

## HASTINGS BAPTIST COLLEGE

By Hugh D. Corwin

The long departed educational institution, best known as "Hastings Baptist College, or, Hastings Baptist Academy," was first established by the Southwestern Association of Congregational Churches, at Hastings, Oklahoma Territory. It was founded as a preparatory school in 1903, but had a precarious financial existence from the start, and was finally sold by Court Order in 1907 to satisfy creditors.<sup>1</sup>

The Southwestern Association of Congregational Churches had named the school "Southwest Academy," and had intended it as a feeder for the Kingfisher College at Kingfisher, Oklahoma. The real sponsor of this movement was the Congregational Education Association of Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup>

A site consisting of two city blocks was secured from J. A. Marley, in the Marley Addition to Hastings. This was east of the townsite of Hastings, on a slight elevation with a good view in all directions. When the Academy failed, the land and the three story building reverted to J. A. Marley, who immediately offered it to the Baptist people of Hastings for a school. For four years after it was started the school did not function, successfully. It did operate for a part of three years.

The Baptist people of Hastings assisted by the citizens, purchased the property and tendered it to the Comanche and Mullens Baptist Associations at their respective sessions of 1907, on condition that these associations finish the building and maintain a school. (The Mullens Baptist Association was, and is, composed of the counties of Stephens and Jefferson, in Oklahoma.)

The name "Hastings Baptist College" was chosen for the institution. School opened again October 28, 1907, under the auspices of the Hastings Baptist Church, with the Reverend C. H. Hairfield, pastor of the Church as President of the College and his wife as a teacher. The enrollment the first day was 29,

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<sup>1</sup> Fred W. Watts, "Baptist Educational Efforts in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 1939), Vol. 17, pp. 33. (Hastings is in the western part of present Jefferson County. Its location was in Comanche County [Lawton the County Seat] which was organized in 1901, soon after the opening of the Kiowa-Comanche reservation. The first post office at Hastings, Comanche County, was organized on March 12, 1902, with Nancy Hopkins as Postmaster.—Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Dyer, *History of Jefferson County* (Waurika, Okla., 1957), p. 62.

but before the close of the year more than 100 were in the school. At the close of the first session Mr. Hairfield resigned, and the Reverend R. A. Rushing was elected President. When the Board of Trustees came to charter the school it was agreed that a name more suited to the location should be given it, and it was chartered as "The Southwestern Baptist College." However, it was known locally, and is still called by former students, "Hastings Baptist Academy."

After one year as President of the struggling institution, Mr. Rushing resigned and Mr. J. M. Dyer was elected President in 1909, and served one year. During this session 152 students were enrolled according to the records kept by President Dyer. He wrote:

"The Southwest Baptist College was a 'Voice in the Wilderness' preparing the way for a greater institution of religious education in Oklahoma. That institution became a reality in Oklahoma Baptist University at Shawnee, Oklahoma. There are those men and women in a score of different states that are making their marks high in the Ministerial, professional and commercial halls of the nation who look back with pleasure to Southwest Baptist College."

Mrs. Eunice Williams, Mrs. Nellie (Turner) Chilton and Homer P. Turner, all of Lawton, were enrolled in the "Old Academy" in September, 1908. Homer Turner recalls many of his school day experiences during the term of 1908-1909, while he was a student.

At this time there were not more than 60 or 70 students in attendance. The Reverend Rushing, the President, also taught classes. Mr. C. H. Hairfield, his wife and Miss Pearl Latner were teachers. In 1908, the basement and top floor of the building were unfinished. The first or main floor was the only one in use, although the second floor was finished but not needed. The building was brick, three floors and basement. There were three class rooms on each floor, with coal burning stoves in each room for heat. Mrs. Rushing, wife of the President, was Matron of a boarding house for girls where twelve girls and two young men were housed. Homer Turner and Ben Sawyer were the fortunate or unfortunate boys to be housed with the girls. The two boys were required to use a separate back stair and were not allowed downstairs except for meals and at study time every evening when all were required to assemble around a long table in the parlor and prepare lessons for the next day. Discipline was strict, and both young men and young women were given to understand they were there to learn and must apply themselves to this task. Most students went home over the week ends. A number of those attending lived on farms nearby and several lived in Hastings. There was a High School in Hastings and the subjects taught in the Academy, were in some instances

the same as those in the High School, but stress was placed on religious education at the Academy.

Among those enrolled in 1907-08 were the following:

Nellie Turner	Henry Paschell
Essie Davis	Homer Turner
Letha Watson	Roger Reynolds
Jewel Blades	Fender McGuire
Cora Williams	Edgar Wax
Maud Horn	Ben Sawyer
Marguerite Griffin	Frank McGuire
Eunice Reynolds	Walter Grundy
Julia Powers	Joe Boyd
Stella Tubbs	Arthur Grundy
Rev. Curbb and Wife	Henry Reynolds
Effie Shaffer	Herbert Clarkson
Ora Mae Shelton	Mattie Jones
Vanetta Staley	Vera Reynolds

In 1910, it was decided to move the Baptist College to Mangum, Oklahoma, since the school was in debt, and the First Baptist Church at Mangum had a building sufficiently large in which to house a College. The Reverend J. L. H. Hawkins was Pastor of the First Baptist Church and President. The College succeeded operating until 1913 when it, too, closed its doors forever. In this venture, some six hundred students received instruction, and approximately \$100,000.00 was expended.

The building at Hastings was never finished and stood unused and empty for many years, finally being destroyed by fire some thirty years ago. In 1957 the Mullens Baptist<sup>3</sup> Association, in connection with the Baptist Church at Hastings purchased and installed a "Marker of History" alongside State Highway 5, on the Fiftieth anniversary of "The Hastings Baptist College."

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Dyer, *ibid.*