

**THE INDIAN ROOTS OF OKLAHOMA'S METHODISM:
"WE MAY NOT BE THE SAME IN COLOR, BUT WE ARE THE
SAME IN HEART"¹**

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In the fall of 1907, Ooalah Pyle wrote a letter to the *Christian Advocate*, the national newspaper for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), and gave his own personal report on the just-finished annual meeting held by Oklahoma's Southern Methodist churches. The meeting was historically significant for a couple of reasons. First, the meeting came just weeks before Oklahoma's statehood became official. After years of white settlement and political maneuvering, the region was about to be transformed from an "Indian territory" dominated by native communities and into the forty-sixth state in the Union on par with the rest of the nation. Second, the meeting was the inaugural gathering of the newly-created Oklahoma Conference. Southern Methodism had been active in the territory for decades, but since 1844 the National Church's work was under the administration of the Indian Mission Conference (IMC). The shift from the IMC to the Oklahoma Conference signified the changing status of Southern Methodism in the region and its outlook toward the future.

In his report to the *Christian Advocate*, Pyle reflected on some of the changes he had seen in the region. "Time was, and not so long since, when the Indian Territory was supposed to be given over to Satan and his servitors. It was a refuge for criminals from other states and the outlaw and desperado found safety and protection amid its wilds," he wrote. "Today the civilizing influences of Christianity have spread themselves over the land and Churches and school-houses are found on every hand. The Methodist Church has been the pioneer in this grand work and in consequence many of the converted Indians are members of that church."²

Yet in his praise for the Methodist Church and its work in Oklahoma, Pyle wanted to bring attention to another element of Oklahoma Methodism that he feared might be lost during this evolving era. As a native minister himself who preached to his fellow Creek Indians near Okmulgee, Pyle was proud that one-fifth of all preachers at the Annual Meeting were Indian. Even though these ministers did not fit the profile of mainstream American Methodism, Pyle did not doubt their commitment to Christianity. "[S]ome of them [are] full-bloods unable to speak English," he wrote, but "whose lives

¹ *Our Brother in Red* 2.7 (March, 1884), 7.

² "Letter to the Editor of the *Christian Advocate* 1907," History of Missions Project, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ.

are devoted to bringing the bread of Eternal life to their people.” Besides, Pyle continued, these individuals were on the front-lines of Christianity. “The Creek country is likely to be the scene of the last conflict between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, between paganism and Christianity, between the false and the true,” he warned.³

Oooalah Pyle’s letter captures a changing era in Oklahoma and reminds readers of the roots of the region’s Methodism. For most of the nineteenth century, Methodism grew in this area due to its explicit focus on native communities. National and local officials created a network of conferences, districts, and circuits that spread the denomination and that utilized the talents and connections of its Indian members. While whites held most positions of authority, Indian ministers served vital roles as local preachers and translators and spread Methodism into individual communities. Conference officials also tapped their Indian members to acquire land and property for churches in order to increase the denomination’s physical presence at time when white ownership of Indian land was heavily restricted. By the time that the federal government opened up the territory to white settlement after 1889, Methodism (or, more specifically, Southern Methodism) was well positioned as a dominant force in the region.

But even as the white population boomed after 1890 and remade Oklahoma Methodism into a denomination that resembled the rest of the nation in its ethnic makeup and attitudes, Indian communities did not fade away. Instead, these congregations used their status as “Christian” communities to operate within a very narrow space somewhere between full assimilation into mainstream society and outright exclusion from it. For much of the twentieth century, Methodist Indian congregations found ways to protect, cultivate, and direct their own culture within a Christian context, which eventually culminated in the creation of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) in 1972.

The story of Oklahoma Methodism begins hundreds of miles to the east in the early years of the United States. The nation’s expansion in the 1810s and 1820s put the majority Anglo-American population in direct conflict with Indian communities in present-day states like Ohio, Mississippi, and Tennessee. To pave the way for white civilization, religious organizations began a sustained missionary effort to convert local Indians to Christianity. For Methodists, this included work among groups such as the Wyandotte, Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw.⁴ By the time that the federal government finally decided upon a policy of removal in 1830 with the Indian Removal Act, whereby it forcibly moved entire native populations from their land in

³ “Letter to the Editor of the *Christian Advocate* 1907,” History of Missions Project, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ.

⁴ Walter N. Vernon, ed. *One in the Lord: A History of Ethnic Minorities in the South Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church* (Oklahoma City: Commission on Archives and History, South Central Jurisdiction, The United Methodist Church, 1977), 1-3; Sidney H. Babcock and John Y. Bryce, *History of Methodism in Oklahoma: Story of the Indian Mission Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Oklahoma City: n.p., 1935), 11-13.

the east in exchange for land west of the Mississippi River, there were dozens of Methodist congregations spread across these Indian communities.

To rebuild those congregations in Indian Territory during the 1830s and 1840s, the Methodist Church continued to send individual white missionaries from neighboring conferences such as Tennessee or Arkansas to work alongside native ministers in a particular community. This approach proved successful as membership among the Cherokee and Choctaw numbered in the thousands by the 1840s.⁵ To accommodate this growth, the Methodist Church created the Indian Mission Conference (IMC) in 1844, which held its inaugural annual meeting that October at Riley's Chapel near Tahlequah in the Cherokee Nation.⁶ Nearly one-fourth of the official attendees were Indian.⁷

The original boundaries for the IMC included the Shawnee Mission outside of Kansas City and stretched as far west as present-day Montana, though the conference soon refined its boundaries to focus on the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Indians—or the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes”—located in the land north of Texas and west of Arkansas designated by the federal government as Indian Territory.⁸ The same year that the Church created the IMC, the divisive issue of slavery split mainstream Methodism into northern and southern factions. Since the IMC was, in the words of Methodist historian Walter Vernon, “the daughter of Arkansas and Missouri Methodism” and had “many ties to Tennessee and Mississippi Methodism,” its decision to join the newly-founded Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1845 seemed logical.⁹ As a result, the Southern Church directed the vast majority of Methodist work in the region for the next several decades.

Between 1844 and 1889, Methodism emerged as one of the strongest denominations in the region. What makes this achievement noteworthy was not simply that Methodism assumed a place of prominence, but rather the methods and ways that the Church used to gain this status. While white officials clearly believed that they directed the Church's work, in reality Indians were more responsible for the size and scope of the Church. Methodism developed in Indian Territory because of two distinct aspects of the IMC's work, both of which demonstrated the influence of Indians in the process. First and foremost, Methodists incorporated native ministers into mission work quicker than rival denominations, a decision prompted in part by the demands of native congregations. John Q. Tufts, the federal government's Indian agent at Union Agency, stated in 1881 that Indian

⁵ Babcock and Bryce, *History of Methodism in Oklahoma*, 19, 23-24.

⁶ Walter N. Vernon, “Beginnings of Indian Methodism in Oklahoma,” *Methodist History* 17 (1979): 153-154; Babcock and Bryce, *History of Methodism in Oklahoma*, 50.

⁷ H. E. Brill, *Story of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: UP Oklahoma City, 1939), 15-16.

⁸ Babcock and Bryce, *History of Methodism in Oklahoma*, 50.

⁹ Vernon, “Beginnings of Indian Methodism in Oklahoma,” 154.

congregations “have no use for those in whom they have no confidence,”¹⁰ a statement aimed at ill-prepared white missionaries. Second, the IMC avoided expensive mission facilities and instead relied upon localized preaching places and Indian boarding schools. By foregoing mission stations, Methodists could afford to push the work into the more-isolated communities, while the focus on boarding schools gave the Church influence over the religious education of the youngest generation of Indians. These techniques gave Methodists considerable clout in the nineteenth century as they claimed such notable native leaders as John Ross (Cherokee), Samuel Checote (Creek), and Greenwood Leflore (Choctaw) as members. Church officials would use this claim as evidence of Methodism's preeminence in Oklahoma.¹¹

In general, Indian ministers filled two basic positions in Indian Territory: local preachers and translators, a fact shown at the IMC's 15th annual conference at Skullyville in 1858 when it ordained “[m]inisters of four different tongues—one English and three the Red men of the Forest.”¹² Since most white missionaries were unable to speak any native language, Indian translators were vital to spreading Christianity, and it was not uncommon to attend large gatherings and hear the message translated into half a dozen different native languages. Just as important were those individuals who served as local preachers. In large circuits such as the Doaksville Circuit in the Chickasaw Nation, where it took the appointed preacher in charge three months to visit each congregation, local preachers dealt with the regular needs of parishioners.¹³ In 1873, the IMC reported more than four times as many local preachers than preachers in charge, which was a higher ratio than any other conference in the Southern Methodist Church.¹⁴ This reliance on native clergy, however, created a problem for Church officials. Indian ministers powered Methodism's growth in the territory and allowed it inroads into native communities that avoided whites, but it also meant that elements of Indian culture would not die out like mainstream white society had hoped. Conducting services in native languages or scheduling camp meetings in conjunction with traditional Indian gatherings ensured that Indians controlled their interaction with Christianity.

The careers of John Harrell and Willis Folsom showed the dual agendas of white church officials who often directed the larger actions of the Church

¹⁰ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1881*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1881), 104.

¹¹ Sidney H. Babcock and John Y. Bryce, *History of Methodism in Oklahoma: Story of the Indian Mission Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Oklahoma City: n.p., 1935), 23-24.

¹² “15th annual session, Oct 7, 1858, Skullyville, Choctaw Nation,” *Minutes*, Indian Mission Conference, 1844-1877, Indian Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

¹³ *Our Brother in Red* 4.5 (January, 1886), 6.

¹⁴ “Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, June 1, 1873,” *Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1873), 39-40.

and of the native ministers charged with carrying out the day-to-day work. Originally from the Arkansas Conference, Harrell served in the IMC for nearly half a century before his death in 1876 after collapsing in Vinita in mid-sermon. During his tenure, he held appointments in the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Muscogee Nations and eventually became superintendent of the IMC.¹⁵ Folsom, on the other hand, was a mixed-blood Choctaw minister that came to Indian Territory in 1832 after the federal government removed his people from their lands in Mississippi. He spent most of his career as a local preacher in the Choctaw Nation and was admitted into full connection in the IMC in the 1890s only toward the end of his life.¹⁶

Harrell's attitude toward mission work reflected many of the expectations held by white officials. A parishioner once described his sermons as "plain, simple, direct, personal, and powerful" and "that he never told 'funny' stories, seldom quoted poetry, and was little given to anecdote."¹⁷ "We need more white men to preach to our people," Harrell told the Board of Missions in his 1871 report as superintendent of the IMC. "At present, most of our charges are filled by our native brethren, who only speak the Indian tongue; they cannot read the English, have no access to our Commentaries, or any books on theology; they can only read the portions of the Bible that have been translated into their own native language, [and] consequently their information is quite limited."¹⁸ Harrell believed in doctrinal preaching grounded in Biblical training and he feared that poorly trained native ministers would harm more than help the conference.

From this perspective, Willis Folsom was seemingly everything that men like Harrell wanted to avoid. "He is no doctrinal preacher," Folsom's presiding elder, E. R. Shapard, told the conference in 1884. "He is a poor counselor in worldly matters, no politician at all; [and] is easily imposed upon by pretenders and hypocrites."¹⁹ The IMC's memorial for Folsom after his death in 1897 was no kinder: "He was, strictly speaking, a man of few talents. His education was limited; his opportunities were few. He was never what you would call a good preacher."²⁰ But native congregations did not judge their ministers according to the same standards held by white officials. Native converts were less obsessed with church dogma and more concerned

¹⁵ "History of Stillwell Methodist Church," Folder 10, UMC Stillwell, Hobart Ragland Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, OKC, OK; *Our Brother in Red* 6.16 (December 17, 1887), n.p.; George McGlumphy, "John Harrell: The Builder on the Border," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 78 (July, 1929): 444-449.

¹⁶ Homer Noley, *First White Frost: Native Americans and United Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 199.

¹⁷ McGlumphy, "John Harrell," 445.

¹⁸ "Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, June 1, 1871," *Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1871), 32.

¹⁹ *Our Brother in Red* 2.11 (July, 1884), 5-6.

²⁰ "52nd session, Nov 10, 1897, Muscogee, Indian Territory," *Minutes of the Indian Mission Conference, 1894-1900*, Box 34, Hobart Ragland Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, OKC, OK.

with Christian experience, which explains how Indians could incorporate Christianity into their own community without totally supplanting their own customs or beliefs.²¹

Folsom's success, therefore, was because he brought Christianity to Indians in ways that they could understand even if these ways did not conform to the expectations of white officials. When a white minister fresh to the mission field chastised Folsom for preaching at an "Indian Cry," or an Indian funeral ceremony steeped in native traditions that many whites considered to be "superstitions," Folsom responded "with a faint smile on his face and said 'You don't know the Indians.'"²² For Folsom, individual prayer was the key. Preaching from I Timothy 2:8 at congregations throughout the Choctaw Nation, Folsom implored "men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" while he put the power of Christianity into the hands of individuals.²³ Folsom's work demonstrated that Indians were less concerned with the specifics of doctrine and more focused on how Christianity could speak to their specific needs.²⁴ Rather than enforcing new difficult-to-understand doctrine alien to the community, the emphasis on prayer eased the transition for individuals into a Christian society. It also did not require that Indian converts immediately throw off the elements of their native culture once they became Christian, a fact that troubled white officials.

In addition to the reliance on native ministers, the second aspect of the IMC's work that allowed Methodism to grow in the nineteenth century was its avoidance of expensive mission stations in lieu of boarding schools and smaller preaching places. At various times, the IMC operated schools among each of the Five Tribes and, later, among the tribes in western Oklahoma. This policy began prior to the Removal era and was renewed in the post-Civil War decades. Schools such as New Hope Seminary in the Choctaw Nation, the Asbury Manual Labor School in the Muscogee Nation, or the Methvin Institute on the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Agency became centerpieces in the IMC's desire to train a generation of Indian Methodists. In fact, some conference officials argued that the Church relied too much on whites to develop the work. "When we want a preacher, we draw from the older Conferences, instead of raising them, up here," Theodore Brewer and Joseph F. Thompson wrote in the IMC's official organ *Our Brother in Red*. "The policy of some of the [Indian] Nations is to raise up and educate their

²¹ Homer Noley, "The Interpreters," *Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods*, Jace Weaver, ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 52.

²² "John Jasper Methvin Autobiography," J. J. Methvin Personal Papers, Oklahoma City University, OKC, OK.

²³ For a sample of Folsom's use of this verse over the years, see "Dec 28, 1873," Feb 3, 1877," and "Sept 16, 1884," Folder 3, Diary Vol. 1-2, 1873-1884, Rev. Willis F. Folsom Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, OKC, OK.

²⁴ Noley, "The Interpreters," 52.

own teachers; is the Church to be behind the Nation?"²⁵

Operating schools, however, meant that the Methodist Church had to navigate the legal complexities of Federal-Indian policy in addition to the typical problems of education. While the federal government encouraged church-run schools as a tool of assimilation, Indians still had control over certain aspects of how the school operated. This made the Church dependent on Indian communities to provide students, land, and money, and that often frustrated conference officials.

Once at school, students were exposed to rudimentary educational and industrial skills, as well as a strong focus on religion. New Hope Seminary's superintendent stated in 1874 that "[e]very child is furnished with a bible, is required to attend prayers, sabbath school and preaching. Morning & night we collect in the school room for prayers."²⁶ But religious training could be difficult and time consuming for those unfamiliar with Methodist theology. "We are seeking by preaching of the gospel and regular sabbath school instruction, to impress them with religious truth," the superintendent of Asbury Manual Labor School said. "In our work however we find it requires 'precept-upon-precept, precept-upon-precept; line-upon-line, line-upon-line.'"²⁷

Equally important as the religious training, schools served as bases for church expansion for the IMC. The conference's church in Eufaula attributed its origins to the re-founding of the Asbury Manual Labor School in 1847.²⁸ The Board of Missions and the Muscogee Nation split the nearly \$10,000 building costs. As Eufaula grew in commercial importance after the Civil War, the school and church attracted a larger population of mixed-blood Creek elites and whites who intermarried into the tribe. In 1874, Theodore Brewer, newly-arrived in the conference from Tennessee, separated the church from the school and moved the church into downtown Eufaula. The prosperous congregation quickly established the church as self-supporting.²⁹

Founding permanent churches like in Eufaula revealed the dependency

²⁵ *Our Brother in Red* 2.5 (January, 1884), 2. Joseph F. Thompson was a Cherokee mixed-blood and leader in the Cherokee Nation. In addition to his role in the IMC, Thompson served the Cherokee Orphan Asylum and often was considered for other leadership positions in the nation. See T. L. Ballenger, "Joseph Franklin Thompson: An Early Cherokee Leader," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 30 (1952): 285-291.

²⁶ "29th annual session, Oct 22, 1874, North Fork, Creek Nation," *Minutes*, Indian Mission Conference, 1844-1877, Indian Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

²⁷ "27th annual session, Oct 2, 1872, Okmulgee, Creek Nation," *Minutes*, Indian Mission Conference, 1844-1877, Indian Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

²⁸ Methodists originally founded the Asbury Manual Labor School in the old Creek country prior to the Removal era, during which time Samuel Checote, later Principal Chief of the Muscogee Nation, attended the school. After removal and the creation of the IMC in 1844, the conference sought to reestablish its schools and built a new Asbury Manual Labor School in Eufaula, Indian Territory.

²⁹ "1847-1947: A Century of Service," Folder 27, UMC Eufaula, Hobart Ragland Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

Methodists had on native communities. During this era, Indian sovereignty and federal oversight restricted the Church's ability to purchase land outright. This was as true among the Five Tribes as it was among the western tribes on government-controlled reservations. To gain any advantage it could, the IMC often drew upon its Indian members to petition their leaders when it needed land, as was evident with congregations in Tahlequah, Sallisaw, and Claremore when the Cherokee Council gave the conference land under the stipulation that church trustees were also Cherokee citizens.³⁰

The authority that Indians had over the Church's work frustrated many white Methodists. Even operating the IMC's official newspaper, *Our Brother in Red*, required Indian approval since it was published at the Harrell Institute, a Methodist-run boarding school in Muskogee overseen by the Creek Council.³¹ By the late 1880s, white conference officials grew tired of the influence that Indian leaders tried to exert over the Church's work. "I was surprised and humiliated," one Presiding Elder wrote in 1889, "when I read an editorial in a paper edited by an Indian of intelligence, containing the expression that a Mission Board had been allowed to exercise its office."³²

The turning point for Methodism in the region came in that same year. In April, 1889, the federal government opened the "Unassigned Lands" in the central part of Indian Territory to white settlement. Over roughly the next decade, land rushes to the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation, the Cherokee Strip Outlet, and the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Agency increased the white population even more. These new communities struggled with each other for preeminence in the region, which was now divided into Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. For Methodists, this meant a renewed rivalry between the Southern Methodists who historically had dominated much of the territory and the reinvigorated Northern Methodists. That branch created an Indian Mission in 1880, elevated it to the Indian Mission Conference in 1889, and then reorganized it into the Oklahoma Annual Conference in 1892.³³

By the early-twentieth century, mainstream Christianity, Methodism included, viewed the prospect of Indians having any authority over churches as counter-productive. When the federal government pushed its policy of allotment, a program designed to divide collectively-owned Indian land into

³⁰ "Act granting one town lot to the Methodist Episcopal Church South, n.d.," Cherokee (Tahlequah), Churches, CHN 69, Cherokee National Records, Indian Archives Collection, OHS, OKC, OK; "Letter from J. F. Thompson to William P. Ross, Principal Chief, November 13, 1874," Cherokee (Tahlequah), Churches, CHN 69, Cherokee National Records, Indian Archives Collection, OHS, OKC, OK; UMC Sallisaw, Box 46, Hobart Ragland Collection, OHS, OKC, OK; "Deed to Town Lots, April 5, 1893," Cooweescoowee District Records: Land Records and Estray Property Records, Cherokee Volume 218, Roll CHN 28, Cherokee National Records, Indian Archives Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

³¹ "Letter from T. F. Brewer to Samuel Checote, July 20, 1882," Creek, Schools, Bacone University, Muskogee High School, Muskogee Institute, & Harrell Institute, CRN 43, Creek National Records, Indian Archives Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

³² *Our Brother in Red* 7.21 (May 4, 1889), n.p.

³³ Brill, *Story of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Oklahoma*, 14-15.

individually-owned sections, churches supported the policy and encouraged Indians to sell their allotments to whites. In fact, a group of ministers from Oklahoma petitioned the government to speed up the process of transferring Indian land to white ownership because the delays “resulted most injuriously to every interest, including the building of churches and the maintenance of church schools.”³⁴

In light of the population boom, Methodist-run Indian boarding schools were considered outdated projects that occupied large sections of land that could be used for white settlement. Unlike individual churches and their small lots, Methodist schools like the Willie Halsell College in Vinita and the Methvin Institute in Anadarko controlled much larger plots of land, and that land rapidly increased in value as the white population soared. In both cases, Methodists initially gained access but not outright title to 160 acres, with the Cherokee Council giving them permission in 1886 for land near Vinita³⁵ and the federal government consenting to requests from the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Agency and IMC for land in Anadarko in 1889.³⁶ But after 1900, various church organizations gained outright title to both sections of land and moved to sell off their new property. Subsequently, Methodist officials turned a \$1600 investment at Willie Halsell into a nearly \$36,000 windfall within five years.³⁷ In Anadarko in 1908, the Woman’s Board of Foreign Missions sold its land at the Methvin Institute to a group of local investors, which included the former Presiding Elder of the IMC’s Duncan District, N.

³⁴ Senate Documents, 58th Congress, No. 169, (February, 1904), 49-50. Twenty-two local ministers from among the Five Tribes signed the petition, including the two IMC ministers N. B. Fizer and J. C. Baird.

³⁵ “An Act allowing the Methodist Episcopal Church South the use and occupation of one hundred and sixty acres of land, November 23, 1886,” Volume 284, National Council, Senate, CHN 15, Cherokee National Records, Indian Archives Collection, OHS, OKC, OK.

³⁶ “Letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to W. D. Myers, March 18, 1889,” Kiowa Agency, Indian History, Culture and Acculturation, Churches 1870-1925, KA50, Kiowa Agency Records, Indian Archives Records, OHS, OKC, OK.

³⁷ “October 3, 1905,” Minutes of Annual Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings File 04: May 4, 1904-May 20, 1909, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ; “April 5, 1907,” Minutes of Annual Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings File 04: May 4, 1904-May 20, 1909, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ; “December 27, 1907,” Minutes of Annual Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings File 04: May 4, 1904-May 20, 1909, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ.

“May 9, 1908,” Minutes of Annual Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings File 04: May 4, 1904-May 20, 1909, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ; “July 9, 1908,” Minutes of Annual Meetings and Executive Committee Meetings File 04: May 4, 1904-May 20, 1909, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ; “Contract,” Indian Work, Oklahoma #3, Methodist Episcopal Church, South Mission Administrative Files, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, NJ.

L. Linebaugh, for \$45,000.³⁸ In both cases, money from the sale of Indian land went to finance the Church's work outside of Oklahoma.

Though Indian communities clearly became a secondary concern to early-twentieth century mainstream Methodism, they did not fade away. In fact, Indians demanded more control over their own congregations and pushed Methodism in ways that benefitted them irrespective of the wishes of church officials. They created their own space within the larger Church community that allowed them to grow. After heeding the calls from a collection of white and Indian ministers for change, the M. E. Church South created the Brewer Indian Mission in 1918 and gave Indian members more administrative control over the Church's work.³⁹

In this new Indian Mission, native ministers like Johnson Bobb, Johnson Tiger, and Guy Quotone emerged as the driving force of the work and native congregations engaged in Christianity to fit their own needs. Camp meetings became, in the words of A. Frank Smith, the presiding bishop over the Indian Mission from 1930 to 1944, a "world within a world,"⁴⁰ while another observer noted that "Indian customs" and not white expectations dictated the flow and length of events like Quarterly Conferences.⁴¹ In 1929, a group of Indian women in the mission felt excluded from the Women's Missionary Society in the other Oklahoma conferences. As a result, these women organized a separate Indian Women's Missionary Society of Oklahoma to conduct work among Indians.⁴² A few years later, Norton Tahquechi petitioned the Indian Mission for a church near Mt. Scott to serve his fellow Comanche Indians. Though the mission denied this request for fear of angering other denominations working in the area, Tahquechi and the Comanche ignored mission officials and built their own church out of discarded material from Ft. Sill.⁴³ In Anadarko in 1941, Ted Ware organized a Kiowa congregation even as his District Superintendent was sure he would fail and offered to "eat his hat" if Ware succeeded. After meeting for several years in private homes,

³⁸ Charles F. Mitchell, *The Story of My Life* (Weatherford, OK: n.p., 1940), 85-86; "The Autobiography of John Jasper Methvin," J. J. Methvin Personal Papers, OCU, OKC, OK; *Sixty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 174-175; *Official Minutes and Annual Report of the Oklahoma Conference of the MECS, 61st Annual Session of the Indian Mission and the 1st Session of the Oklahoma Conference*, Tulsa, IT, November 14-19, 1906, 18.

³⁹ Frank M. Thomas and Curtis B. Haley, eds., *Journal of the Eighteenth General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1918), 28, 170.

⁴⁰ "Travis Park Chapel, San Antonio, Sunday, Sept 3, 1944," Box 598, Bishop A. Frank Smith Papers, Bridwell Library, SMU, Dallas, TX.

⁴¹ *Seventy-Third Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 44; *Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 45-46.

⁴² *The Indian Mission of Oklahoma, Minutes, 12th Annual Session, 1929-1930*, Sept 13-15, 1929.

⁴³ "Letter to the Superintendent of Indian Mission, W. U. Witt, November 9, 1931," Correspondence, 1930-1936, W. U. Witt Personal Papers, OCU, OKC, OK; "Our Specials," *The World Outlook* 24 (March, 1934): 100.

in another Methodist Church before being kicked out, and even in an old creamery in town, the J. J. Methvin Memorial Church opened its own doors for Kiowa Methodists in 1945.⁴⁴

Methodist reunification in 1939 meant that the Indian Mission diversified further, as shown by the Creek District's 1941 report on its efforts to reach Creek, Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Osage, Kaw, Seminole, Euchee, Ponca, and Pawnee communities.⁴⁵ Over the next thirty years in the Indian Mission, membership, salaries, properties, and opportunities all increased steadily as more native ministers assumed positions of importance within the mission.⁴⁶ Finally, in 1972, the United Methodist Church elevated the status of its Indian work in the region and created the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

Today, Methodist Indians are a minority in Oklahoma, but their overall importance and influence in the region looms large. Because of its Indian congregations, the United Methodist Church hold a place in the region that extends back nearly two centuries and exceeds most other denominations. Indian congregations created a foundation for the church in Oklahoma that later generations of Methodists continue to enjoy. Likewise, church institutions gave sanctuary to Indian communities struggling to survive the cultural assault of the early-twentieth century. As mainstream society pressured natives to assimilate, Indian Methodists used their Christian experience to preserve aspects of their culture and maintain some autonomy. In Oklahoma, the story of Methodism is inextricably linked with the history of its Native American citizens.

⁴⁴ Luke Eric Lassiter, Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay, *The Jesus Road: Kiowas, Christianity, and Indian Hymns*, (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 2002), 40.

⁴⁵ *Indian Mission Conference Minutes, 1941*, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

⁴⁶ Vernon, ed. *One in the Lord*, 38.