet completed.
Under the spot where he stood was a trap door. In the enthusiasm of his message, he jumped a few inches off of the floor. When the secret opening gave way, the preacher unexpectedly disappeared into the cellar! He was so humiliated that he left through the side cellar door and never returned—that day!

During his fifty years of ministry, he pastored many churches in Oklahoma, including Choate Prairie, Heavener, Poteau, and Canadian. He spent years in Missionary work, including Buckner and Concord Associations of Western Arkansas, and Haskell Association of Indian Territory. He was pastor of many churches in Arkansas, including Winfield, Waldron, Dayton, and West Hartford. He was once moderator of Buckner Association, Vice-Moderator in 1918 and Moderator of the Concord Association in Arkansas in 1889. He was the last moderator of the historic Short Mountain Baptist Association.

While on a preaching tour southeast of Oklahoma City, Patterson was captured by Indians. He got them to laughing at his famous stories, seized his captors’ gun and escaped.3

A certain revival meeting in Eastern Indian Territory started off with only one person in attendance, a woman. It ended when he had baptized forty people. He preached the first gospel sermon in Oklahoma City when it was a cowboy camp.

Deacon Green Stovall tells the following story: One day while near Oklahoma City he was bathing in a creek. He looked up in time to see an Indian deliberately gathering up his clothes. Naked and in great haste, he came up out of the water, giving chase. Stimulated by a strong urge, he prayed as he pursued the Indian for a full mile. Looking back over his shoulder, the Indian saw the preacher gaining on him, dropped the clothes to escape.

During the first seven years of his ministry, Brother Patterson did not receive any financial remuneration for his pastoral work. Like his Master and unlike many Christians, he was a very poor man. His treasures were not on earth. Reverend C. L. Barnes tells the following story that was written by Reverend Herman Highfill, about the Pattersons:

"Food was scarce in the home. Mrs. Patterson had prepared the last they had for dinner. The family had eaten. Nothing remained. There was no money with which to buy more. There was no employment to be had by which to earn more. It was a time of severe trial of his faith. He had given himself sacrificially to the Lord’s service. He had held nothing back. At this last meal he and his wife had eaten sparingly in order that the children might have more. He and his good wife sat looking at each

3 This is a good example of a tale bordering folklore. In the 1880's, there were no wild Indians southeast of Oklahoma City who would have seriously taken a white man captive. The Indians throughout the Indian Territory of that day were generally a peaceable, sensible people. Some such incident could have happened in a prankish spirit, a group of young Indians having taken Patterson along with them as a practical joke.—Ed.
other, in their hearts the question, 'What next?' It was up to the Lord. He had preached the care of the Lord for his children. The rattle of a wagon was heard. Brother Patterson turned his head to see the driver turn the horses off the road toward the house. It was a merchant friend, Brother Hale, from Hackett, Arkansas, who had brought a wagon load of groceries and supplies. The Lord had been faithful. God did care for his own."

Brother Dave Nowlin said of him, "Like many other preachers of that day, he had only two shirts and two suits of underwear. He and father would cut each other’s hair with mother’s scissors. The boys called him ‘a one horse preacher’ because he had only one.” Yet this devoted follower of the lowly Nazarene is said to have baptized 2,000 people. He passed away on March 2, 1924. On a little memorial card that bears his picture, circulated by friends, is the following eloquent eulogy: "Faithful servant of Christ and friend of all humanity has passed over the river to be with His Lord. What a reception he must have received, over there! . . . . Dear Brother Patterson."

The people of LeFlore-Latimer Association for whom he had poured out his life, in grateful memory of his sacrificial service, erected a beautiful monument over his tomb at Winfield, Arkansas.

**John Washington Hulsey**

1864—1944

The son of Lucretia Overall Hulsey and Dr. James Carroll Hulsey, was born on March 17, 1864 at Arkadelphia, Arkansas. His father was a country doctor practicing medicine in and around Cameron, Williams, Spiro, Hartshorne and Wilburton, Oklahoma. Like most others of his day in these parts he found little opportunity for schooling. His thirst for learning impelled him to attend country summer schools for years, even after he was married and the father of four children. He was converted in the summer of 1889, at the age of twenty-five, near Bengal, Latimer County, Oklahoma. His daughter, Mrs. Otto Whittington, thinks that he was either baptized by Reverend J. S. Murrow or Reverend E. B. Harlan. Reverend E. B. Harlan was Moderator, and A. J. Hulsey, Clerk of the ordination council which was also composed of Reverend C. L. Alexander, Reverend W. M. Morris, Reverend Joseph Barnes, and Reverend R. W. Cook. Mr. Hulsey was ordained by the Harlan’s Chapel Baptist Church, on September 1, 1889.

When he began preaching in 1889 he could hardly read. His life shows what God can do with a man who is surrendered to Him. Brother Hulsey was later spoken of by one who knew him, "as a power in the ministry in Arkansas for nearly sixty years."

Prior to conversion he had run with a rough set of men. After he was saved, one of his former gang tried to force some strong liquor down his throat. In righteous indignation he struck the offender,
knocking him down, frightening the man's horse which ran away. The old drinking gang admired him, remaining his loyal friends, although none of them ever tried again to make him take a drink. In later years he won and baptized some of them.

Robert L. Kidd, a Methodist layman and life-long friend, described him as, "One of the greatest men I ever knew. He was fearless, consecrated to the Lord, devoted to the gospel ministry; an unforgettable character. When he prayed, he fully expected the Lord to do what John Hulsey had asked Him to do, and more. One day he prayed for rain. It hailed!"

He pastored the following Churches, probably on the dates given: Harlan Chapel and Bengal, Indian Territory 1889-1892; Cameron 1892-1894; Poteau 1894-1898. While Missionary and living in Poteau he organized the First Baptist Church, Wilburton in 1898 and served it until 1900; was re-called, 1905-1907. He also served Waldron, Dayton, and Gibson in Arkansas; Cameron, Liberty Hill, Red Oak, Wister, Choate Prairie and South Canadian in Oklahoma. From 1908-1913 he served Waldron, Parks, West Hartford and Mansfield, Arkansas. From 1914-1917 he was pastor at Norman, Caddo Gap and Mount Ida, Arkansas. In 1920-1921 he served at Kinta and Indianola, Oklahoma. From 1922-1944 he was pastor at Big Fork, Cherry Hill, Antioch and Mount Ida, Arkansas. His last and longest pastorate was his second term of work with the Mount Ida Church that lasted twenty-two years, until his death.

Brother Hulsey also did the work of a home missionary. He worked among the Indians during the last years of the nineteenth century. In 1917-1918 he was Missionary of the Caddo River Baptist Association, and then again in 1921-1922. He was Moderator of the Short Mountain Baptist Association in 1895, 1896 and 1898.

In 1919 he served as director of the $75 Million Campaign in Montgomery and Polk Counties of Arkansas. He also served as Moderator of Buckner Association in Arkansas, 1909, 1911-1912. He preached the Arkansas Convention sermon in 1923.

Mrs. Otto Whittington thinks that "the best thing that he wrote was, "Instructions to Church Members." He is described as "a serious, thoughtful man, a powerful doctrinal Preacher." Reverend Columbus Lee Barnes, invited him to Bates, Arkansas to preach on a series of doctrinal subjects. One night he was dealing with the question of sanctification, reading from the Old Testament where it spoke of sanctifying of the fields to the Lord. Some preacher in the rear rose up and laughed. "Sit down brother," shouted Hulsey, "You are not going to laugh at God's word in this service." To
Hulsey it was a serious matter and he was ready to back up his command, if necessary.

In the *History of Arkansas Baptists*, in a very brief but striking tribute, he is described as being “in a class with Buckner, Compere and other iron men of the West.” He had gone to Little Rock to attend the State Convention, and unexpectedly died there on November 17, 1944.

**JOSEPH HARVEY MUSE**

1876—1948

Brother Joe, as he was affectionately called, was the eleventh child of Stephen and Mary Muse. Brother Muse was born at Story (now called Mount Ida), Arkansas on April 17, 1876. His father, a school teacher, was killed in a storm before Joe was born.

Brother Muse was denied the privileges of very much school education. He finished only the eighth grade at Burnsville, Arkansas. He was baptized by Reverend J. H. Byers on August 18, 1895, near Waldron, Arkansas. On July 16, at the age of thirty-two he was ordained by the Blackfork Missionary Baptist Church of which he was a member. The ordaining council included Deacon J. R. Adams, Moderator, and Deacon Z. R. Muse, Clerk, both nephews of the candidate, and also Reverend E. Bowen, Reverend W. G. Lucas, and Deacon D. J. Spears.

Brother Muse pastored many churches that lay in the valley between the Sans Bois and Kiamichi Mountains, and many others in Arkansas. At one time or another he was pastor of most of the churches in Latimer, LeFlore and Haskell Counties. Coming from Arkansas, the first church in Indian Territory to call him was Mountain View Baptist Church, south of Wister. Other churches that he pastored were Mt. Pleasant (near Heavener), Conser, Hodgen, Page, Honubbie, Loving, Williams, Pacola, (near Fort Smith), Muse, Big Cedar, Rock Creek (north of Red Oak) Lutie, Wister, Enterprise, Tamaha, Richie, Summerfield, Petros, and historic Cowlington. Once while preaching a drunken Indian rode his horse through the church while children were sleeping on the floor in the aisles, but no one was injured.

While Reverend Tom Lucas was missionary in the Latimer Association, 1943 to 1945, he held a revival meeting at Bengal where Reverend and Mrs. Joe Muse lived. One night a girl came in while the service was in progress and tried to open a window. Brother Muse gallantly rose to the occasion and opened it for her. Soon a sickening smack was heard as a rotten egg hit the window sill at his side; then another one hit the window frame by his head. A third egg crashed through a window pane and saturated his hair. It was worse than tear gas and sulphur bombs combined! The congregation, not being
able to stand the odors, were put to rout. But the agitators that sought to break up the meeting found that man cannot successfully resist the Almighty. The next night there were three professions of faith.

His close friend, the Reverend Tom Lucas tells the following story of an experience Muse had:

“One night he stayed in the home of a frugal mountaineer. After the chores were done and supper over, sitting on the porch they watched a mother cat and her kittens play. The next morning there was delicious, tender young squirrel for a sunrise breakfast. ‘Where did you get those squirrel before day,’ asked the incredulous Joe. ‘Trapped ‘em,’ grunted the self-conscious host. After breakfast Joe set out in quest of the kittens. Only the old cat was found.’”

Brother Muse gave many years of his life to missionary work in the white settlements in Eastern Oklahoma. He was missionary in Haskell Association for many years, and LeFlore-Latimer Association for at least eight years, probably longer. For some years he was editor of the Missionary Baptist, published at Wister.

A few days before his death he received a letter from his dear friend, Reverend Hedgepath of Heavener who was ill, asking him to come to him. That night his wife, Mrs. Nina Muse, laid out his clothes that he was to wear the next day. At about 1:30 a.m., he became suddenly and violently ill and died at 5:30 a.m., November 18, 1948 at Booneville, Arkansas. It was not until after the funeral that Mrs. Muse discovered that Brother Hedgepath had also died, and that both bodies had been in the same funeral home, at the same time. Doubtless both would have liked it that way. Brother Muse was laid to rest in the cemetery of the Mountain View Baptist Church, his first pastorate in Oklahoma, near Wister. Mrs. Muse now lives with her aged mother in Wilburton, Oklahoma.

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4 This story should be classed with the “tall tales” ascribed to the “Arkansas Traveler” many years ago. Though poor white of the Southeastern Oklahoma moun-
tains, the host was an honest man: His laconic reply with backwoods’ propriety explained the “delicious, tender young squirrel” served for breakfast. The dish was undoubtedly either ground squirrel or pocket-gopher sometimes trapped as vermin. —Ed.