Preaching to the Wyandots, Thomas Bernard Markham

About three weeks after our arrival, a camp meeting was held at the Shawnee camp ground, in which the missionaries to the Shawnee, Delawares, Kickapoos, Peorias, Potawatamies, Kansas, and Wyandots, and the superintendent of the Manual Labor School united; it continued for nine days. It is thought to have been one of the most interesting meetings ever held in this Indian country. A goodly number were converted . . but the greatest good resulting from it, was its quickening influence on the Church. It closed on Saturday; and on Sabbath afternoon the Wyandot class met near to each other in their camps for class meeting, after which they immediately assembled for prayer meeting, which lasted until nearly midnight, when others came forward, professing a 'desire to flee the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins.'

- A letter from Rev James Wheeler, on the occasion of the Wyandots relocation from Upper Sandusky Ohio to the Kansas Territory; 30 September 1843.

Missionary work among the Indians along the Missouri – Kansas border had been active more than ten years when Rev James Wheeler arrived with the Wyandot immigrants in 1843. The movement of the Wyandot tribe from Ohio to Kansas came late in the scheme of Indian removal. They first encamped in Missouri, near the junction of the Kansas and Missouri rivers, but shortly after, purchased land from the Delaware tribe on the Kansas side of the river. In 1844 they established their first homes and community buildings, including a Methodist Church, in an area that is today's Westheight Manor subdivision of Kansas City.



GOING TO CONFERENCE.

Rev Thomas Bernard Markham was one of several Methodist missionaries who served among the Delaware, Shawnee, and Wyandot tribes for almost twenty-five years. In September 1830 the Missouri conference of the Methodist-Episcopal Church met in St Louis. They determined to establish mission work among the Indian tribes of Kansas. Two years later, in 1832, the conference appointed William Johnson and Thomas B Markham to establish a mission to the Delaware tribe. This may have marked the beginning of Markham's work with the Indian people of Kansas.

We don't know exactly when Thomas Markham arrived in Missouri, but it must have been sometime between 1822 and the 13th of September 1825 when he was married to Sarah Jones in Clay county Missouri. He may not have moved to Missouri as a formally ordained minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His 1855 obituary indicates that he was licensed to preach in 1835, and ordained as a Deacon in 1842. But, he must have had some established relationship with the church. Rev TB Markham is briefly mentioned in a number of records related to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Missouri and Kansas, but it is challenging to present an exact chronology of his work. At the annual Church conference, preachers, missionaries and other church workers were given assignments, or appointments. These often changed from year to year. During his years of labor, he worked side by side with other leaders of the church, including Thomas Johnson, and his brother William Johnson, E Thompson Peery, James Wheeler, John Armstrong, and Dr Abram Still.

The growing Markham family started out in Clay county Missouri, but appeared in the records of adjoining Platte county by 1841. They were settled near the bustling town of Westport, along the Missouri River. Thomas Markham had a sizable farm which he must have attended. Perhaps he served as a lay leader of churches sprouting up near his home. In 1832, he was assigned by the Missouri Conference to establish a mission to the Delaware Indians in Kansas. He must have travelled back and forth across the River, as his family home remained in Missouri.

The [Delaware] Mission was erected in 1832 near a spring in a beautiful grove, some of the trees of which are still standing. The church was about forty by sixty feet and the frame was black walnut. It stood on the high divide on the site of the present town of White Church, facing east. The church was painted white, thus giving the name to the old town, which is about in the center of Wyandotte county. It was destroyed by a tornado on May 11, 1886. A stone memorial church recently was erected on the site of the one destroyed, in which are memorial windows for those pioneer missionaries who gave their lives to this great work, and the list includes the names of many of these workers. After the inauguration of the mission and school by the Reverend William Johnson and the Reverend Thomas B. Markham, E. T. Peery was in charge . .

[source] History of Wyandotte County Kansas and its people; Perl Morgan, 1911.



Methodist Episcopal Church at Kickapoo

We do not know exactly what role Thomas Markham played at the Delaware Mission. His descendants record that he had a classical education, and was proficient in Latin and Greek. Perhaps he taught in the school that was established there. In 1837 Dr Edwin James was serving as a government agent for the Pottowatmie tribe, and had assisted in their move from the area around Ft Leavenworth Kansas to Council Bluff Iowa. In a letter to General William Clark:

... I beg leave to nominate as Teachers among the Pottowattomies of this Sub. Agency, Rev. [John] Dunbar Missionary of the A B C F. M. to the Pawnees, and who has spent two years among that people also. Rev. Thos D. Markham of the Methodist Episcopal Church who has spent two years as a Teacher among the Shawnees and is highly recommended.

[source] United States Office of Indian Affairs, Central Superintendency, St. Louis, Missouri. Volume 34, Correspondence; Kansas Memory Website.

Rev Markham did not move to Council Bluff for this new position, but the letter confirms his role as teacher. The first Shawnee Methodist Mission was built in 1830, near the present-day town of Turner. It remained at that location for nine years, and was the place where Rev Markham taught. In 1839, the mission moved to its present-day Johnson County location, where an Indian boarding school was opened. Rev Markham might have continued teaching at the new site. Three of the early buildings of the Shawnee Mission are still standing today, and operate as the Shawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site in Fairway [Shawnee Mission] Kansas.

When the Wyandot people arrived, in 1843, in the area of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers, they already had a strong connection to the Methodist Church.

Even before they were located on the lands they purchased from the Delawares, the Wyandots held regular services on the strip of low land at the state line, with a little band of two hundred souls, nine class leaders and three local preachers. In April, 1844, after they had established themselves and were erecting their homes, a log church was built and ready for use. It stood about one-half mile west of Chelsea Park [Kansas City]. It was there the whole community worshipped until 1847, when a brick church was erected on the Mary A. Grindrod tract near Tenth street and Walker avenue, one-half mile west of the Kansas City-Northwestern freight depot at Fifth street. Occasionally public services were conducted in the English and Indian languages, in the school house on the east side of Fourth street between Kansas and Nebraska avenues. The English speaking class met there and the first Sabbath school was organized in June, 1847.

[source] History of Wyandotte County, Kansas . . , Volume 1; Perl Wilbur Morgan, 1911.

In 1844 a great division arose in the Methodist Episcopal Church, primarily over the question of slavery. This was the time when the Methodist Episcopal Church 'South' came into existence. Some of the white church leaders among the Indians determined to affiliate the established churches with the southern (pro-slavery) branch. But, many members refused to be persuaded,

and insisted on staying with the "old" church. In 1849, Shawnee and Wyandot members called for a missionary to lead the "old" church, and Rev Thomas B Markham answered the call.

... I object fifthly: To the very unkind course the preachers of the church South, have taken with those who could not in conscience go with them in their separating, and newly organizing work . . . Old Father Seaton, of Hermon circuit, was threatened hard; and they laid violent hold of brother T. B. Markham, and brother James Dorlalevno, of Weston circuit. These good brethren were early pioneers in Platte purchase, and firm supporters of old Methodism; and when they found they were not going to give their influence to the separating move, a powerful effort was made to turn them out; but they foiled in this; and these brethren still remain to help the afflicted church.

[source] A brief bill of exceptions to the ME Church South, Lorenzo Waugh; extracted from "Western Christian Advocate, 3 July 1848.

Rev Markham's commitment to the Indian Missions was only one part of his work as a representative of Christ. The records of the Missouri Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church also show his assignments, at different times, as a Circuit Rider to the Weston, Wyandott, Harrisonville and Liberty circuits in Missouri and Kansas. He persevered in this work for over thirty years, until he retired (superannuated) in October of 1854.

It was in July of 1854 that the Markham family was visited by another travelling Methodist missionary, Rev William H Goode. Rev Goode wrote about his travels, and addressed his time with Thomas Markham. See more in the blog posting titled, **Brother Markham..of mild and engaging disposition and much practical good sense.**

Within a few months of Rev Goode's visit, Thomas Markham contracted pneumonia and died at his home in Platte county Missouri, in April of 1855. Rev Goode later commented - "good brother Markham was called home to his reward without witnessing the worst of the painful struggle which ensued."

Do you want to know more?

Link to Thomas Bernard Markham in the database

Further Reading:

Shawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site, Fairway [Shawnee Mission] Kansas;

Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery and the Shawnee Indians in Pre Territorial Kansas 1844-1854; Kevin Abing,

White Church Memorial Church and Delaware Indian Cemetery; Kansas City Kansas Historic Landmark, 1983.

Outposts of Zion; Rev William H Goode, 1863.

Holy, "Knock-'Em-Down" Preachers; John H Wigger; Christian History Magazine, Issue 45, 1995; Christian History Institute.



East Building, Shawnee Mission

About the Photos:

Illustration from The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age by Edward Eggleston (1906), depicting a Methodist circuit rider on horseback.

<u>Methodist Episcopal Church at Kickapoo</u>; Part of the Kansas Memory project of the Kansas Historical Society.

East Building at the Shawnee Mission – built in 1840, served as chapel, classrooms, and teacher living quarters.