

Early Account of Hugo

First Presbyterian Church Hugo
contributed by Rev. Edwin Bernard, H.R.
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The following was taken from the book "The Romance of Home Missions" by S.L. Morris published by Whittet and Shepperson, Printers at Richmond, Va. in 1924; pages 165 ff.. The book is a history of the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church and was published under the direction of the Presbyterian Committee of Publication. Dr. Morris was the Executive Secretary of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Hugo, Oklahoma

Twenty years ago, Hugo was an insignificant village, consisting largely of one room shacks hastily constructed by investors to hold "claims" against their respective "lots" in the prospective town. The Presbyterian Church was organized by four members, constantly shifting, but having a continuous though precarious life. Rev. R. P. Walker, a young minister of South Carolina, had the courage to take unto himself a wife and the greater temerity to "volunteer for Home Missions" – on "nothing certain a year." The Committee sent him to Hugo and invested \$600 to build him a church "in keeping with the importance of the town."

At our request Rev. R. P. Walker gave us an account of his work in Hugo:

"Almost twenty years ago Dr. Morris sent the writer out from South Carolina to Hugo, Okla., as a Frontier missionary. Hugo was one of the government town sites in what was then Indian Territory, and had begun about a year before when A.& C. crossed the Frisco at this place. Hugo, as we saw it that morning, was composed of tents and "shacks," small boxed rooms built to hold lots. The stores were cheap board structures, and there was neither church building nor school houses in the town. We visited around and found five Presbyterians. Two of these were a young elder named Peters and his good wife. They opened their hearts and home to us and were the chief supporters of the organization. The Presbyterians owned two lots with two "shacks" thereon. In one of these we spent our first year in Hugo. Mrs. Walker was not burdened with an extensive house.

"This manse was composed of one room 14x14 feet, and a shed-room half the size. It was not encumbered with non-essentials as ceiling, paper and paint. So it has been truthfully said: 'The sun could smite us by day and the moon by night.' The "meeting house" for all denominations was a rough board room 40 x 60 feet, and there I preached for two years. Often Peters and I were the only Presbyterians present. In this house we organized a Sabbath School several months later, ordained and installed officers, baptized infants, and received enough members to build a church.

"During the first year in Hugo we were so fortunate as to find two sources of income other than our little congregation. One was the "city school." The town was not incorporated, but the people wanted a school. So I rented the "meeting house," employed two lady teachers, and opened with something over a hundred scholars. In the spring about the time the school closed, another business began to flourish for me, the only resident pastor. I have never seen such a matrimonial epidemic as struck Hugo that spring and summer. How did the come for me to 'say the ceremony' - morning, noon, and night! At the house, on the street, in the stores, and one couple had me go down to the Red River and marry them on the 'flat' as they crossed over, because they had a Texas license.

"It would be hard to find a more unpromising prospect than Hugo was twenty years ago, but great has been the change in these years! Today Hugo has a population of 10,000 people, with splendid brick business houses, flourishing banks, fine hotels, a public school building that cost \$20,000, an electric plant, a number of manufacturing industries, concrete sidewalks, a through water system, and four handsome churches. The Presbyterians built the first church in town."

In his brief ministry there he built four churches: Hugo, which now has a membership of 300 and a house of worship costing \$60,000; Marietta, which has a manse and a creditable church; Bennington, the first church building erected in the town' and Milburn – the latter which has been the only one which has not had successful growth. Their combined membership is 640 and their present property is valued at \$75,000.



First Parsonage



1902 Church



Present Day Church