

ST. JAMES OF WAGONER

With additional data of the Episcopal Church written in the summer of 1933.

By

Miss Daisy Shannon

Founding of the Episcopal Church in what is now Oklahoma, received its first impetus when Leonidas Polk, in 1838 was consecrated Bishop of Arkansas and Indian Territory, with charge of the dioceses of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. While there is nothing to substantiate it there is a rumor that following Bishop Polk's consecration, a church was established near Spiro. In 1841 Bishop Polk resigned all these charges except the bishopric of Louisiana, which he retained until the time of his death. From 1889 until 1893, Oklahoma and Indian Territories were under the direction of the Bishop of Arkansas, Dr. Pierce, and during that time occasional services were held by priests from that state. As a child I attended one of these services, held in the parlor of the Bernard hotel (since destroyed by fire), in Wagoner. The others present were my mother, Mrs. George Shannon, and Mrs. Owen, mother of Senator Robert L. Owen. I do not remember the name of the priest. This was perhaps in 1889.

The first Episcopal wedding in Wagoner was November 17, 1891, when Miss Sallie Cleland was married to Mr. Rutledge Alston, in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church here, by Rev. Mr. La Grary of Van Buren, Ark. On the afternoon of the same day, Bessie, infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Alston, was christened by Mr. La Grary. This was the first Episcopal baptism in Wagoner. One member of St. James Church, Miss Arabella West, was christened at Fort Gibson in 1890 by Rev. Mr. T. W. Barry, Episcopal chaplain, stationed there with the United States troops. This baptism took place in the chapel provided for the troops and their families. Miss West was in the first class confirmed by Bishop Brooke in St. James.

When the Rev. Francis Key Brooke of Atchison, Kansas was consecrated missionary Bishop of Oklahoma in 1893, this diocese included Oklahoma and Indian Territories. Shortly thereafter a

movement for the organization of an Episcopal Church in Wagoner was begun, when Mr. Wm. Alston living near here wrote to Bishop Brooke, asking him to visit this place. This was perhaps in 1893. Mr. Alston, a former resident of Georgia, had moved with his family to the then Indian Territory, in the summer of 1888, and being a devout churchman, had felt the want of the service. During the Bishop's visit, at which time the people of the Methodist Church very kindly offered their building for services, the organization was formed, and in February 1894, the erection of a modest wooden structure was begun. It was completed the following month, March. A carpenter by trade, Mr. Alston did much of the work himself, and other workmen contributed labor. The total cost of the building was \$850, the Bishop giving \$275 and \$583 being raised locally. The first services were held in the church by Bishop Brooke in April 1894, and it was consecrated in June 1894. The building of St. James has been moved twice, first in 1896 to a different location on the same block, where the City Hall now stands. Later it was moved to its present location on Church Street and at this time a small addition was made.

When the Church was organized the membership was made up principally of the following families: Alstons, Clelands, Wests, Weldons, Barbees and Shannons. Many others have come and gone, but the membership today includes among its communicants members of these same families, and there are instances where three and four generations of these families have been christened in St. James. The first rector was Rev. Dwight Benton who resigned a few months later, and was succeeded by Rev. Henry Tudor who served the mission three years. Mr. Tudor also had charge of the missions of Tahlequah and Muskogee and resided at Muskogee. During the summers of 1896-97, George Biller then a student at Berkley Divinity school Middleton, Connecticut, spent his vacation here alternating services with Mr. Tudor. In later years Mr. Biller was consecrated Bishop Coadjutor of South Dakota. Rev. A. V. Frances succeeded Mr. Tudor, serving the same missions and likewise residing in Muskogee. He resigned in 1902, and was succeeded by Rev. A. B. Perry of Missouri. During his term the Church in Muskogee changed from a mission to a parish.

Since that time St. James has been served by the following priests and deacons: Frank Jones, H. H. Jackson, F. W. Pratt, John Hartley, Karl Gibbs, Wm. Metcalf, Martin, Swan, Jacobs, J. C. Jameson, Spencer Creighton Mounsey, H. B. Smith, Wm. La-Rue-Witmere, Dr. L. W. Doud, and at present, the year 1933, Rev. Thomas M. Melrose, always in connection with some other mission. Mr. Melrose has charge also of Eufaula and resides there. Rev. Edwin C. Morton became vicar in charge in November 1934. He also serves Sapulpa and Claremore. In addition one member, Mr. John Curry, serves as lay reader, and has been church school superintendent for the past twelve years. When Bishop Brooke's health began to fail under the strain of his many duties, it was deemed best to divide the diocese in order to lighten his burdens.

It was Jan. 25, 1911, at St. Paul's Church, Minneapolis, that the Rev. Theodore Payne Thurston was consecrated missionary Bishop of eastern Oklahoma, and assumed his duties, residing in Muskogee. He served as Bishop of eastern Oklahoma for seven years, but, with the passing of Bishop Brooke the dioceses were reunited and his residence became Oklahoma City. In this capacity he served eight years when his health broke compelling him to give up his ministerial duties in 1926. He has made his home since that time in California. Bishop Thurston held services in St. James shortly after his consecration and many times thereafter. During the period elapsing between the resignation of Bishop Thurston and the consecration of Bishop Casady, the missionary district of Oklahoma was cared for by Bishop Cecil E. Seaman of North Texas. In this capacity he visited St. James at Wagoner, April 22, 1927, and confirmed a class.

The Rt. Rev. Thomas Casady was consecrated bishop of the missionary district of Oklahoma, at St. Luke's Church in Omaha, Nebraska, Sunday, October 2, 1927. His first visit to St. James was in November following, and he has made us three official visits since that time. His last visit to us was the first week in April 1933, when he held a mission lasting four days. We feel that much spiritual influence resulted from this visit.

The Rt. Rev. Middleton C. Barnwell, Bishop of Idaho, has held services frequently in St. James. His mother, Mrs. Elizabeth

Barnwell, now deceased, formerly lived in Wagoner and Bishop Barnwell spent part of his boyhood days here.

Also Rev. Hugh J. Llwyd, rector of Grace Church, Muskogee, for the past 30 years has held services here. Performing in the Church the marriage service for Miss Kittie Cleland and Mr. E. T. Cook in June 1920.

At present the Church property consists of the Church building which is in a fair state of preservation, and equipped with the necessary furnishings for holding services, and a Parish House comfortably furnished. There is no indebtedness against either. The baptismal font was made at the Gifford Marble Works of Batesville Marble in Muskogee, and placed in the Church Nov. 25, 1924. It is a gift of the women of the Church; all the brasses are memorials. The candle sticks to Mrs. Mary Shannon; the vases to Mrs. Sallie Barbee; the cross to Mrs. Ruby Weldon; these three were sisters. The Altar Reading desk to Mr. George Shannon; the Altar Service book to Willard P. Hays, Jr., and the Alms Basin to Mrs. Samantha Shannon. These were placed in 1930, and consecrated May 1931 by Dr. L. W. Doud.

St. Mary's Guild was organized shortly after the Church was built and the Daughters of the King Chapter July 16, 1911. Both are functioning today. To the Church school, more than any other organization, may be attributed the fact that the children of the Church families have received the training which prepared them for confirmation on the Bishop's official visits. Always few in number, but well organized, and with faithful teachers they have carried on the work of the Church under some rather trying conditions. The present membership is made up of about twenty adults and fifteen minors. The names of the Church families belonging to St. James of Wagoner in 1933, are Alstons, Clelands, Walters, Millers, West, Parkinsons, Biggerstaffs, Hays, Deal, Biles, Barnards, Shannons, John Curry, Ruth Billingsley and Sidney Orr.

I believe St. James to be the first mission established by Bishop Brooke, at least on the eastern side of the state, and the Church building to be the oldest Episcopal Church building in the state of Oklahoma. The others were built later or have been replaced with new ones.