

HISTORY OF VERBENA CHURCH \_\_\_\_\_ BY Henrietta Nichols

Bro. J V Bilberry was a Missionary Baptist, and he came once a month and held services in different homes in the community.

In 1902 , August, an arbor was built of poles and covered with schinnery brush and that was Garza County's first Church, built without hammer or nails. At the close of the meeting the first church of any kind was organized in Garza County, with nine Charter Members.

They were; J.B.Cotton, M.C Cotton, Ford Cotton, Isabel Nichols, Iona Nichols, RaE Nichols, Mamie Graham, Annie Cotton, and J.L.Barrow.

These were the only ones present who had Church Letters. As soon as the church was organized others joined, some on promise of letters, and I can remember hearing my Mother say that there were about twenty members at the close of the meeting.

Services continued once a month in the homes, tho I can remember only a few, and our Sunday school continued in our homes.

I shall always remember the arbor built in 1903, erected on land where our present Church now stands, to be nearer the center of the Community. Will Cravy , then a very young man, offered to give two acres for the church. We will always be grateful for his generosity, even tho it proved to have been a mistake, in measurements, to be on the Espuela Land and Cattle Company land.

Under this arbor our second meeting was held. The Verbena postoffice which was in the home of J.B. Cotton was named for his wife, whose given name was Verbena. So with the postoffice and Church, it all became the Verbena Community.

In 1904 we had enough money to build a small house. Volunteer drivers went to Snyder for the lumber, and willing but not all experienced hands, built it.

It was built by all regardless of denominations, and many who were not members of any Church. Tho at that time it was known as the "Verbena Baptist Church" as it was the only organized church in the county. I do not think/<sup>anyone thought</sup> of it as a "Baptist Church" to one and all it was "OUR CHURCH". The arbor continued to be re-covered each year as soon as schennery was in leaf. ....It was used as a "summer church" as we had no air conditioning then.

The sunday school was organized in 1904. The Baptists always had the third sunday as long as the church continued. Ladies carried box dinners and spread them together. Our third sunday dinners became famous, especially to those men who were batching and any Spur Cowbys who happened to be near. These dinners were locally fondly known as "dinner on the ground"

In 1906 the Methodist church was organized and we now had Church and dinner TWICE a month. As always it continued to be "our" church, and always you could not tell one denomination from the other as we all cooperated, for instance we had one Methodist preacher who had been coming for over a year before he found out that the Nichols family were not methodists, and only one officer in the Sunday school was a Methodist.

In 1925 we decided to enlarge our church house by adding to the old church. This time it was easier ~~for~~ this time lumber could be hauled from Post. Again it was a community project with money and time and labor, even the ladies helped paint inside----- the walls and benches and we had heard where we could order parchment like paper painted to resemble stained glass windows, with glue to stick it to the panes. How proud we were of our "big new Church" with stained glass windows.. Sometimes I look at it now and wonder how a house could shrink so in size.

Since 1902 ten day meetings were held every summer, hiring cooks, cattlemen ~~and~~ furnished beeves, others donated money for

3

food and other expenses. The Church house was used by the women and children to sleep and dress, the men and boys had cowboy bed rolls that they rolled out on the prairie. It was a vacation for mothers, an opportunity for more service, sunrise services were held AND GROVE MEETINGS AT SUNDOWN. The arbor was used for services and a longer arbor built for a dining room. Baptisms were conducted in the stock tanks nearby.

About 1920 or-22 we decided our community could not support two pastors, as there were more Methodists we had a Methodist pastor tho the Baptists did not dis-organize. Hoping someday to have a pastor a committee consisting of B.W.Kennedy, Isabel Nichols Sec. <sup>R. 2.</sup> <sup>W. H. HUGHES</sup> were appointed to attend to any business, and to write letters for any members who requested it, but it was still our community, our Church, and everyone co-operated.

A former Verbena pastor had asked to use the minutes of the Baptist church hoping to get information to again have a church at Verbena. This was about 1936, or 1937 his home burned and with it all of our records. My Mother, Mrs Isabel Nichols, was asked to write to the Ft Worth Star Telegram as a Pioneer of Garza County, and the only records we had left were those I had copied in 1933, from the Church records. We were proud that she had saved this record of our Church just as she had saved and brought with her to West Texas her mementoes of her home church in the form of two song books, a book of childrens stories of the Bible, and a few large sunday school cards. This was the beginning of Sunday school in Verbena.

*Henrietta Nichols*