

MISSIONARY BEGINNINGS IN IDAHO

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Note: A longer version of this account appeared in slightly altered form in the Minutes of the Synod of Idaho for 1927:

In 1883 the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly created the Presbytery of Wood River, encompassing all of southern and eastern Idaho, and attached it to the Synod of Utah. There were within the bounds of the new presbytery only two Presbyterian ministers and three churches with forty-two members. Three ministers detached themselves from their Utah presbyteries in order to give the Wood River body the minimum of five required by the denomination's rules.

The presbytery's first meeting was held at Bellevue. . . . With somewhat prophetic vision they said in the first report of their Home Mission committee: "Your committee views with deep interest this vast outlying frontier field of central and southern Idaho. We see here a country of surpassing mineral and agricultural wealth, capable of supporting a large population. We would raise the Macedonian cry to our church and the Board of Home Missions, 'Come over and help us.' We must take possession of this territory for Christ and the church. . . ."

It has been requested that some personal experiences be given in connection with this historical sketch. A retrospective glance at those early years brings to mind many incidents, some pleasant and some otherwise. How interesting they may be to others is uncertain. They may, however, throw some light on the way in which the work was done in those days. . . .

An incident in a somewhat different environment was the beginning of the work at Rigby. This was a village of probably two hundred population in a strongly Mormon community. The person who was chiefly interested in having services other than Mormon was a man named Jake Parks who lived three miles from town. I spent a week holding services in his house every evening. His house was a log cabin with two rooms and an earth roof. In this building ten of us lived and ate and slept for a week. The smaller room was a bedroom with one bed. It was occupied (the room, I mean) by the two women and two girls. The larger room was the living room, dining room, kitchen and sleeping room combined. Besides the table and chairs its only furniture was an old sofa about eighteen inches wide with sloping head and spiral springs. As a result of much service each spring asserted its individuality. As the honored guest, the minister [Barton] occupied this sofa as a bed. The others slept on the floor. This may seem like uncomfortable accommodations. It was the best that was available and was accompanied with hearty good will and fellowship and was not devoid of real pleasure. At the close of the week I organized a Sunday School. This was November 20, 1898. The present Rigby church is a lineal descendant of that school.

Note: When the Revs. Samuel Wishard and Hugh Rankin got their gospel tent, the first place it was used was in Rigby, where they built on the foundation Barton had supplied. The Rigby church resulted and continues in 2004.]