AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Anna R. Fait*

FOREWORD

This autobiography was written in 1944 by Mrs. Anna R. Fait who had come with her husband, the Reverend S. V. Fait, a missionary of the Presbyterian Mission Board to the Comanche Indians in 1888, and taught the first school for white children in present Caddo County. Mrs. Fait had been asked to write this story of herself, having been recently selected and honored as the outstanding "Pioneer Woman Teacher" in Caddo County by the Delta Kappa Gamma Fraternity of women teachers. Mrs. Fait's manuscript has been contributed for publication in The Chronicles of Oklahoma by members of the Committee on Choice of the Pioneer Woman Teacher in Delta Kappa Gamma, Dr. Anna Lewis, Head of the History Department, Oklahoma College for Women, and Mary Bailey, History Department in Chickasha High School, with this word about Mrs. Fait: "Wishing to pass on to you the interesting story of her life as she recorded it for us most charmingly, we give you her biography in her own words."

Editor.

Born October 3, 1865, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. When I was eight years old my father bought some lots in a college town and built a home joining the college campus. As there was no railroad up the Monongahela River at that time, we made the forty-five mile trip by boat, and at night. The boat rocked so that my brother—four years old—and I fell out of our berth. I wasn't very strong and hadn't been to school a great deal but, in the Model School (for teachers training) I was given the opportunity to make as many grades as I could each year. All my academic and college work was done here, taking examinations in twenty-two subjects, and graduating in June 1883, (third in a class of forty-three, most of whom were much older than I) three months before I was eighteen.

I had never been in a country school; but, my first experience as a teacher was in such a school, in a coal mining district, with sixty-nine pupils and eight grades and I taught some other things not required, had a community literary society and a spelling school with a crowded house. Here I had many strange experiences, one of them falling through the ice on the river. It was a

*Mrs. Fait is still living at her home near the site of the old Presbyterian Mission and School, which is now called "Mautame Farm," east of Anadarko. She wrote the following note in connection with her autobiography: "The story is necessarily brief, I could say very little about life at the Mission. I failed to say, in connection with my teaching in the Braddock, Pa., schools, that I marched to the polls at the head of 1,500 school children, to ask for a Constitutional Amendment on the liquor question. Mrs. Jessie Hutchins of Anadarko; and Mr. John D. Williams (father of Mrs. Grace Franks—teacher) are still in Caddo County."—Ed.
terrible winter—twenty-five degrees below zero for weeks. My salary was thirty-five dollars a month, the highest paid in the county. My eyes were giving me trouble, so I didn’t teach the next year; but went to Pittsburg and took care of a beautiful home, keeping house for a dear old couple. In the summer I took a post graduate course under a special teacher from Boston and was librarian at the college. I received a diploma allowing me to teach without an examination. In the fall I went to Braddock, near Pittsburg, and became a member (the youngest) of a corps of fifty-seven teachers. While teaching here, I marched at the head of fifteen hundred school children, to the polls to secure Constitutional amendment on the liquor question. Taught two years and was made Principal of one of the ward schools when I decided to come to Anadarko, Indian Territory, as the wife of Reverend S. V. Fait,1 a young Presbyterian minister, assistant pastor of one of the largest churches in New York City, located where the Pennsylvania Station now stands.

On the morning of August 30, 1888, Mr. Fait and I were married and started for Anadarko and Indian Agency. Few of our friends ever expected us to return. It was a five day journey—three days and nights by train and two days overland, in a vehicle called a “hack” and drawn by two ponies. No large horses were known here except at the Army Post, at Fort Sill, forty-five miles away. All the freighting was done by ox teams, 16, 18, 20 and sometimes 22 oxen in a team, with their slow plodding driver walking along at their sides. The Indians, hearing his “Whoa Haw” thought that was the name of the animals and so originated the name “Whoa Haw” meaning beef.

I can never forget that morning we “landed” in Paul’s Valley, one hundred miles from our destination. It was one of those cold September mornings with a very heavy dew, like rain. I was worn out from travel on the slow, dirty train, and when Mr. Fait asked for a place where I could rest and clean up, the hotel proprietor said the only place was the small dirty room we had entered, filled with rough looking men who had already washed in the one basin on a bench and used the towel that looked like a floor mop. My teeth chattered so; from cold and nervousness, the proprietor finally told me I could go to the kitchen to warm. How good that warmth felt! And the breakfast smelled good. The stove in the kitchen was what was called a “Tin Plate” stove and had a front that held the ashes and could be pulled out. On this front was a plate on which the cook was stacking some delicious looking hot cakes; but, beside the stove the old grandmother sat, smoking her pipe and every once in a while she’d spit into the ashes, right over the cakes! No breakfast for me—and I was so hungry!

1 See Appendix A for biography of Rev. Silas V. Fait.
Mr. Fait, not knowing what I had seen, ate heartily. Goes to show "What you don't know doesn't hurt you." After the cold morning the terrible heat of the day was especially trying.

I neglected to say that on the way out we had spent Sunday at Park College, a missionary school outside Kansas City. The son of the founder, Dr. McAfee, was a classmate of Mr. Fait. He became a great preacher and it is his daughter, Mildred McAfee, President of one of our eastern colleges, who now heads the WAVES in the United States Naval Service.

We arrived at the Agency about sundown of the second day, having spent the night with some people who had a trading post about twenty-five miles east of where Chickasha was finally located. The Agency consisted of an old adobe hotel, four trader's stores, four small homes, the Agent's house—a two story brick with his office of two rooms, a blacksmith shop, and a small building with a cross on top just visible above a field of immense sunflowers with trunks like trees.

There was also another building which the "Squaw: men (white men with Indian wives) had built. Here the Agency people gathered on rare occasions for a social time. The Agency was filled with Indians, about two thousand, for their usual "beef issue" and other rations, consisting of rice and beans. There had been a death in the camp that day and the air was filled with the beating of the "tom-tom" and the death cry, which once heard can never be forgotten; but, among it all I heard the happy voices of white children, one of whom is still living in Anadarko, the only person still living there who was there when I came. The hotel people were so kind; and although there was no locks on the doors and "other inhabitants," I slept the sleep of exhaustion and woke to a very, very strange world where ignorance, superstition, and intense hatred of the white men reigned almost supreme.

We had come to build a school for the Comanche Indians and waited at Anadarko for instructions. We had a grant of land where Lawton now stands but the woman who was to give $30,000 for the work suddenly decided she'd give her money to the Alaskan Indians instead. This left us stranded and we had to wait until other plans could be made. We couldn't stay long at the hotel; and there wasn't anywhere else we could go except in the little building hidden by the sunflowers. It was a building that had been moved from Ft. Sill, and used by the Episcopalians occasionally for church services. Two small rooms, one eight feet by eight feet and the other eight feet by ten feet, had been added at sometime for the convenience of the rector. The sunflowers were finally cut down, revealing a small porch over the door and a makeshift affair on the west. We moved into these two rooms and started housekeeping with a bed loaned by one of the traders,
one chair and some boxes for chairs and table, and a cook stove that had been issued to an Indian and that he had spurned and thrown out on the prairie to rust. Days of hard work with coal oil and scraping with pieces of glass made it usable. In the church were some benches, a long stove, called a box stove, and a small organ so covered with dust as to be almost invisible. By Sunday morning, however, the condition of the place was so improved we held church services. All the white folks were there to show their appreciation and it made us very happy to have such a ready response. Mr. Fait went to the camps with an interpreter in the afternoon. Our own interpreter had died in the spring and the new one appointed by the Board of Home Missions in New York was yet in training in the East. He was a young Chief—Joshua Givens—the idol of his people. It was months before new plans could be made and a new site for the Mission be selected.

After forty-four days our boxes, which we had feared lost, arrived bringing us many needed things. Mr. Fait, secured two bolts of faded calico from the Indian trader nearby and enclosed the porch on the west for a kitchen, and then we began living. Everybody came to see the "calico" house, even the Indians; and after that the people thought the little black eyed preacher and his golden haired, blue eyed wife could work miracles—and we did. We had to.

Here, in this building, I gathered the white children of the Agency for Sunday School, and then for day school, as there was no other possible opportunity for them. Quite a number had recently moved here from the states. There were twenty-eight in all, ages ranging from six years to eighteen. The youngest, W. G. Methvin, has been a successful business man in Chickasha for years. I taught him to read.

It was a strange school—no desks, no blackboards, and only such books as the children found in their homes. We managed to get enough slates; and, as there were no copy books, I scored one side for penmanship lessons. Many of the lessons, of necessity, had to be prepared by me out of school hours; but we were a happy lot, all the children so eager and willing to learn. After a Bible reading each morning and the Lord's Prayer, we always sang. The little organ "wheezed" its way along with our voices.

One very warm day the door was open and in walked the most horrible looking creature I had ever seen. I was terribly frightened and ran back into our rooms where Mr. Fait was busy at his type-writer, crying out, "There's an old Indian in the school room. Come quickly and chase him out." This amused the children very much, for they knew it wasn't him, but a her—"Old Granny Houston," said to have been the wife of Governor Sam Houston of Texas.
She was barefooted and literally in rags, and wearing a man's dirty hat. Her unkept hair was very coarse and quite gray, hanging about her face and shoulders; and under her arm she carried a watermelon, prancing about and calling out, "Swap, swap" which, the children said—meant "sell." At my insistence she finally left and order was once more restored. I can't remember what became of the melon. One Trader's store was across the road; but the children didn't have the chance to run across at noons and recess to buy a penny's worth of candy or fruit, for there were no pennies or candy or fruit to buy. The nickel was the smallest coin in circulation and there was no paper money. All money, except the nickel was silver. I've known as much as $90,000.00 being brought at one time from the railroad in an army ambulance, drawn by four horses and guarded by eight or ten soldiers on horseback. Major Baldwin used to tell the folks he always put on an extra guard when passing the Mission, for fear of Mrs. Fait!

At the school we worked happily, and despite our handicaps the children accomplished a great deal. When the summer vacation came I went East. In January, 1890, Howard was born and I lay at death's door for many weeks. In the spring we moved to our new location, four miles east of Anadarko. Here I lived twenty-two years and here Russell and Willard were born. My husband's salary was small and sometimes we didn't have money for a postage stamp because some missionary society back East forgot its obligations. I was never employed, never drew any salary; but averaged eighteen hours a day doing many things for which there was no money to hire. Curing the meat and rendering the lard from twenty-five or thirty hogs each year, and raising the chickens were two jobs for which I assumed entire responsibility. I often took entire charge of the school for the summer so that the teachers might have a longer vacation. We usually had a family of twenty-five or thirty for the summer. There was much to be done, can-

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2 N. B. Johnson, now Vice-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, attended this Presbyterian Mission. He, his brother and sister arrived in Anadarko on the Rock Island Railroad one afternoon in September, 1902. Their grandmother had brought them from Mayesville, Oklahoma to Chickasha, the nearest railroad station, and put them on the train. Someone from the Mission met them at the station at Anadarko, with a wagon and team of mules, and drove them to the school 4 miles east of Anadarko. They were very small children of Cherokee descent, and very homesick, and all began to cry as soon as they came within sight of the school, but they were soon reconciled when they met the Indian children and the few white children who were at the school. Judge Johnson had a tablet and colored pencil and began to draw pictures to amuse the other children. He was graduated from the 9th grade in 1909. He went from the Mission School to Henry-Kendall College in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which was maintained and sponsored by the Presbyterian Church. Years later, when he was County Attorney of Rogers County, he returned to Anadarko and participated in the ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the Presbyterian Church which was founded by the late S. V. Fait.
ning, etc. Wherever there was a need for my help I went, day or night, and sometimes we had to make coffins.

I had long ago learned that those men who had so terrorized me upon my arrival would not harm me; that my life and my virtue were safe in their hands, and so I went everywhere alone, fearing no one. I have always, through the years, had some girl who needed "mothering" and training in my home, teaching her to be a good housekeeper and a good homemaker. Some of these have gone out to teach in other Mission schools and one married a great doctor and went to China with him, where they did a great work, returning to America only when compelled to do so because of ill health.

Each day in our work was a new day, an unusual day, but some stand out more vividly than others. Among these were the awful prairie fires, one raging for three days, and the Mission alone was left an island of safety while for many miles around it there was nothing but the blackened earth. We all fought: men, women and children. God's care was surely manifest that day!

The first building to be finished after our house was enclosed was a little chapel, which is now a part of the house in which I live, the oldest building left standing in this part of the country. All materials were freighted by ox teams, and, as there were no bridges, streams had to be forded. The work of building was very slow. While waiting for the completion of the boarding school we had a day school for both whites and Indians in this chapel. Judge Ross Hume of Anadarko was one of these pupils. He and his brother came horseback, as did some of the others. A college classmate who was spending some months with me taught the school until the Mission Board sent a teacher. We had both Spanish and English church services, as a number of Mexicans attended, and some of the Indians understood Spanish. The Mexicans, having no priest at that time, continued to attend until a priest arrived. The friendship of these people, and later on of Father Isadore, was a lasting one. Our Indian Agent, Major Adams, and one of the Kiowa school teachers decided to be married in the little Chapel, because, said the bride, "It is fitting that an Indian teacher marrying an Indian Agent by an Indian Missionary should be married in an Indian Church," and so it was, the bride in her mother's satin wedding gown, with music on my little melodeon. An Army ambulance, drawn by four big horses, took them to Paul's Valley to take the train north for a honeymoon. The weather, which had been cold, suddenly turned very cold and snow began to fall. Before morning a terrible blizzard was raging. The afternoon of the wedding the disciplinarian at the Kiowa School punished three boys. They ran away and started to their homes, miles away, but were caught in the blizzard. Searchers found them frozen to death on the prairie. The Indians declared war on
the teacher and all the whites. There was no telephone, no telegraph; so a messenger was sent to Fort Sill for help and another to Pauls Valley to intercept Major Adams, and bring him back. The teacher was spirited away and never dared return, and the Agent and soldiers finally averted what came nearly being an awful tragedy.

Another uprising came later, when a clerk in one of the stores knocked a cup out of the hand of an Indian who was getting a drink from the white folks' well instead of the one for Indians. The young man was Albert Harris, well known in Chickasha for years. All the Agency folks were barricaded in the old log trader's store. It was a terrible time while it lasted; but, once more, with the help of the soldiers, peace was restored, but the hatred for the whites was no less.

On two occasions I was left alone with my two year old Howard. I had gone East for the summer and was about to return when a friend wrote that Mr. Fait was not well, so I hastened my return. He had nursed a very dear friend, who had died of typhoid malaria, and after taking the body to Minco, our nearest railroad station by that time, and sent it back East, he came home and went to bed, very ill. When I got off the train at Minco, Mr. Fait wasn't there, but he had managed to get word to Mr. Lewis Hornbake, editor of the once famous "Minco Minstrel," and asked him to find some way for me to get home. The only person willing to try the trip was a young man with a team of wild mules and a lumber wagon. We started out on our perilous thirty mile journey in early afternoon and about nine o'clock we reached the Washita River, the team plunging madly into the stream. How we ever got up the banks on the other side I don't know, but it was dark as pitch. We were now within two miles of home, where I found Mr. Fait, with a raging fever and unconscious. The school had not yet been finished and there was no one to call for help. A young white boy had drifted in from somewhere and he had been doing what he could for three days. Dr. Hume came in the morning and for weeks Mr. Fait lay between life and death.

The story of Joshua Givens, our Indian helper, is a long story in itself, but I will tell you only of his sickness and death. As so many Indians did who returned from the East he soon contracted "TB." The Indians claimed his sickness was due to a "hoodoo" they had put on him because he had accepted the white man's religion and was trying to be a white man. They said, "If you will give up this white man's religion, go to camp and let our medicine men treat you, you will soon be well." Joshua refused for a long time; then, as his body weakened, and stung by their taunts he finally yielded and one day when Mr. Fait was away
they came and carried him off to camp. For days the tom-tom beat over his head and the "medicine" men went through all their heathen incantations. Finally, he was stripped naked and put into a "sweat house" (a small round shelter of stones—the stones having been heated very hot). Here he was to sweat out the "evil spirit" that was tormenting him. Knowing that he could not endure any more and repentant for his having been so faithless to his Christian belief, he begged to be taken home. The Indians didn't want him to die in camp, so they brought him back to us, where he was given every care. Finally, Joshua realized he was sinking fast and begged Mr. Fait to take Howard and me to safety, fearing the Indians might injure us. All the Indians hated his white wife, so we locked her and her two children in one of the rooms, also all the things with which they could injure themselves or her, and sent a white man that was passing by for the Indian police. This was barely accomplished when we heard the Indians coming over the hill, shrieking their horrible death cry. The Police disarmed them all, and having nothing with which to mutilate their bodies they left and went to camp, there to cut and slash their bodies in a horrible manner. Mr. Fait decided there should be a Christian burial, though even the Agent felt it should not be attempted, fearing an outbreak. Joshua was put in a neat, home-made coffin of pine boards and carried to the little church-school house at the Agency, and there was held the first Christian burial of an Indian. To the surprise of everybody there was no trouble and old Chief Lone Wolf and several others attended. Among all the strange experiences of this long ago pioneer life, before there was an Oklahoma, this was a very sad one.

I am glad to say that after more than fifty-five years these Indian atrocities no longer exist; and, as we now know these people, so many kind and good and whom we know for so many good qualities, it seems their ancestors could never have been so cruel. Sad to say, many have absorbed the sins of the white man; but, we now live together, as one people, under one flag, for which the Indian is fighting and dying beside his white brother.3

Now seventy-eight years old, I still have my ambitions, but broken health keeps me from the busy, useful life I once lived, and knowing this I must be content and find my happiness in lonely hours, in living over the precious memories of many happy years, filled with so much love from all who have "passed my way" and I only hope, at the end, it may be said, "She hath done what she could."

3See Appendix B. for notes on the first Decoration Day held at Anadarko, Oklahoma Territory, May 30, 1895, in a grove near the Washita River.
July 1944.

APPENDIX A

SILAS V. FAIT, PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY

Born in 1857, near Bedford Springs, Pa., in a small place called the "Cove" and which is now marked on the map of the great super-highways crossing Pennsylvania. His mother died when he was 26 months old. He and his brother 13 months younger were cared for by their old grandmother 90 years old, in their mountain home until the return of the father from the Civil War, he having fought in 14 battles, and receiving wounds from which he died in later life. He married a woman whom he thought would be a good mother to his little boys, but it proved otherwise. They were cruelly treated and much neglected. When Silas was 12, he went to live with strangers where he often received unkind treatment. He wanted to go to school more than anything else but was denied that privilege except for a very short time. He got hold of every bit of reading matter he could find, and while there was no chance to study at night, he carried his books or paper in his pocket and studied while resting on the plow handle in the field while his team rested. When he was 15, he walked 15 miles over the mountains to recite to a teacher there; and although he had no money (none was ever given him for his work) he finally got to Shellsburg (not far from Lafayette College) and found friends and a home with the superintendent of the Shellsburg Academy where he graduated going from there to Lafayette College, graduating from there. With very little money and no one to bank him financially, he won friends who honored him in his perseverance, and when he left college, he had the love and respect of every one with whom he had been associated. He never wanted to be a minister. He loved the outdoors, the farm, and always wanted to be a farmer, but he couldn't get away from the thought that he must study for the ministry, and so he soon found himself at Union Theological Seminary in New York City where he graduated in May 1888. He found work as Sunday School Missionary in the old North Church, working in the slums, and going over to New Jersey on Sundays to some small church. The North Church was one of the largest churches in New York City at that time, located where the Pennsylvania depot now stands. He was asked to become the regular assistant pastor, but turned it down to come to Anadarko, then wild Indian country, to build a school for the Comanche Indians under the auspices of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. Although there were 400 young women in his church, he came across the Allegheny mountains to Pittsburg, and married me August 30, 1888 and we reached our destination Sept. 6th after a 3 day train ride and 2 days overland in a vehicle called a "hack." Finding the white people at the agency needed to be looked after as well as the Indians, Mr. Fait organized the church. The money we were to have for our school was sidetracked to another station, and we were stranded for the time being until another location could be secured. For 22 years he conducted the Mission School, where besides being pastor of the church at the agency 6 miles away—he was farmer, surveyor, doctor, lawyer, teacher, undertaker—all things to all men. Because of the mistaken idea the public schools could meet all needs, the Board of Home Missions closed the school in 1910, taking away from him the great joy of his life, to be helping needy worthwhile children who had no other chance for an education. After the opening of the country in 1901 he continued the pastorate of the church still located at the Indian Agency, but a resident pastor was a necessity, and he finally persuaded the church to employ a man who could give full time to the work and relieve him of the great responsibility he had carried so long. Then in 1910 he returned to the pastorate,
continuing until his death November 4, 1921. He had an obsession for books—they were his closest friends, and he loved anybody who loved his books. At one time his library was the largest in the state (private library) starting with the Bible he bought when a boy, borrowing money with which to purchase it. All of his working library, occupying 3 sides of the wall in his study at the church, are now in the library of Tulsa University of which he was a trustee. On acceptance of the library I received these words, "We find this a real library, not a collection of books." The remainder of the library is still in the home, perhaps 1000 volumes. He was a scholar, an orator, and could hold an audience spellbound especially on patriotic occasions, and the high school refused to have anyone else for their Baccalaureate and Commencement addresses. The year of his death the senior class dedicates it annual with these words: "We the Senior Class of the Anadarko High School do respectfully dedicate 'The Caddo'; We have lost our best friend." Men who never went to church, and had no religion of their own, believed in him, and his kind of life. He taught tolerance and brotherly kindness in his daily life. To him there was neither Jew nor Gentile; Catholic or Protestant, and that spirit exists today among many of Anadarko's citizens. The Presbyterian Church, built as a memorial to his life work is the most beautiful thing in the city. He will always be remembered as Anadarko's outstanding citizen. These few facts written at the request of many friends.

Anna R. Falt

January 30, 1948.

APPENDIX B

FIRST DECORATION DAY AT ANADARKO

It was Decoration Day time; but there were no cemeteries. People were buried where they died—Indians in shallow furrows all over the reservation. The white people at the Agency were remembering their own dead, buried way back east somewhere and our wonderful patriotic agent, Major Frank Baldwin, (Later General Baldwin) hero of many battles, decided something must be done about it. So, he had some Indians pile up a mount of earth down on the river bank in a grove near where the bridge is now, and he asked the children of the three mission schools, Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic, and the two Government schools—Wichita and Caddo (now Riverside) and the Kiowa School (west of Agency) to pick all the flowers they could find (and the prairies were one mass of wonderful bloom) and bring them to this place, and cover the newly made mound. A platform was built, and the little organ from the little church building at the agency was brought down. The Indian children hadn't learned much English but all there who could joined in singing patriotic songs with Mrs. Falt at the organ. The soldiers (in the background) added their voices too. There was always a troup of soldiers. Prayer and a speech by Mr. Falt (thru an interpreter) who himself was the son of a soldier who fought at Gettysburg and thirteen other battles, and died from wounds received in one of the battles. It was a day never to be forgotten. There have been other Decoration Days but none like this one so far from civilization. Since then the Indians have learned to honor the flag, and many have given their lives for it, and lie in graves far from home; but the flag for which they fought, still hangs high.

—Mrs. Anna R. Falt