

Chronicles of Oklahoma
Volume 20, No. 4
December, 1942
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF SHERIDAN, OKLAHOMA

By Charles Hazelrigg

Page 398

[Charles Hazelrigg was an itinerant preacher of the Disciple of Christ in pioneer Oklahoma. Coming to the territory shortly after the first Opening, he traveled over the country, first on foot, then driving a horse furnished by one of his rural congregations, preaching at the schoolhouses and organizing churches throughout the triangle bounded roughly by Marshall, Hennessey, and Dover.

He was a man of intelligence and culture. Born in 1858 on a farm near Hazelrigg, Indiana of an old English family that traced its descent back to the time of William the Conqueror, he grew up in an atmosphere of luxury and educational opportunity. After his college days he came west and began preaching at Nickerson, Nebraska in 1887. He attended a Bible college at Lincoln, Nebraska, and came to the new Oklahoma frontier in 1891. In 1899 he settled in Mulhall; he retired from the active ministry and for twenty-five years he served as assistant postmaster. He died at Mulhall in 1940.

"Brother Hazelrigg" not only entered actively into the life of the pioneer Oklahoma settlement, but thanks to his reflective mind and his facile pen, he left a permanent record of his impressions. The accompanying sketch was found among his books and papers, and was made available through the kindness of Mrs. Hazelrigg who still lives at Mulhall.—Angie Debo.]

It has been claimed that Guthrie had the first house of worship erected by our people¹ in Oklahoma. Its building was completed and dedicated in 1892. But the Sheridan brethren were the pioneers² among our folks in Oklahoma in the construction of a church

¹*The Disciples of Christ.*

²*Historical "firsts" are notoriously tricky. But considering the care and accuracy which Mr. Hazelrigg habitually used in his writing he is probably correct in stating that the Sheridan church was the first one erected by his denomination in Oklahoma Territory.*

Page 399

home. Their house was built in 1890. This Sheridan congregation, though now of the past, has an interesting history. There is a touch of romance connected with it.

A few months after the opening of Oklahoma for settlement in 1889, a quarter-section of land

in Skeleton Township, in the northeast corner of Kingfisher County,³ was set apart for a town. It was given the name of Sheridan in honor of General Phil Sheridan of Civil War fame.

The homesteaders surrounding the new town were principally from Kansas and Missouri. Many of the settlers were members of the Christian Church. They got together and organized a congregation with the following officers: elders, Lee N. Hobbs, Henry L. Miles, and Ross Lewis; deacons, John L. Woodworth, Charles R. Mahan, Robert Anderson, and V. C. Troxwell.

Ross Lewis was the town's first merchant. He and his family were used to church privileges in Kansas. He arranged for cottonwood logs to be cut on the farm of Brother Horton L. Miles. On the Miles homestead there was an abundance of cottonwood trees. Frank Osborn had a sawmill nearby. These logs were sawed into lumber by him, and soon there was a meeting house on the new townsite built of native lumber except the shingles and seats. The seats were made of pine with comfortable backs. A table served for a pulpit. The building was lighted with coal oil lamps with reflectors hung against the walls. Brother Lewis bore all expenses. The brethren afterwards reimbursed him for his outlay.

George Rainey became one of the town's general merchants. He was postmaster. He and his wife united with the church. Through his influence the Christian Church at Wellington, Kansas made the Sheridan church a present of a brass chandelier. It was shipped to Hennessey, Sheridan's nearest railroad point, eleven miles away, and was hauled to Sheridan by team. Brother Rainey is now⁴ postmaster at Enid, and is one of the city's progressive business men. He has written extensively on Oklahoma's early history.

Azariah Culbertson, a preacher from Anthony, Kansas, came to Sheridan and served the church for a time as its first minister. He afterwards moved to Ingalls, Oklahoma, then returned to his old home at Anthony, where it was reported he committed suicide.

Brother Lee of Dexter, Kansas held a series of meetings for the Sheridan church, baptizing several. Skeleton Creek, a half mile from the church, was the place of baptizing; and it was used frequently both summer and winter. One morning in after years—

³*The town was at the cross roads on sections 14, 15, 22, and 23, Twp. 19N., Range 5 W. It was eleven miles east and one-half mile north of Hennessey.*