

## CHAPTER VIII

### Methodism in Arizona

#### I. METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN ARIZONA

We camped out several nights. In that part of the Territory one finds no inconvenience in sleeping in the open air, so far as the *atmosphere* is concerned; but in case a rattlesnake, a scorpion or a tarantula should volunteer to take lodgings with you, if you should escape with *only* a prolonged fit of *insomnia* you might think yourself exceedingly fortunate.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Alexander Gilmore, one of the earliest pioneers of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Arizona. Life for the Methodist preacher in this outpost of American civilization for many years was interesting and exciting, if not downright dangerous.

Tradition tells us that the first sermon delivered by a Methodist minister in Arizona was that of the Rev. J. L. Dyer, a Presiding Elder of the Santa Fe district of the Colorado Conference. According to Mr. Dyer, he preached twice to Americans at Ft. Wingate in New Mexico. Then he set out for Ft. Defiance, which was just over the line in Arizona. There Mr. Dyer preached three times. The date was sometime not too long after March 7, 1870.<sup>2</sup> On arriving, he found the Rev. James M. Roberts sent by the Presbyterian Mission Board. The beginning of permanent work in Arizona may be dated September or December, 1870. During one of these two months the Rev. Charles H. Cook held a preaching service at the Fort Bowie military reservation.<sup>3</sup> A member of the Rock River Conference, he had come to Arizona for the express purpose of ministering to the Indians. Having read a New York magazine article appealing for missionaries to them, he applied through the Methodist Episcopal Church. Although he was told that there were no funds available, he still decided to go. His experiences en route and later read like a romance, ranging from watching a scalping party to the high moments of baptizing a whole host of Indians. He began his ministry in December among the Pimas on their reservation at a point on the Gila River. Eventually Cook joined the Presbyterian Church, which adopted the mission and helped it to flourish.<sup>4</sup>

The second Methodist minister to reach Arizona in the fall of 1870 was Alexander Gilmore. A member of the New Jersey Conference, he came as the appointed chaplain to the United States Army in Arizona. On his first Sunday he preached in Prescott, a mile from the military post. In the following February he organized a Sunday School there.<sup>5</sup> With the gradual appearance of other missionaries his activity became more restricted to the military post, but he continued throughout his stay in Arizona to help wherever he was needed.

The third pioneer was Glezen A. Reeder of the North Ohio Conference, dispatched at the request of Bishop Matthew Simpson. He was the first superintendent in the territory. Shortly after his arrival in 1872 he wrote Bishop Simpson a description of the existing conditions in this mission field:

first, the Apaches were in open hostility—they were on the war path; second, the influence of the saloon affected all; third, Romanism was well established and was none too cordial to the incoming of other denominations; fourth, vice was universally prevalent.<sup>6</sup>

If one adds to this picture the physical hardships of nature suggested above by Chaplain Gilmore, one gets a real insight into what kind of men those days demanded. Of 30,000 population in 1872, 20,000 were Apaches, and there was said to be one saloon for every fifteen of the total population.<sup>7</sup> Those sturdy men who labored there did so without personal glory or gain to be sure, only hoping that their efforts might not be in vain. As the Rev. D. B. Wright put it, appealing to San Francisco for help: "My brother, remember us in your devotions. When you think of poor, neglected Arizona, let your heart raise a prayer to God that He may pass this way."<sup>8</sup> The work progressed slowly, but gradually more men responded to the challenge. In 1880 the successful construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad made a vast improvement in the accessibility of the southern half of the Territory and led to the opening up and settlement of the region. In 1879-1880 there was only one Methodist Episcopal Church in Arizona—at Prescott; during 1880-1881 five more were added: Globe, Phoenix, Pinal, Tombstone, and Tucson. In 1879-1880 there were two missionaries; by 1881 there were six.<sup>9</sup> There were many more growing pains to come and much sacrifice and hard work ahead; but the foundations had been laid well. It was time for stronger organization.

i. *The Arizona Mission, 1881-1920*

## (1) Growth

On the morning of July 3, 1881, Bishop Charles Bowman called a meeting to order in the Presbyterian Church of Tucson and established the Arizona Mission. The Conference lasted for two days, and though nothing significant was undertaken outside of the organizing itself, enthusiasm and hopes for the future were most evident. The first appointments in the Mission were as follows: Superintendent, G. H. Adams; Prescott, W. C. Green; Phoenix, G. F. Bovard; Globe, E. H. Brooks; San Carlos Reservation, J. J. Wingar; Tucson, W. G. Mills; Tombstone, J. P. McIntyre; Pinal and Florence, Safford and Clifton, Verde, Tonto Basin—to be supplied.<sup>10</sup>

The stronger organization of the ministers did not lessen the dangers. More than once these men of God chose to "take their places along with other citizens of the community and, with gun in hand, stand guard through the night in protection of those to whom they were to preach the Gospel on the coming Sabbath."<sup>11</sup> Apaches broke up numerous camp meetings and sharply curtailed immigration and business expansion. Nature functioned irrespective of professional talents, and many times these missionaries found themselves stranded by flash floods or called upon to be doctors to every race in the area.

Evangelism was the key word, but fruit was slow in appearing. The first report in 1883 showed 143 members and 6 churches in the Mission.<sup>12</sup> As it entered the new century, 16 churches reported 1,002 members.<sup>13</sup> By 1906 the Mission reported that there was "a church and a minister in every town of size in the Territory."<sup>14</sup> When it dissolved and became part of the Southern California Conference in 1920, 34 charges showed a membership of 4,436.<sup>15</sup> Extensive funds given to the Mission by the General Board of Church Extension made possible the establishment of many of the churches. The people themselves were generally poor. An important reason for this was the recurrent mining depressions that swept the Territory and made several promising sites ghost towns almost overnight. This in turn created a shifting population. Thus it was "difficult to make permanent growth in membership."<sup>16</sup> Numerous people pushed farther westward to California; others returned to the eastern United States. The ministers of the Arizona Mission, nonetheless, did not despair. They firmly believed that in these migrating movements

the churches had at least been able to impress righteousness upon many more than actually could be reported.

## (2) Projects

The Christianization of the Indians was always a concern of the Arizona Mission, but it was some time before anything more than spasmodic preaching could be undertaken. In 1906 a Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Arizona Mission was established. In keeping with the zeal of their sisters everywhere, these women quickly went to work. The following year they expressed a concern regarding the Yuma Indians. By 1909 they had raised enough money to build a chapel on the reservation. Practical instruction in such things as cooking and the use of sewing machines was another aspect of the Indian work. The existence today of the Yuma Mission is testimony to the vision of these early women.

The most significant project of the Arizona Mission in terms of results and size of undertaking was the Arizona Deaconess Hospital in Phoenix. Curiously enough, it came directly as the result of years of failure to establish an educational institution. Like her sister Conference in southern California, the Methodists in the Arizona Mission were anxious to erect a college; in 1884 a committee was appointed to consider a proper location. Two years later ten acres of land were secured in Phoenix. A Board of Trustees was elected, and Professor O. S. Frambes, who had headed the old Los Angeles Academy, was elected to take charge.<sup>17</sup> The school opened in November, 1886, with forty pupils but no buildings. The following May it was discontinued for lack of funds and enthusiasm. Thirteen years later, in 1899, the Conference report expressed it precisely: "Arizona is not ready for a Methodist university. Our numbers are too few and our resources too limited."<sup>18</sup> The land in Phoenix was still intact and free of debt, and the Conference continued to hope for a school sometime in the future. Meanwhile, it should be added, the Mission urged its people to support the University of Southern California. By Conference time in 1912, the year Arizona became a state, the situation had not changed, and thoughts turned toward a hospital. It was planned to begin such an institution as well as a training school for nurses and a medical collegiate institute. The educational hopes thus took on an even broader scope. Upon purchasing a building near the First Methodist Episcopal Church, the Arizona Deaconess Hospital began its service in 1912. The quarters soon proved inadequate. An answer was found in the joining of forces with the

Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Southern Methodists had five acres of land for a camp ground, but the growth of the city kept encroaching on it and made taxes heavier. The Southern Church, interested also that Phoenix should have a hospital, generously sold the camp ground and thus made possible additional room for expansion. In 1923 a completely new building was dedicated; in 1930 an additional wing was built. The name was changed to Good Samaritan Hospital in 1928. Today the hospital is an integral part of the ministry of the Southern California-Arizona Conference.<sup>19</sup>

## ii. Arizona District of the Southern California Conference

In 1920 the Arizona Mission dissolved and became a district of the Southern California Conference. For some years the remoteness of the new district to the rest of the Conference was felt. The District Superintendent reported in 1923 that "the pastor who lives closest to the seat of the Conference lives 252 miles away, and one of our secretaries has come 650 miles by rail."<sup>20</sup> The general feeling throughout the Conference was that Arizona was a "feeder" for southern California. A. L. Baker, the Arizona District Superintendent in 1925, reported: "Arizona will always be a feeder for California . . . we must . . . bring in the best from our schools who, after a few years in Arizona, may easily be placed in California."<sup>21</sup> The following year he reported that "we are this year sending some of our best men to the other districts. Next year there will be another group."<sup>22</sup> Fortunately for the morale of the district and for the good of the Conference this attitude gradually changed. By 1932 the District Superintendent in Arizona, Will A. Betts, reported that Arizona was no longer "an appendix to the royalty of California."<sup>23</sup> Fellowship and progress strengthened considerably as the clergy and laity came to believe in the essential importance of the Arizona ministry.\* At unification three of the strongest city churches in the new Conference came from Arizona. Two of these, First Church, Tucson and First Church, Phoenix, had been in the Southern California Conference. The third, Central, Phoenix, was in the Southern Church's Arizona Conference. Likewise in the rural areas some of the best efforts could be found in Arizona.

Today while the mileage remains about the same, the growth of the state and the improvement in transportation have created a much closer fellowship. Moreover, Arizona is an integral part of

\* In 1933 the Arizona ministry was divided between two districts: Pasadena-Arizona and San Diego-Phoenix.

the Southern California-Arizona Conference and includes some of the outstanding churches and men.

## 2. METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH, IN ARIZONA

### i. *Arizona District, Los Angeles Conference, 1870-1921*

The same fall in which the Methodist Episcopal Church began ministering in Arizona saw the start of the Southern Methodists. At the organizing Conference in November, 1870, Alexander Groves, who had been partly responsible for the beginning of Southern Methodism in southern California, was appointed to Arizona. The following spring he succeeded in starting a class in Phoenix, the first Methodist congregation and the first Protestant organization in the Territory.<sup>24</sup> He then went northward to Prescott, where he established a small society. Groves was by himself for at least part of this year, but he was joined in the following year by Franklin McKean. In 1872-1873 he was again alone in Arizona. When Arizona was made a district in 1873, the work thereafter slowly gained strength. Groves must certainly be credited with the extensive pioneering for the Southern Church in the Territory. In May, 1872, he held the first Church Conference in the Salt River Valley—at the Mesquite School House just outside of Phoenix.<sup>25</sup> The following year he fully established a church in Phoenix. Probably this was the first *permanent* organization of Protestantism in the Territory and was the beginning of Central Methodist Church, which today in a new location is one of the great churches of the Southern California-Arizona Conference.<sup>26</sup> In 1876 another stalwart son of the Southern Church, the Rev. Lewis J. Hedgpeth, was appointed Presiding Elder of the district. For twenty-five years thereafter, as Presiding Elder and then pastor, he gave his tireless energies to preaching in Arizona.<sup>27</sup> Likewise 1876 was the year in which Groves opened the Verde Valley and the wilds of the northern mountains to Methodist influence.

Conditions were no easier for the Southern Methodists than they had been for their Northern Methodist brethren. The religion of these Arizona settlers was, roughly put, "Mind your own business and do your own thinking."<sup>28</sup> Those settlers were not excessively religious, but at least they respected well-meaning ministers and desired to live in peace with them. The pastors had their share of tribulations. Sunday labor in the mines worked hardships on the ministry of preaching. Groves particularly had some heated arguments over this. More than once he held a church service by himself

to protest Sabbath employment. The sense of humor of the rough and reckless men of the period was often not fully appreciated by the Methodist clergy. There is a story of a minister in the Territory who set up his pulpit in a theater. Out of curiosity several men came to hear him preach. When the minister had finished, they demanded that he dance for them. Even the thought of such an evil nearly overwhelmed the poor pastor, and he refused. The men insisted. The minister refused again until they shot off one of his boot heels. Then he complied, but he soon returned to his home Conference in the East.<sup>29</sup> For others, however, the great spaces offered relaxation and time for meditation as well as preaching. James E. Crutchfield, pastor, Presiding Elder, and one of the colorful Southern Methodist frontier preachers, gives such a picture from his own experiences in 1908:

December 7.,—Prescott. Had a pleasant walk ahead of the stage today. . . . Memorized a part of Milton's magnificent description of the character and aspect of Satan.

December 10.,—Bowie. Went quail hunting today with father . . . preached tonight the dear old story of Christ the Redeemer.

December 27.,—Phoenix. I missed my train for Parker yesterday, and walked out to Cartwright and preached for Brother Douglass at Central tonight.<sup>30</sup>

As had been true in southern California, the growth in Arizona for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was slow. By 1907 there were only five hundred and seven members in the entire Territory.<sup>31</sup> The Arizona Church Extension Society organized in that year proved to be the needed spark. Its members, nearly one hundred in number, pledged to give a minimum of five dollars to each new church that would be built. By 1918 eight new churches had been erected, while the membership had risen to 1,694.<sup>32</sup> This year Bishop DuBose, who was assigned to supervise the Southern Methodist's western churches began thinking seriously of an Arizona Conference. He brought J. E. Harrison from the West Texas Conference in 1919 to be Presiding Elder in Arizona. With both agriculture and mining stimulated by the war, the new state was on the threshold of its first large permanent immigration. Harrison went from the Los Angeles Conference in 1922 as delegate to General Conference with the request that Arizona be made a separate Conference. When this was granted, the Los Angeles Conference dissolved, the churches in California entering the Pacific Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

ii. *Arizona Conference, 1922-1939*

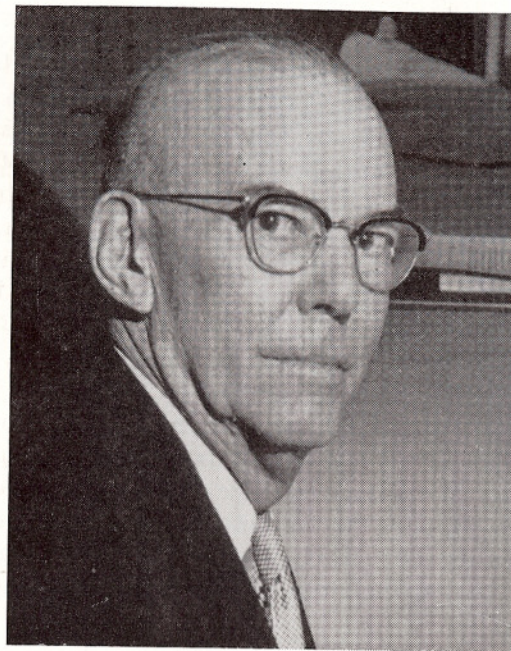
## (1) Growth

Outside of establishing a basic foundation Southern Methodism in Arizona appears to this time not to have accomplished anything outstanding. The newly organized members were determined to succeed. At this first session in October of 1922 leaders from nearly every General Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were present to consider the needs and possibilities of the Arizona Conference. It claimed 2,834 members and 21 congregations, with 27 preaching places assigned as follows: *Phoenix District*, J. E. Harrison, Presiding Elder; Camp Verde, J. E. Walbeck; Cottonwood, Arthur Thomas; Liberty, James Crutchfield; Parker, George W. Western; Phoenix Bethel, Jesse Crumpton; Phoenix Cartwright, T. F. Hughes; Phoenix Central, C. M. Aker; South Phoenix, L. B. Holliday; Prescott, C. F. York; Ray, R. M. Odom; and Litchfield, to be supplied. Listed for *Safford District* were: D. G. Decherd, Presiding Elder; Bowie and San Simon, W. L. Reid; Clifton and Morenci, J. C. Ryan; Claypool, Howard Strickland; Duncan, Charles W. Griffin; Miami, D. G. Decherd; Safford, James L. Lyons; Solomonville and Fort Thomas, E. A. Moody; Superior, Carl Braswell; Apache and Navajo Circuit, to be supplied. On the *Tucson District* were: W. J. Sims, Presiding Elder; Casa Grande and Maricopa, L. B. Ellis; Nogales, G. W. Forman; Patagonia, Earl Cropp; Tucson University Church, W. J. Sims; Tucson Student and Extension Work, H. Conger Jones; and Tombstone and Elgin Circuit, to be supplied.

Church extension was zealously promoted. By Conference in 1929 the membership had risen to 4,876 in 32 congregations though 50% of the churches had less than 75 members.<sup>34</sup> With the coming of the depression the churches showed a decline in membership, salaries, and benevolences. The organization of only one church, Avondale in 1937, was accomplished, while others at several locations had to be closed. By unification, nonetheless, the Conference was able to look back over 18 years with a genuine sense of achievement, having increased its membership to 5,309 in 29 congregations.<sup>35</sup>

## (2) Southern Methodist Hospital and Sanitorium

The hospital at Tucson was the most extensive undertaking of the Arizona Conference. The presence of hundreds of tubercular patients in Arizona by 1925 had created a real need for such a hospital.



James L. Lyons

Largely through the efforts of Dr. James L. Lyons the Tucson General Hospital was purchased at an excellent price by the General Conference Commission in 1926, and Dr. Lyons was appointed Commissioner of the hospital.<sup>36</sup> Plans were laid immediately to establish a training school for nurses. With the coming of the depression in 1929 a time of hardships ensued. Despite numerous appeals and many personal contributions the hospital went deeper into debt. Interest payments could not be met by the Annual Conference. The General Conference did not feel able to accept it as a Churchwide connec-tional institution. By 1936 suits to secure judgments and to foreclose were pending, with the result that publicity was very embarrassing. Just prior to unification the hospital passed from the control of the Church.\* It was a disheartening end to such a humanitarian project, but while in existence the hospital had served several thousand people.

\* The bondholders, a Denver firm, were unable successfully to operate the hospital, and the buildings were eventually utilized as apartments.

## (3) Lay and Youth Activities

What has been previously stated about lay work in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in California applies also to that in Arizona. Active participation in the Annual Conference sessions enabled the laity to become acquainted with the total outreach of the Church. Christian stewardship and benevolences dominated the agenda of Arizona brotherhoods as they did in southern California. Arizona was fortunate to have had a high caliber of Conference lay leadership: A. H. Davidson (1922-1924), B. F. McGough (1924-1932), R. E. Nelson (1932-1933), John H. Evans (1933-1939). Unification and the increased activity of Methodist Men's work saw a smooth continuation of the strong programs carried on previously.

The Woman's Missionary Society in the Arizona Conference was likewise active. Its members served diligently on various Conference committees. They gave a large measure of devotion to the Church and its spiritual life. Supplies for the hospital at Tucson were their special projects. Within the local churches, too, the Woman's Missionary Society helped to implement the Conference emphases of growth and stewardship.

The success of the youth program in the Arizona Conference was one of its most satisfactory accomplishments. An early emphasis on work with young people was apparent with the organizing of University Church in Tucson in 1922 under W. J. Sims. The Conference spared few efforts to make this enterprise a success with special attention to its ministry to the University students. Even as early as 1928 the investment had met with success. Six young men from this church had entered the Arizona Conference, one had joined another western Conference, and two young women had become foreign missionaries.<sup>37</sup> In 1947 the church merged with Catalina Church and today is part of one of the strongest churches in the Southern California-Arizona Conference.

Throughout the twenties the camp program gained in popularity. The only fully successful camp owned by the Los Angeles Conference had been in Arizona in the Pinal Mountains. It was subsequently strengthened by the Arizona Conference by additional buildings and an increased summer institute program. In 1932 the camp ground was changed from Pinal Summit to Pine Lawn Camp Ground at Prescott.

The youth program as late as 1931 was still loosely organized. That year the Rev. E. Clyde Smith was appointed Executive-Extension Secretary of the Conference Board of Christian Education. Assigned

the task of organizing new educational work in places and to solidify existing activities, his first report showed signs of accomplishments and of promise for the future. New youth groups, Sunday Schools, Adult Departments, institutes and assemblies had been organized and additional plans laid.<sup>38</sup> By the time of unification the Arizona Conference had an extremely well organized youth program as well as a smoothly working Conference Board of Education, enabling it to contribute considerably to these aspects of the united Conference.