

CHAPTER III

A SURVEY OF THE GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

From the beginning of the organization of the community of West Plains to the present time the presence of churches and social organizations have played an important role in the lives of the populace. The people felt a real need for the spiritual help that the early circuit rider could give them. Times were indeed difficult for these early people and the help and inspiration that they received from the church was more than welcome. From almost the beginning of the town there have been four churches that have served the needs of the people. These churches are the Methodist, Christian, Baptist, and the Catholic.

There have been a number of social organizations that have functioned at odd times. No attempt will be made in this treatise to give the complete history of all of them. Some of the organizations that have functioned in the past years are as follows: Young Women's Christian Association, Lions Club, Masonic Lodge, Woodman Lodge, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and the various recreation clubs that have existed from time to time. The writer wishes to mention a fact or two about several of the organizations mentioned. The American Legion Auxiliary and the American

Legion have been active in Plains since about 1920. The Lions Club and the Young Women's Christian Organization have been active since about 1930. At present the Lions Club has about forty members and meets every Thursday evening at seven o'clock in the City Hall during school months. The Y. W. organization has a membership of sixty and meets in the high school auditorium the third Monday in every month at seven thirty. The Woodman Lodge was started in Plains in 1904 and was dissolved in 1934 when the dues became too high for most of the members. Some of the members joined the Meade group. The Masonic Lodge was organized in 1912 and is an active lodge today. From 1912 to 1930 the group met in an old wooden building on Grand Avenue. When the Plains State Bank building was built in 1930 the group bought an undivided one-half interest in the building and has used the top story of the building as a meeting place since that time.

The churches of Plains have interesting backgrounds. The accounts that follow indicate the faithfulness of the members of their respective organizations. The pictures of the different churches are found in the pictorial section in the appendix.

The Catholic Church is located in the northwestern part of Plains and has a very interesting history which dates back to 1903. In that year several Catholic families

came to West Plains to settle. Prominent among the Catholic membership were the families of John Burnes, Tom Murphy, and Pat Flannigan. Since there was no church at Plains at this time the families went to Meade to attend Mass.

Between 1903 and 1910 several Catholic families moved in an area about twenty miles north of Plains. The directors of the church persuaded Father Mennis of Dodge City to come to Plains to hold services. The journey was generally made in a wagon in all kinds of weather. A little later the priest from Pratt came to minister to the people. All of these services were being held in the home of John Burnes. It was soon evident that the membership was increasing to the point where a church was necessary. The Catholic settlement north of Plains built a little cement block church on the prairie near Copeland, though the Plains people had worked hard to have it built in their own community.

About 1912 several new families had increased the membership. Some of these families were the Haydens, the John Kisners, Milton Grants, John Berghaus' and the Clarence Dunns.

The Right Reverend Bishop J. J. Hennessy realized that Plains was an ideal location for a Catholic Church so during the years of 1915 and 1916 the St. Patrick's Church was built and formally dedicated on June 17, 1916.

From the period 1916-1925, the church underwent a missionary administration under the direction of Father E. K. Cryne of Liberal. In the spring of 1926 Father Esler took up residence in Plains in the newly purchased rectory.

From 1931 to 1937 the church was led by Fathers Moeder and Weller. In 1933 the largest class of the parish was confirmed numbering 32 from Plains and 17 from Liberal. The largest number of clergy ever to attend a celebration in Plains were present. There were ten clergy present, including the pastor, Father Weller.

On June 29, 1937, the parish with deepest regret witnessed the departure of Father Weller to take charge of St. Mary's Church at Loretta, Kansas. On June 30 Father Stock, C. P. O. S., assumed the pastoral charge with missions at Liberal and Elkhart. Since 1946 the church has been under the direction of Father Bihn. The last few years have witnessed a steady progress in the parish. The rectory has been enlarged, debts have been paid, and the church and the rectory have been completely redecorated. A sidewalk was laid along in front of the church grounds and a graveled parking lot has been provided for cars.¹

Probably the Baptist Church of Plains is the oldest of its kind in the western Kansas area. A missionary by the

¹ Mr. Gus Shinogle, interviewed in Plains, May 11, 1953. Plains, Kansas.

name of Willis founded and established this early pioneer church. The first member was Edward Hopkins and the first minister was one Rev. Rhodes from Liberal. Other members in 1891 were Mr. and Mrs. Hile Yokum and Mr. and Mrs. Rynerson. All of these members were received by letter. Charlie J. Angell was the first member received into the church through the Ordinance of Baptism.

The church disbanded in 1896 and the few remaining members took their membership to Meade. In 1903 the membership returned to Plains and the church was reorganized and a church building was built. It was the wishes of the congregation that the building be used by any other church group that cared to use it. The church had four ministers from 1907-1911. The ministers serving during this time were the Reverends Colvin, Webb, Callahan, and Harper. The Rev. Callahan preached four months from April, 1911, to July, 1911, with the agreement that the church should pay him what money they could raise for his salary.

An interesting proposition was drawn up by the church congregation on April 22, 1911. The proposition reads as follows:

At a called meeting of the members of the Baptist Church of Plains, Kansas, a committee of three of the board of trustees, P. L. Davis, H. P. Ragsdale, and Mrs. L. Edwards were appointed to confer with a committee from the Methodist Church and submit a proposition to the effect that a charge of \$5.00 for

Sunday half-time service and a weekly prayer meeting for a month will be charged for the use of the building. An extra charge will be made for each day's use during revival meetings, lectures, etc.

Provided further, that any denomination have the privilege of using the house, by paying the proportionate amount when not in use by the Baptist people.

These charges, which shall be paid in advance to the treasurer of the Baptist Church, include janitor service, lights, and the use of the church.

This agreement shall remain in force until October 1, 1911.²

On July 3, 1915, the Collingwood Land and Grain Company offered to the church their choice of any number of lots in block 159 for the purpose of building a church parsonage. In accordance with this the church met and decided to build a parsonage on this ground. The parsonage built is the one that is still being used in 1953.

From 1915 to 1925 several pastors served the church. Those serving during these periods were the Reverends Dent, Morrow, Sutherland, Macom, and Riblet. The Baptist Young Peoples Union was organized in 1923.

Early in 1926 there was some talk of building a new church house, since the old one had become too small to accommodate the Sunday School and did not give enough room for the different classes. Mr. Angell describes the plans and the building of the new church in his paper this way:

² Charley Angell, History of the Baptist Church of Plains, Kansas. 1953 (not published).

The Lord blessed us with an abundant crop and in the early fall about ten thousand dollars had been pledged for the building. A little over half of this amount was payed in. During several months that followed there was much discussion and consideration of the matter as to how and when we should build.

Ideal weather conditions made possible the rapid progress on the building which was under construction.

On the first day of October, 1927, a religious service was held on the site of the new church. Miss Lela Winfrey was given the honor of taking the first shovel full of earth from the site. That afternoon, Milo Mohn and John Ferry commenced the excavation. On October 14th, about twenty-four men with three cement mixers, poured the cement for the basement. The job was finished about six o'clock that evening. The ladies served dinner and supper at the adjoining parsonage.

The laying of the brick commenced Dec. 5, 1927, and the corner stone laying was held on December 22nd of the same year with Ed. M. Angell in charge.³

By 1927 the membership of the church had grown to the hundred mark. The church was beginning a period of steady growth. Memberships had increased to a high level.

The first funeral to be preached in the new church was that of A. V. Angell on February 21, 1929. Rev. C. E. Riblet was the minister in charge. The first wedding to be performed in the church was the ceremony for Miss Lela Winfrey and Rev. Earl Ray. The regular minister, Rev. Riblet, resigned on June 24, 1928, and Rev. Ray was chosen to take charge.

³ Angell, op. cit.

In the spring of 1929 the congregation removed the contents of the cornerstone of the old church. Upon removing the contents of this stone it was found to contain an old newspaper which had been placed in a tin container. The container had rusted to pieces and the contents of the stone were in bad condition. After examining the different items the decision was reached by the church membership that these should not be put in the cornerstone of the new church.

From 1930 to 1945 the church had a number of ministers serving them. They were the Reverends Welch, Whitlock, Soderstrom, Stanfield, Reeves, and Wing.

To serve the needs of the Baptist men in service the congregation bought bullet-proof New Testaments for Max Angell, Leland Angell, Glen Jones, Louis Jones, Billy Bob Bisbee, William Hockett, Elin Lawson, John Lawson, Jr., Charles Lawson, and Dale Lathrop.

During the years, 1946-1947, the church did much redecorating and remodeling on the church and the parsonage. The church floors were sanded, the walls repainted, and the roof repaired. The same procedure was carried out in improving the parsonage.

Reverends Gorsline, Freeland, and Brown have been the ministers from 1946 to the present. The last named has been the minister since October 1, 1949. Rev. Brown has been in

charge of a Sunday morning church service over radio station KSCB, Liberal, Kansas, since Feb. 14, 1951.

The church now has 114 active members. In this number are 80 resident and 34 non-resident members. The valuation of the church property is as follows: church building, \$32,000; parsonage and lot, \$7200; farm land donated to the church, \$8000.

The congregation is planning and looking forward to their fiftieth anniversary celebration to be held in December of this year. Plans are being made to have all day services, a church dinner, and a program which will be attended by guests from the State Baptist Convention. Mrs. Ada Robers of Santa Anna, California, and Mrs. Lea King of Garden City are the only living charter members. It is hoped these two people can be present.

The following is a brief history of the Methodist Church of Plains:

The pioneer Methodist circuit riders established the first Methodist "class" in the West Plains community. The work was begun in northwest Meade County in 1885 when Rev. J. N. Stamper of Meade organized a circuit called the Mertilla circuit. In March, 1886, this was changed to the West Plains circuit and Rev. J. N. Stamper was appointed pastor again. Rev. A. P. George was the presiding elder of the Garden City district.

On January 20, 1887, the First Methodist Episcopal Church of West Plains was chartered. The names on this charter were B. P. Bruce, Fred Baddeley, Thos. Beaty, Ernest B. Russell, and Harry B. Stone. In

March, 1889, the pastor, Rev. Stamper, reported there were 40 members and \$5.00 had been given for benevolences. His salary was \$160 per year.

West Plains ceased to be the head of a circuit in 1890 and for the next fifteen years the church depended upon pastors who came at infrequent intervals from Meade, Liberal, or Old Montezuma.

Many homesteaders left after 1890 and no records were kept until 1906. While organized religious services faded from the printed page, the true spirit of Christianity was kept alive by devout homemakers.

A union Sunday School was established in 1906 in West Plains. The services were held in the Baptist Church with the Christian, Baptist, and Methodist memberships taking part. The ministers for the churches took turns in furnishing ministers. J. W. White, a local preacher, held the services for the Methodists.

The union services were continued until 1910. Under the date of August 19, 1910, a charter was filed for the Methodist Episcopal Church of Plains, Kansas. The names on this charter were A. S. Frather, A. L. Driver, O. D. Overton, N. A. Geisinger, and H. M. Wooten. J. W. White served as the pastor for the years, 1910 and 1911. In 1911 the church board bought for the sum of \$300 the location which has served as the site for the church and later for the second parsonage. The official board members were E. B. McConnell, Peter Hearn, N. A. Geisinger, Ed Palmer, and Robert Wilson. A meeting was held at the Wyatt school house east of Plains for organization and planning. Soon the upstairs of the Elder Store building was secured as a meeting place. In the meantime the basement of the new church was dug by volunteer help and the building was started in 1911. Much of the work on the frame building was donated. It stood as a shell through the year of 1912.

The first Methodist Church to be built in Plains was dedicated to God on August 31, 1913. Rev. R. A. Dadisman of Pratt, the district superintendent, dedicated the church. Western Kansas was experiencing a drought. No member of the church had any wheat to

harvest, or scarcely any, and the grass barely became green on the prairies that year. A member of the building committee recently wrote, "One of the great assets was the faith and optimism of Rev. Dadisman. Also we received some help from the Board of Church Extension. The loan was \$500." In the issue of the Plains Journal following the dedication mention is made of a \$300 pledge from the Ladies Aid and \$200 from the Sunday School to provide for the payment of this loan due in five years.

On May 17, 1915, a lot was contracted for on which to build a parsonage. Roy C. Elliott signed this contract. The location was on the southwest corner on the same block as the church. Rev. and Mrs. O. F. Volkland, who came in 1915, resided in this first parsonage.

Rev. S. M. Day, the pastor in 1923, led a movement in securing a seven room parsonage to replace the first one of four rooms. In March, 1923, the charge reported the new parsonage completed. This building cost \$4800. The church paid \$3200 and carried a debt of \$1600.

The church became overcrowded and in 1926 plans were made for the addition of the north wing, after the official board voted that an effort be made to raise \$5000. The north window was retained and placed in this wing. The church was cleared of this debt in 1928.

During the following decade the church experienced a period of growth. Even during the depression and dust bowl periods the membership was mindful of the world needs and sacrificially contributed to the cause of missions. The Reverends Coppedge and Morgan served the church as pastors through this period.

In May, 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Protestant Methodist Church united to form the Methodist Church. In October of the same year, the Central Kansas Conference was formed by union of the southwest and the northwest Kansas conferences.

The new church recently completed had its beginning at an official board meeting on October 2, 1944, at which time Rev. Hamm appointed a group of three people

to be put on a committee to set up a trust fund for the purpose of building a new church. Substantial amounts of money were contributed to the cause during the pastorates of Reverends Kamm, Wells, Rickard, Allen, Benton, and Good.

Recently a building committee was selected and an architect was secured from Wichita. On October 8, 1952, the contract was let to a Colorado Springs firm. The ground-breaking ceremony was held on October 29, 1952, at the site on Grand Avenue. The corner stone laying ceremony was on April 19, 1953.⁴

The Christian Church is the "newest" of the Protestant churches in Plains. Just a few scattered disciples were present at the first worship service in 1908. In April, 1908, evangelists Roger H. Fife and Clyde Lee Fife conducted a revival in the union church building and a few additions were made in the membership list. The membership by this time had grown to fifty.

The first employed minister of the church was Rev. C. C. Peck of Stratford, Texas, who came once a month to hold services. His length of stay was for three years from 1908-1911.

According to the secretary's book the church disintegrated and most of the members moved away during the latter part of 1911.

During the fall and winter of 1926 Mr. and Mrs. Ed Hall gathered some of the few remaining members together in

⁴ Mrs. Herman Bender, History of the Plains Methodist Church, written for and read at the corner stone laying ceremony of the new church, April 19, 1953.

cottage meetings and for awhile met on Sunday afternoons at the Baptist Church. Later the group met in Klan Hall for Sunday School and communion services.

Beginning in September, 1927, Mrs. Mason Glaze of Meade came every Sunday morning to preach. Under her direction several projects were started. Some of these projects were as follows: a women's movement called the "Ladies Council" was initiated, a building committee was established, and finally a church building was built. The revival meeting which was held shortly after the dedication of the church added some twenty members to the church.

The first official meeting of the membership of the church was held on April 20, 1928, with the following officers elected: the church Elders were Brother Fall and Brother Ford; the Deacons were Brothers Clyde Atkinson and J. R. Morris; the Trustees were Brothers J. R. Morris, Clyde Atkinson, and Myron Fall; and the Secretary chosen was Sister Edith Wyatt.

There was a debt of \$1500 still to be paid on the building materials used in the new church. To take care of this the following resolution was passed by a unanimous vote:

Whereas the church basement has been completed so far as present plans are concerned and whereas there is an unpaid bill of \$1500 for which there is no available funds and in order to get everything in proper order...

Be it resolved: The board of trustees is hereby authorized and directed to borrow the above mentioned amount and sign the name of the church to the necessary note. The note is to be signed by J. R. Morris, chairman of the board of trustees.⁵

Rev. Swift from Los Angeles, California, was called to be the minister of the church on Feb. 14, 1929. The salary paid to Rev. Swift was \$120 per month. He was dismissed as the minister on May 27th of the same year and a Rev. Hall came to take his place at \$100 per month.

On July 28, 1930, the church board met to consider building a house for the pastor. After much discussion the board decided that the cost for building a house was too high at the time. It was decided to rent a house for \$5.00 per month.

In 1931 the matter of the church budget was brought up and since the great depression was in evidence the congregation asked the minister, Rev. Bachelor, to wait until after harvest to see what they could do about the coming year's salary. The church board and the pastor finally agreed on \$55 per month.

During the period, 1932-1933, the church was in severe financial straits as were most of the churches at that time. The church agreed in a meeting on December 4,

⁵ Mrs. Clyde Atkinson, Official Minutes of the Plains Christian Church. 1948 (not published).

1933, not "to put the small amount of money in the church treasury in the bank because of the 50¢ monthly charge."⁶

On March 17, 1935, Mrs. Mason Glaze, the first pastor of the church, came to Plains and was employed subject to the following terms: "to employ Mrs. Glaze for services here for 12 months, subject to a 30 day notice by either party if dissatisfaction arises." Mrs. Glaze was the minister until 1939.

From 1939 to the present the church has had a number of supply pastors ministering to the needs of the congregation. The present one is Rev. Ewing.

In 1951 the church board bought the old church building at Hayne and moved it to Plains to be remodeled and used as a church building. With much work completed on the building it is one of the nicest ones in the area. At the present time the membership is 110 members. The church is looking forward to many successful years ahead.⁷

⁶ Atkinson, op. cit.

⁷ Mrs. F. Bromwell, Interviewed in Her Home, May 14, 1953. Plains, Kansas.