TA-POOTH-KA AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The Story of Nebraska Baptists

By Florence (Mrs. Maynard R.) DeGolier

1967 CENTENNIAL OBSERVANCE
Nebraska Baptist State Convention

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The Story of Moses and Eliza Merrill,

of

Baptist Beginnings in Nebraska

and of the

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TA-POOTH-KA
("The-Man-Who-Speaks-The-Truth")

MOSES AND ELIZA MERRILL
From 1833 - 1840 in Nebraska

What is the mysterious urge that propels pioneers and trail-blazers through every age? What is it that spurs missionaries, explorers and adventurers to live lives of irresistible daring? What causes the legendary few to mount the rim of history, while countless others lie somewhere below the surface, forgotten and unsung?

Why do Baptists recall the names of William Carey and Adoniram Judson, while they fumble over those of Isaac McCoy and Moses Merrill?

How many Baptists speak with pride and familiarity of the Merrills, knowing that they not only came from distinguished families but also showered Nebraskans with a rich heritage of historical "firsts?" Are Nebraskans aware that during a brief span of less than seven years, from November 1833 to February 1840, the Merrills organized in the area now called Nebraska the first Sunday school for Indians and half-breeds, administered the rite of baptism for the first time, conducted the first wedding for white settlers, started the first temperance society, were first to reduce an Indian language to writing, to supply the copy and to requisition the printing of the first hymnal, the first spelling book, and the first portions of Holy Scripture—all in the Otoe language, and were first to build a mission-school complex? Is it common knowledge that Moses Merrill was awarded the first teaching contract to be issued for the Nebraska area? How many people know that today the tall stone chimney which served one of the mission buildings still stands, the oldest thing made by a white man in Nebraska?

At the time of Moses Merrill's birth (December 15, 1803) Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States. Two months earlier the Louisiana Purchase was ratified, bringing more than one million square miles of land west of the Mississippi River into possession of the United States. Thirty years later only trappers, traders and soldiers preceded Moses and Eliza Merrill into the wild and uncivilized upper reaches of this territory.

Moses was born in a Sedgwick, Maine, parsonage, the sixth of thirteen children. Daniel, his father, was a graduate of Dartmouth with a master's degree, a member of the state legislature, a founder and trustee of Waterville College (now Colby University), and chairman of the committee which helped to organize the Northern Baptist Educational Society and the Newton Theological College.

Eliza Wilcox Merrill was three years older than Moses, born June 3, 1800, in Charleston, New York. Her father, Brigadier

General Silvanus Wilcox, served in the Revolutionary War. The original Wilcox settlers came to New England in 1636 aboard the ship "Planter" and settled near Boston. Their descendants were prominent people and held offices of honor and trust.

Moses, well-educated for his time, prepared himself for the teaching profession. In 1829 he was licensed to preach. Later in the year he traveled to Ann Arbor (Michigan Territory) to work with his brother, Thomas, who was the first missionary appointee of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Their educational efforts prepared the foundation for what later became the University of Michigan. Another of their schools, chartered as the Michigan and Huron Institute, later became Kalamazoo College.

As time passed, Moses became deeply disturbed about the Indians. Journal entries reveal his distress: "I was informed that there was no one who would address the Indians on religious subjects publicly, although they expressed a desire to hear. I felt grieved and pained for them, and upon being requested, I passed some weeks in assisting the missionary, though for this service I received no compensation. Here I felt much for the poor Indians, and resolved that if the door opened I would become their servant for Jesus' sake."

During this same period of time, Eliza Wilcox found her life of ease and social advantage increasingly empty. In search of a life of service she opened a school in Albany in 1828. Later, with a friend, she launched a successful orphanage. On a trip to New York City she sought "modern" methods for improving their "infant school," as they called it. Finally, her deep concern for people became a passion for "the heathen." On sharing this concern with her pastor, she was astonished to discover from him that it was "not proper for a lone female to go to the heathen with the Gospel." However, he promised Eliza to find a good husband, and he evidently kept his word.

In May, 1830, Eliza terminated her services with the orphanage and with her father traveled to LaGrange, Ohio, where at her brother Calvin's house she was united in marriage to Moses Merrill. Little else is known of their relationship except that they had met in Albany the previous year. Immediately following their marriage the Merrills left for Ann Arbor where they remained nearly a year. Moses preached in surrounding territory and Eliza taught school.

It was in the spring of 1831 that they moved to English Prairie, Indiana, formed a Sunday school and temperance society, and awaited the birth of their first-born, Moses Daniel. Following a period of severe illness for both mother and baby, Eliza found a foster home for their child in Albany, New York, and later rejoined Moses on June 11, 1832, in Boston, where they appeared before the Baptist Mission Board. There in Boston on June 26, two weeks later, a great service of dedication was held for a number of missionary appointees. A spine-tingling surge of glory and exultation

swept over the hall as candidates bound for foreign shores were commissioned and blessed. But the painful truth was that Indian missions (and candidates Moses and Eliza Merrill) were altogether forgotten and ignored. Tears welled in Eliza's eyes—their hearts were very heavy.

Finally, two months later, the Merrills received word to report to the Baptist Indian Mission at Sault de Ste. Marie, Michigan Territory, for service during the following winter with orders to establish a mission for the Chippewas at the head of Lake Superior in the spring. Their frustrating eight-month sojourn at Sault Ste. Marie was filled with problems and near-fatal illness for Eliza. To climax their unstable situation news from the Missionary Board in Boston completely changed their circumstances. "Voted: that Mr. Jotham Meeker and wife, Rev. Moses Merrill and wife, and Cynthia Brown be transferred from their present station at Sault de Ste. Marie to such place west of the Mississippi as may thereafter be prescribed by this Board." The Board felt impelled to switch its main thrust to the western frontier to match changing governmental Indian policies under President Andrew Jackson.

Almost immediately the Merrills began their arduous trip down Lake Huron—first by Indian canoe, then by schooner—reaching Cleveland and finally traveling the Ohio by riverboat to the Mississippi, arriving at St. Louis June 16, 1833, six weeks after their departure from Sault Ste. Marie.

Embarking for Independence on July 4, 1833, the Merrills took passage up the Missouri River aboard the Steamboat Otto. A vast cholera epidemic which plagued the country was spread by riverboat traffic throughout the west. It shadowed and tormented the Merrills all along the way. At Independence landing their boat was greeted with an enormous bonfire of tar, lit by frightened people who hoped by its effect to ward off the dreaded (and often fatal) disease. As the boat docked, people at the landing fled, and it was with much difficulty that the Merrills located a place to sleep for the night. With more difficulty they secured horses for the following day.

As their journey had lengthened and problems multiplied, Shawnee (or "Shawanoe Mission" as then known) came to assume almost magical proportions for the Merrills. Their aching bodies cried out for the convenience of comfortable quarters and home. Their weary spirits yearned for the warmth and fellowship of like-minded Christians. They craved refreshment and renewal. Yet their arrival at Shawnee was predestined to bitter disappointment. How could the mission staff, as yet unexposed to the cholera, view the Merrills' coming with less than great fear and alarm? And so it was that as the new missionaries arrived they immediately became outcasts. Eliza described the wretched house to which they were assigned as filled with fleas and dirt, and inhabited by a rattlesnake which Moses killed. She recorded in her journal: " . . . I am so weak I know not how to clean it or how to prepare

meals. We have had but one day's assistance in unpacking and arranging our articles . . . It takes a great deal of time to secure food. We have to hunt for it and bring it a distance, and have no cellar, and the heat is intense." Yet, with single-minded intensity they renewed their vows to God, for they steadfastly determined to serve the Indian people regardless of the most insurmountable obstacles.

The days and weeks that followed at Shawnee were disturbing to the Merrills. Administration seemed lacking. Continual shifting of assignments dimmed the dreams they envisioned for service to the Indians. Suddenly, however, the atmosphere was charged with change by a decision to locate the Merrills at Bellevue near the Otoe Indian tribe. Scattered hopes and plans resolved themselves into a single mighty purpose as they swung into action.

It was at Shawnee that Isaac McCoy was headquartered, and it was from this location that he operated his many projects and occupations. At this particular period of time McCoy was engaged in securing Indian treaties and in surveying Indian lands for which he was paid by the government, which was his sole support. He also officially represented the Baptist Missionary Board, but received no salary from them. He was largely responsible for guiding frontier missionary and educational ventures for all denominations, and for resettlement of Indian tribes in the West.

Since Isaac McCoy and a group of men appointed by the government to make a treaty with the Otoe Indians were scheduled to leave Ft. Leavenworth in the early part of September, Moses Merrill and a fellow-missionary named Ira Blanchard were directed to accompany the party on their journey. The Otoe village for which they were bound was located near the confluence of the Elkhorn with the Platte River about 200 miles from Shawnee.

With a promise from Major John Dougherty (Indian Agent at Bellevue) for rooms in which to live and to hold classes for children of Indian and French parentage who lived at the Agency, Moses felt he could proceed at once with plans for the new school. And with an Otoe interpreter in residence at Bellevue he felt that acquisition of the Otoe language should be his first major objective for the Indians.

On return from his exploratory journey (which took almost the entire month of September) there was a flurry of preparation for final departure. The Merrills planned to travel by land carriage, and to take with them only the most-needed articles for the fast-approaching winter season. Their remaining goods would follow by steamboat in the spring. At that point several missionaries who had served with the Merrills at Sault Ste. Marie arrived at Shawnee Mission. Among them was Cynthia Brown who elected to accompany the Merrills to Bellevue and to serve with them as an assistant.

Early on the morning of October 26, 1833, the last traces of

ivilization quickly faded into the distance as the small caravan et out on its lonesome journey over the trackless plains. At imes prairie fires filled the sky with smoke and ashes. Later he party's guide lost his way. Food had to be rationed. Then two veeks after their departure, Eliza wrote in her journal for November 0th: "Tonight I prepared the last bread, mixing half bran with the lour. While doing it the wind was so hard that the dust from the rairie on which we encamped was mixed with it. While kneading t I thought of dear friends."

At last the company reached the Platte River and made arrange-nents to cross. They came within four miles of Bellevue but were onfronted by another stream which could not be crossed in the lark. They were forced either to encamp without fire, or to walk he rest of the distance to the Agency. They chose to walk. And o it was that they arrived in Bellevue on foot, Monday evening, November 18, 1833, a little more than three weeks after their de-parture from Shawnee. Their goods and cattle followed the next lay.

Of their new home Eliza wrote, "Oh, what a place. Piles of lirt are in the room, which they say the rats have brought in. The nouse is an old log one, and extremely dirty. Water is a great listance off. Soap is scarce. Help is scarce; corn and wood are also scarce. We were exhausted with fatigue and exposure."

After a week filled with strenuous activity, they held a meeting n English on Sunday morning. During the afternoon Sabbath school was conducted for nine half-breed children and in the evening Moses talked to a few Indians through the interpreter. During the lays that followed Eliza held classes during the week for the same children. They were of French, Otoe, Omaha and Pawnee parentage. Beside the Merrills and Cynthia Brown there were only two other white people in residence at Bellevue, but the Indians were friendly and often visited the school on their way to the blacksmith's shop or to the trading post.

Moses' plans for rapid acquisition of the Otoe language were thwarted at every turn. The interpreter who spoke very little English required a French interpreter. The Agent, who spoke Otoe and French, was absent most of the year. No one but a fourteen year old lad who spoke a little English could be found, but after several days the boy's mother took him away. Nevertheless Moses, pen in hand, sat near the Indians as they came to Bellevue to visit, trying to engage them in conversation on some particular subject. He tried to write down their words in one column with an English translation in the column beside it. To correct his translation he sought the help of both French and English interpreters whenever available. Through this tedious process Moses managed to make several small translations of Scripture, two hymns and two prayers. The Indians especially loved the hymns. Traders one hundred miles distant told Moses that upon visits of the Otoes at the trading posts scarcely a night passed without their singing the hymns

learned at his mission house. Often the chief called children around him and led them in singing the hymns.

However the dark side of frontier life continually threatened to ruin all that was good. During the winter Eliza's school was forced to close for lack of wood to build fires. Both Cynthia Brown and Eliza were unwell. And by far the worst threat was the havoc wrought by the Indians' thirst for whiskey. Despite the law of the land the Indians were plentifully supplied, and to get it the Indians loaded their horses with their best furs and traveled as much as one hundred miles. At the same time they came to the Merrills begging for food and complaining of starvation. Their periods of drunkenness often included brawling and mutilation of each other—even murder. It was extremely unsafe to be with them without an interpreter. The Indians not only exchanged their valuable furs for liquor but also their horses, guns and blankets, all of which were essential to their survival.

Animosity arose as the Merrills bitterly complained of the traders' duplicity in securing the liquor and in the exorbitant prices they extorted in trade with the Indians. The traders in turn sought to influence the Indians against the missionaries who were depriving them of highly profitable business. It is little wonder that both the Indian Agent, Major Dougherty, and the Merrills hoped to relocate the mission and quickly to put into action the terms of the government treaty. And so it was that a year and a half after the Merrills' arrival, Major Dougherty selected sites on the north bank of the Platte, about six miles west of its junction with the Missouri River, for the Otoe village and for the mission buildings.

Moses favored the "Village Plan" for teaching Indian children rather than the boarding school method as it provided close contact with Indian families and eliminated the burden of boarding and clothing pupils. With governmental appointment of two farmers and a blacksmith and his own appointment as school teacher and with removal of the school and mission from the corrosive influence of the whites it seemed certain that the Otoes would soon become civilized and Christianized. The missionary board in Boston had no doubt that success would come as the Indians became stationary and changed their habits.

The great dream of Isaac McCoy to give the Indians land and a permanent home, to assist them in a vast change to a stabilized agricultural economy, to grant to them a better way of life compatible with the inevitable westward sweep of the white man's civilization was a magnificent and humane dream. But the habits of centuries, the "alien" values inherent in Indian cultures and religion, and the customs handed from father to son and mother to daughter—could these all be changed in the shrinking interval of time left to a few pioneer missionaries?

As the days passed Moses' requisition for more materials than he at first planned for the new mission-school complex was granted; the Articles of Agreement for hiring Moses as the first school master

were signed and sealed April 1, 1835; and shortly another great event occurred on the frontier—the birth of their child, Samuel, on July 13, 1835. He was the object of great interest among the Indians who traveled for miles to stare at his little pink-white toes and pale complexion.

By rendering as inaccessible as possible the sources of temptation for the Otoes, the Merrills likewise rendered equally inaccessible their sources of food and the supplies needed for the erection of their new buildings. Yet Moses was able to construct one house 16 feet square to which the family moved September 18, 1835. Then he supervised the erection of two buildings together, one 24 feet by 16 feet, the other 18 feet by 16. The first he planned to divide into a bedroom and kitchen, the second to be a study and sitting room. The plank was sawn by hand and the buildings finished in a plain and economical manner. The school house was to be 20 feet by 16 feet. All were made of hewn logs.

The farmer who was appointed for the Otoes built a house for himself and helped build a shop and house for the blacksmith, both of whom were located near the mission site. While the Indians were absent on their buffalo hunt the blacksmith was engaged in making and mending hoes, axes, traps, knives, guns, kettles, fire steels and many other items. The farmer, with two other men, broke 150 acres of good prairie ground for the Indians and fenced it. The Otoes were furnished during 1835 with 175 axes, 138 corn hoes, 1 ox cart, 1 log chain, 1 prairie plough, 1 steel corn hand mill, all of which were delivered to the chiefs and distributed by them to the squaws of the various families.

With the confusion of moving the school and mission and of trying to relocate the Indian village much of the regular mission work was necessarily suspended, and with the Indians away on their hunts twice yearly schooling was extremely difficult. Yet Indian Agent Major Dougherty was able to write to General Clark in St. Louis in June of 1836: "He (Moses Merrill) appears to be a man of good feeling, honesty, perseverance, and industry. And I entertain no doubt that his example will soon have a good effect with the Otoes. The difficulties he has had to encounter in securing workmen and provisions so far removed from the settlement has been the cause of retarding him very much in building, etc., to make his family comfortable. I mention this on account of his having failed to complete the Otoe school house at the time specified in the contract. Two of the men he had employed in building were taken sick during the winter and returned to the settlements. He has all the materials on the ground and will I have no doubt completed the house by the last of the month. I hope the Department will grant him this indulgence."

Half of the Otoe tribe (about 500) pitched skin lodges near the mission building in January and began cutting timber for the village. In April, about one-fourth of a mile from the mission house, they put up 30 houses, 28 of which were large. The houses were

circular, covered with earth and from 25 to 50 feet in diameter. Each house had a kind of porch at the entrance but no window, floor or divisions. Several families occupied each building. The other half of the tribe remained at the old village but planned in September to burn the village and take up residence at the new site on return from the winter hunt.

Moses felt that progress was slow, yet he forged onward. At the new village he taught some of the children and youths in their own language, but it was difficult to collect them at one time or place. So instruction was given to the few or many, in whatever way they gathered. After return from the summer hunt school sessions seemed to meet with more success, although attendance continued to be quite irregular. Three scholars read from 25 to 30 pages each, and twelve others began easy reading lessons. They also sang hymns and learned English names of persons, places and things, and counting. Religious instruction was given mainly by conversation and reading of the translated lessons. Weekly meetings on Sunday were held at the mission-house, but before leaving for the winter hunt meetings were also held at the houses of the chiefs.

On Wednesday, August 18, 1835, Cynthia Brown was married to Reuben Mercer, one of the young men employed by Moses Merrill. They remained with the Merrills for some time, but later planned to help erect buildings for another missionary station 100 miles up the Missouri River.

Entries from Moses' journal during the early fall months of 1836 paint a vivid picture of the great problems faced by the Merrills: "For several days past the Otoes have been drinking whiskey and fighting. One Otoe man is dangerously stabbed . . . Whilst drinking as above mentioned an Ioway man fell into the fire and was severely burnt." "At 11 a.m. had exercises in Otoe at the school house for the first time; 25 or 30 were present. The chiefs promised to attend but failed. Some Ioways arrived today with whiskey, wishing to get horses. Four horses were soon given them. How wretched are these souls! Complaining of starvation, and giving away horses for whiskey! Many of them are sick—am daily administering to them, and giving them a little hard corn. This is the third or fourth season of drunkenness since their return from hunting.

"Gave an Indian feast to the Otoe and Missouri chiefs and 11 scholars. Our present number is 14. Some of the principal Otoe men were displeased at our partiality for our scholars in feeding them and neglecting others."

It is little wonder that Moses Merrill often recorded these words: "Feel depressed at times in view of my prospects among the Otoes." In February of 1837 he wrote: "Have been three years in their country; but what have I done for them? The first year and a half I was situated in the agency 25 miles from the Otoe village. My means of support were so scanty that most of my time was

necessarily taken up in attending to worldly matters, providing for my family. The next year was taken up in erecting mission buildings. Have obtained a scanty knowledge of the Otoe language. Have not the means of obtaining an interpreter. Cannot at home have access to one. Have not the means of obtaining the confidence of the Indians as practiced by the traders—namely, feeding them and giving them presents . . . "

On April 28, 1837, fell a most serious blow to the future of the Otoes and the work of the mission: "Received intelligence that the wives of Itan (the chief), who absconded a few weeks ago, had returned, together with the two young men who had taken them. The chief had previously declared that he would kill one of the young men the first opportunity. He was not in the village at the time . . . He had to pass the mission house after he received the intelligence; and as he passed, walking rapidly, Mrs. Merrill and myself went out to see him and dissuade him from his purpose. We pled with him but to no effect. He was determined upon revenge, and hastened on his way. The two men, aware of the design of the chief, had entered the village singing the war song as a kind of challenge. They had taken their stand in some timber near the village with weapons of death. Mr. Martin Dorion, the interpreter, . . . endeavored to pacify his rage and prevent strife; but to no purpose. The chief fired a musket at one of the young men (and discharged a pistol at him afterwards) and missed him. In a moment one of the chief's friends shot the same young man . . . He, however, soon raised his rifle and shot the interpreter through the right arm, and the chief through the body . . . Two of the young men shot were scholars, two of those that shot them were our scholars. These latter two have fled to escape death. Alas for the poor Otoes."

Tragedy was followed by turmoil and mounting fury. "The Otoes are in great agitation and full of revenge. One part are eager to revenge the death of their chief; the other part are equally eager to revenge the death of the young man. In some instances the same family are divided on this subject . . . Many have fled for their lives."

In spite of this deplorable situation Moses proceeded to further his work with these troublesome and ungrateful people. He even requested the appointment of a helper and a woman for the kitchen to be paid for from his own pocket. Yet ominous clouds continued to gather on the horizon: "My own health is not as good as usual, in consequence probably of exposure and falling on my way up from the settlement (Ft. Leavenworth) last winter. I went to the settlement in January to get the assistance of an interpreter in translating the Scripture. On my return in March in company with three Otoe men we were overtaken by a severe snow storm. We fasted four days, two of which we travelled."

More displaced Indians from the east arrived and were settled in areas near the Missouri River on the eastern side. Violence and

unrest between tribes and with the newly arrived Indians resulted as their valuable hunting grounds diminished in size. Thefts and feuds increased. The Otoes quarreled with and robbed the Pawnees. They refused to adopt the settled agricultural life because they preferred to hunt for their food. Inferior chiefs who came into power following the death of Itan were quarrelsome and arrogant. Offering promises of gifts and fine clothes to the Indians the traders succeeded in prejudicing them further against the Merrills while the Merrills had no means of competing with gifts of material things. Finally they were no longer able to supply the kind of food or meals the chiefs began to demand. Yet the government had provided every possible need of the Indians for the process of becoming educated and self-sufficient for all time and the Merrills had lavished on them the whole-hearted devotion of their dedicated lives!

During the summer of 1837 a raging smallpox epidemic, more destructive than all previous visitations, wiped out the lives of thousands of Indians and left many others sadly disfigured. Mortality among upper Missouri tribes was almost without parallel in the history of plagues. The mission family through vaccination escaped the scourge, but the Merrills ministered unceasingly to the afflicted around them.

In June of 1838 Moses prepared to accompany the Otoes on their summer hunt in order to improve his knowledge of the language and to impart religious instruction. The Indians carried with them their skin lodges which they spread every night. Each family had on the average about three horses, which were loaded with provisions for the journey. To reach buffalo country it took 20 days of steady travel which also included crossing of the mile-wide Platte River in small skin boats—an all-day affair.

Moses' health suffered from exposure and from his meager subsistence—mostly gruel made of pounded corn and parched corn. Nevertheless he conversed with the Indians and often travelled from lodge to lodge, speaking the words of God.

On July 27, nearly seven weeks later, the Indians were ready to turn homeward with more than 1200 buffalo slaughtered and much of the meat dried, packed in bales and loaded for the return trip to the village. Not only the horses were packed, but also many of the women and some of the men carried loads. On August 16, 1838, over two months following his departure, Moses rejoined his family.

The Indians were more unruly and belligerent than ever, and only through Moses' intervention was the formation of a war party against the Kansas tribe curtailed. Nothing the Merrills tried was any longer successful in the field of education—it had no value to the Indians. Moses felt compelled at this point to put into effect the boarding school method in order to remove Indian children from the detrimental influences of their village and homes. They also hoped to clothe the children as the boys wore no garments at all

during the summer and the girls donned only a cloth around the waist. Yet no funds were available for any proposals made to salvage mission investments or revitalize educational efforts.

Now Moses was forced to admit that the privations and hardships of his journey to buffalo country had been too much for his body to withstand. He was obviously suffering from the symptoms of consumption (tuberculosis). Yet he wrote: "Our hearts are no less interested in the blessed work before us, than when we first entered it. In prospect of my decease I feel calm, resigned, and happy . . . My dear family have claims on me; but if God calls me hence, I trust he will provide for them. His promises cannot fail. We have experienced so much of his kindness in this dark land that to distrust him now would be a grievous sin." He then wrote to his brother, Thomas, making arrangements concerning his property, his will and the guardianship of his children.

On January 1, 1839, Moses commented: "Another year has opened upon me. Six weeks ago I did not expect to see this day, nor did I desire it. But the Lord has raised me up, may it be to serve him in preaching the gospel to these poor heathen."

The work of the mission moved on in spite of Moses' physical weakness, Spurred on by Roman Catholic plans to build a large boarding school for the "Putawatomies" across the Missouri River in what is now Iowa, Moses called together the chiefs and principal men of the village to propose the opening of a school in English for the Otoes. He warned them that they must be prompt and maintain perfect attendance if they were to learn the language, and that a little bread would be distributed at the close of school each day. Mrs. Merrill opened the school February 20, 1839.

Finally, it became necessary for Moses to seek medical help. The nearest doctor was located at Ft. Leavenworth, but the Indians threatened to rob the mission if he left it. Moses, however, could no longer put off medical treatment. He left May 30, 1839, but received a note from Eliza telling of threats. Immediately he returned and let the Indians know that he had detected their tricks. Presuming that they would be more quiet, he returned to Bellevue to take the steamboat to Ft. Leavenworth. He was gone for a month and during that time Eliza suffered the terrors and fright of lonely nights filled with deceptive noises—stealthy footfalls—fleeting glimpses of slinking Indian figures—whistled calls under their windows. She sturdily warned the Indians that even though she continued to feed them during the day, she would shoot any who came near the mission house at night. In turn, they threatened to kill the whites at the mission, or if not that, to steal horses and kill cattle. Eliza found herself torn between loyalty to the mission and safety for the household, with an alarming desire to quit the place yet deeply fearing that if she did the Indians would no longer have a Christian witness. She also feared that if Col. Kearney took no action about the Indians' threats it would not be long until some white person suffered death. She wrote to Moses saying that

"Should they break in—I feel that I could shoot at them to defend my life and the lives of those around me . . . How long must I stay under these circumstances?" "Today have had some time for reading. When I thought of leaving the station, the firmness of Mrs. Judson came to my mind when Mr. Hough left her in Rangoon alone." And so, Eliza remained!

When Moses returned to the mission threats diminished yet no one had any influence over the surly insolent younger Indians. A new Indian Agent, J. V. Hamilton, and Col. Kearney with 200 dragoons were called upon to straighten out difficulties with the Otoes. The Indians came in battle array, but the prudence of the Agent in dealing with the four held prisoner ready for whipping averted a battle. The Otoes returned to their village, but not to peaceful living.

A few days later, the son of an old chief was treacherously killed by a party of young men of his own tribe. In the ensuing conflict they burned most of their earthen wigwams. Indian Agent J. V. Hamilton who was at Leavenworth immediately ordered Moses to inform the band that for their offenses Otoe Treaty annuities would be lost unless they rebuilt the village. Otherwise, the whole amount would go to the few who complied with the treaty. "I wish them distinctly to understand this," he stated. The course they continued to follow marked them for extinction.

Moses' weakened body could no longer sustain his spirit or the stresses and burdens of life. On February 6, 1840, hardly two months after his 36th birthday, he passed from this life. His last words were a prayer that someone might be sent to take his place in order to continue the great missionary task ahead. The faithful Otoes who knew him as "The-one-who-always-speaks-the-truth" (Tapoothka) inquired if he whom they mourned had a brother who would come to take his place. But there was no one. Moses' body was laid to rest on the east bank of the Missouri River. The Rev. John Dunbar, a Presbyterian missionary and friend, conducted the funeral. Since then the changing course of the river has washed away the grave. Eliza and little Samuel made their way east to live for a time near friends and relatives. The hand of death closed the work and time has nearly obliterated the evidences of their labors. The mission is gone. The Indians are gone. The grave is gone. Yet there remains on the mission site a single tall chimney, like a sentinel; and the record of their heroic devotion to the work of Christ in behalf of needy people stands as another tall sentinel. Today their story lives again in the hearts of thousands of Baptists!

BAPTIST BEGINNINGS IN NEBRASKA

Francisco Vasquez Coronado, in 1541, is believed to have been the first European to see the territory that is now Nebraska. In 1720 a Spanish soldier, Villasur, led an expedition into Nebraska, but he and his party were massacred by Otoe and Pawnee Indians. From 1700 to 1763 the French controlled the region, then ceded it to Spain. In 1803 Nebraska came into possession of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase. Until the Oregon and California trails became established, leading through Nebraska, there was little to disturb the solitary prairies. Fur traders, explorers, soldiers, and frequently-absent government agents were the only white people to traverse the Nebraska area which was marked "Unexplored Region" in capital letters on maps of the time. During the 1830's a few missionaries braved the unknown wilderness, and, along with a few blacksmiths and farmers, courageously endeavored to "civilize" the Indian tribes. Other settlers were slow to follow and those who came limited their activities to a narrow strip of land bordering the Missouri River.

At different times Nebraska was part of the Territory of Indiana, the Territory of Louisiana, the Territory of Missouri, and finally on May 30, 1854, Nebraska became a Territory of the United States. By that time settlers were more numerous, but since they came singly or by couples or small family groups rather than as larger colonies of people, there was little political, social or religious affinity. Up to the year 1855 no Baptist church was in existence. However, many people who arrived from eastern states came through Nebraska City on their westward journey. Some stayed, and from their number a few were interested enough to organize the First Baptist Church of Nebraska City on August 18, 1855.

During these early beginnings the American Baptist Home Mission Society sent its missionaries to Nebraska. On May 1, 1855, Rev. J. M. Taggart (affectionately known as "Father Taggart") was appointed a representative. The commission of G. W. Barnes to Florence and Cuming City was dated September 1, 1856. At that time he was licensed but not ordained. Rev. J. G. Bowen was appointed a missionary December 1, 1856, and spent the greater part of his time in Nebraska City. These missionaries went from place to place throughout the eastern part of the state, preaching to the scattered population and helping to organize the earliest churches. From 1855 to 1858 (following the establishment of the church at Nebraska City) six more churches were formed: Plattsmouth (October, 1855), Peru (May 6, 1856), Fontenelle Church (May 30, 1856), Florence (October, 1856), Cuming City (February, 1858), and Rock Bluff (May, 1858).

The first baptism in the Territory occurred at Cuming City in Washington County during the winter of 1857. Several candidates

were baptized by Rev. Taggart who was pastoring the church at Fontenelle. Even though the ice was two feet thick, enough was cut away for the rite of baptism. The appearance of the opening strangely resembled that of a grave, and was a fitting symbol of "death and resurrection" to all who stood on the banks of Fish Creek that day. Many of them had never before witnessed an immersion.

It was because baptism is performed only by an ordained pastor that Father Taggart was called to administer the rite for G. W. Barnes. Repeated efforts to gather a council of delegates and regularly ordained ministers to examine candidate G. W. Barnes for the ministry had met in failure. It finally occurred to some of the brethren that if a meeting of the desired council on ordination could be connected with a proposed organizational meeting for uniting the churches into an association the same delegates could serve for both purposes. Accordingly the church at Florence invited the Baptist churches of Nebraska to send delegates to act as an ordaining council to meet at Nebraska City, May 28, 1858. G. W. Barnes borrowed a horse for the occasion. Father Taggart, who donned Indian moccasins, walked over 40 miles to join him, and then rode with him the 50 miles to Nebraska City. It was noted at the meeting that only Rev. J. M. Taggart and Rev. J. G. Bowen were ordained ministers.

Naming the association brought with it a minor crisis. Delegates, all of whom came originally from different states and who brought with them a wide variety of ideals and viewpoints, insisted that the official title include certain descriptive terms. To settle the dispute one delegate proposed that all of the suggested terms be used in one title to insure complete acceptance! Finally, realizing that more than a million Baptists felt no need for explanatory terms to differentiate them such as "United," "Regular" or "Missionary," they decided that "Nebraska Baptist Association" would be satisfactory until another association came into existence.

The called meeting, first of its kind for Nebraska Baptists, proved to be so inspirational for delegates and visitors alike that they retained the same features in future associational meetings: worship, prayer together, sharing of pastoral joys and sorrows, problems and blessings, and recounting their many tales of danger and courage. The meeting also became a time of innovation. Many important and far-reaching resolutions were made, and on that sturdy foundation the entire Baptist work in Nebraska was laid.

Rev. J. M. Taggart played an important role during these difficult years. His name occurs many times in Baptist records. He not only held numerous offices in Baptist affairs but also ably served in governmental circles. Bills he introduced were characteristically for schools, the opening of new roads, bridges and general development of the country. When the Midland Pacific road was built from Nebraska City to Lincoln and the town of Palmyra (between the two) was laid out on land which was entered

and proved by him he moved to that area and made it his permanent home. While there he was instrumental in building a church and other buildings for public use. On his death he was interred in the Palmyra cemetery, and it is known today as Taggart Cemetery.

Results of the great financial depression of 1857 were felt everywhere. Funds from the Home Mission Society dwindled alarmingly. Pressures brought by the Civil War and political controversies caused a lag in the development of new churches, but membership in existing churches increased despite severe hardships and deprivations. Few can know or understand the hardships suffered by missionary pastors and families of that era.

Opening of public lands for homestead entry by act of Congress on May 20, 1862, and the coming of the railroads brought a new and greater influx of people from the East. From 1860 to 1875 sixty-five Baptist churches were organized in Nebraska. In all but a few instances membership in the new churches was very small. Meetings were held in school houses, some built of sod, some of logs and others of frame construction; some were held in private homes. Because permanent ministers seldom were secured and missionary pastors were unable to reach them regularly the situation was quite unstable, but there was progress.

A second association was organized at Cuming City in 1867 and named "The Omaha Baptist Association." One hundred sixty people were present. In 1873, the South Eastern and York Associations were organized. In 1877, on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the first association, Nebraska Baptists counted 73 ordained ministers, 3,354 members and 105 churches united in 8 associations.

The year 1867 was a memorable one in Baptist history as well as in the history of the territory. It was during this year that Nebraska was organized as a state and adopted her constitution. It was on November 12 of that same year that delegates from the various churches created the Nebraska Baptist State Convention at Bellevue. As was officially stated, the object of the newly formed Convention was: "To conduct Baptist mission work of all kinds in the State of Nebraska; to receive, control, and manage all kinds of property for the purpose of providing expenses connected with its mission work; to receive donations of all kinds to be held, managed, and expended under such terms and limitations as the donors thereof may impose upon the Convention, and in general to do everything its Board of Managers may deem necessary to carry on such mission work."

Rev. W. J. Kermott of Omaha was State Convention's first president. Rev. Taggart was later made president and continued for many years, directing the operation with great enthusiasm and zeal.

The story of the cooperation of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in erecting church buildings in Nebraska and supporting missionary pastors is an interesting one. Few realize its

extent. It is difficult at this point in history to conceive of a time when extremely small groups of Baptists, anxious to meet as church bodies, were faced with problems of marauding Indians, wide expanses of territory, scattered population, financial impossibilities and all of the problems characteristic of pioneer life. The state secretary "stood between," presenting to the Board in New York the appeals of these little groups. In Christian response, many "grants" or "gift loans" were made by the Board, and in later years regular loans were made. During a ten-year period of time from approximately 1880 to 1890 the total figure for grants and loans was $209,758.66, for a total of 154 towns or cities. Even to this present day the State Office holds a number of these "Contingent Loans."

Support of missionary pastors throughout drouth and depression years was also of inestimable value. From 1856 to 1882 the Home Mission Society through missionary pastors served 186 fields in Nebraska and supported 466 missionaries. From 1889 to 1899 the Home Mission Society supported no less than 42 missionary pastors at any time, with the highest number for any year being 63. This is an amazing figure when one considers that today this same figure represents the total number of paid active Baptist pastors in the State of Nebraska! In preparation for the Diamond Jubilee held in Lincoln in 1942 statistics were prepared which indicated that in 75 years a total of 2,162 men were supported by the Home Mission Society (many were commissioned yearly). Included by the Home Mission Society in these figures was support of work with Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Germans, Negroes and Mexicans. And there were colporters, too—another interesting chapter in Nebraska Baptist history. Hundreds of miles were covered in old-time autos, and later by car and trailer.

The first record of a women's organization was in 1873. A circle was organized consisting of women from churches at Nebraska City, Omaha, Lincoln, Fremont and Tekamah. At that time there was no state organization. In 1879, during the State Convention session, a women's meeting was held in the interest of foreign missions. At a meeting of women in 1880 a resolution was adopted to the effect that branch societies in churches should be formed to work with the Women's Baptist Home Mission Society. At a later time, to reduce friction and competition, the two separate organizations were joined. From these small beginnings came the present-day well-organized missionary enterprise managed by the women of Nebraska, with deep interest in both the home and foreign mission fields working through the agency of national organizations in Valley Forge.

Little is to be found in earliest records concerning Sunday school work. For quite some time not more than one-fourth of the Baptist churches of the state had distinctively Baptist Sunday schools. Most churches organized under the Sunday School Union or other groups, but they increasingly found that there was lack of

freedom to express Baptist convictions or to teach Baptist doctrines. Accordingly, it was felt that Baptist Sunday schools should be included in the working machinery of Baptist churches. In 1878 the Publication Society sent a representative to act as Sunday school missionary to introduce Baptist literature into Baptist homes and Sunday schools. Sunday school institutes were held and Sunday school associations were organized. When the Publication Society representative began his work, 40 of the 130 churches claimed Sunday schools, with a membership of 2000 scholars. In one year there were 60 Sunday schools with 4000 scholars. From that beginning Christian education for Baptists continued to grow and expand.

Another area of Christian education was promoted in 1880 at a State Convention meeting in Gibbon. The town offered to donate a three-story brick building with surrounding land to the Baptists of the state, providing they establish there a high class seminary. Their offer was accepted and a school was organized with a principal and two teachers, and was formally opened November 8, 1880, with a student body of 120. A dormitory for women was erected later and three additional teachers were employed. Students from 5 states were enrolled and for a time the seminary appeared to have a bright future. Soon, however, financial troubles began to plague the school and the general consensus seemed to be that a college rather than a seminary was needed. For these reasons the State Convention voted at its meeting in 1885 to abandon the enterprise.

In the year 1888 the Committee on Resolutions offered a resolution to the effect that the cornerstone of Grand Island College be laid and that support be given to that institution. This action came following the work of a newly organized Educational Association. Several towns (Lincoln, Omaha, Nebraska City and York) had made attractive offers to secure the college. Grand Island, however, offered a campus of 25 acres and 540 city lots valued at $163,000 on the simple condition that the school be located there. Also a sum of $10,000 would be given on condition that the Baptist denomination raise within two years $50,000 outside of Hall County. Grand Island College was completed and opened September 13, 1892, with Rev. George Sutherland as President.

Another phase of Christian education began with the organization of the "Nebraska Convention of Baptist Young People" on Tuesday, October, 1889, at a convention of young people meeting with the State Convention. This was the first organization of Baptist young people in the United States. Other states soon followed, with a national organization developing in a short time known as the "Baptist Young Peoples' Union." Nebraska Baptists can take great pride in knowing that their forebears were the originators and pioneers of the youth movement in the Baptist churches of America.

Last, but by far not the least of Nebraska Baptist educational

ventures, was the purchase and establishment of Camp Merrill near Fullerton, Nebraska. The year 1943 was momentous for all who were involved in purchasing the Chautauqua Park for $4,500 with a $300 down payment. The name was changed to "Moses Merrill Baptist Camp" and a program of development was begun on the 92 acres of land. The name was chosen for its significance in memorializing the first Baptist pioneer in the Territory. Although Moses Merrill ministered primarily to the Otoe Indians the Pawnees often visited Bellevue and visited not only his school there but also the mission station on the Platte, which was built later. Camp Merrill is located on a part of what was formerly the Pawnee Indian Reservation before their removal to Oklahoma in 1873 and 1875 by the Government.

The first Chautauqua was conducted in 1899 and was an annual event on the grounds for more than twenty years. Later, some six or seven years before purchase by Nebraska Baptists, the Government leased the property for a CCC Camp. Ten or eleven buildings were erected, water-works and sewer systems were installed and a camp was operated for about eight months. After the experiment the buildings were removed, leaving the foundations which were of inestimable value to establishment of Camp Merrill. The CCC boys had trimmed the 45 acres of trees and cleared the underbrush and established a fine carpet of grass. The old dining hall, some cottages, garages and sheds were also of great value in early camping years.

To read of the plans and dreams of men, women and youth who speak to present-day Baptists from their positions in past decades brings the realization that, although they were often faced with insurmountable obstacles, still they dreamed their dreams and prayed fervently, expecting great things from the future. Just as Camp Merrill was established and promoted with such slogans as "Build for Christ and Youth" and "Serve to Save Young and Old," so were pastors, settlers, missionaries and lay people motivated in serving in churches large and small. And we are part of the future generations these people envisioned. We are proud to be counted with them, and we are grateful for the sacrifice and daring which was theirs. The results in lives throughout the world can never be listed or even estimated, but that they are vital and that they are everlasting is the tremendous fact of our Christian faith.