

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 Eser 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

