



Church building, c.1915 (Photo from 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).



Church building, c.1925 (Submitted by John King).

THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PRAIRIE GROVE

BY SUSAN PARKS-SPENCER



AFTER SEVERAL EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN PRAIRIE GROVE, A GROUP OF PERSISTENT FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS MET AND FORMED A CHURCH THAT CONTINUES TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY AND ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP IN THE LOCAL REGION.



THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PRAIRIE GROVE

SUSAN PARKS-SPENCER

fter several efforts to establish a Presbyterian Church in Prairie Grove, a group of persistent families and individuals met and formed a church that continues to have a successful ministry and active membership in the local region. Throughout its history, the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove has maintained a working relationship and outreach with other churches and organizations in the area, had a close friendship with the First United Methodist Church down the street, and ministered not only in word but in action to the people in the town and surrounding communities.

Prior to the founding of the First Presbyterian Church in 1905, two churches were organized that can be considered its predecessors. The first was the Big Springs Church that was established south of Moffit, or Hogeye, in October 1880 by the Reverend S.W. Davies, O.C. Gray and D.C. Bogg. There were sixteen charter members at Big Springs. Sometime during 1881 a church was built for \$500 on land that member Judge R.O. Hannah owned. One future founding member of the Presbyterian Church in Prairie Grove, Myrtle McCormick, was baptized at Big Springs by Rev. J.L. Houston on March 13, 1887.2 Around 1901, it appears that the Big Springs Church ceased operating.3 Several years later, some of the former members of this church would help establish what is now the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, while other members would join the Church at a later date.

In 1888, Reverend A.W. Milster organized a Presbyterian Church in Prairie Grove. T.P. Allison* and Samuel Bradley, both former members of the Big Springs Church, were appointed Elders, and Dr. E.G. McCormick was also named Elder sometime later. This church met at the Methodist Church, and it was apparent that membership was small. After meeting for several years, members moved from the area and others died which left the church with only Dr. McCormick's family as the last remaining members.⁴

It wasn't until April 6, 1905, that a group of Presbyterians, who were using the Methodist Church as a regular meeting place, were able to organize a congregation again. Two Presbyterian pastors from Fayetteville were in attendance: Rev. S.W. Davies, a founder of the Big Springs Church, and Rev. J.C. Lawson. After a consensus was reached that enough people were interested in establishing a Presbyterian Church, the meeting then moved to Miss Mary Campbell's house at 202 East Bush Street where the attendees voted to organize the Southern Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove. Nominations and installations of Elders and Deacons commenced with Dr. E.G. McCormick and H.C. Magruder designated Elders, and Dr. Charles L. Moore chosen as Deacon.

On August 13, Miss Campbell's house was once again used as an organizational meeting place when nine women met at the home to create the Missionary and Aid Society, or Woman's Aid Society. The charter members were Miss

^{*}T.P. Allison and Rev. S.W. Davies attended the first meeting of the Washburn Presbytery held in Fayetteville's Presbyterian Church on October 24, 1884. The Washburn Presbytery was named after Rev. Cephas Washbourne, an Indian Territory missionary who was probably the first to preach a Presbyterian service in Washington County.⁵ The Washburn Presbytery's name was later changed to the Ozark Presbytery.



Back row, I-r: Judge R.O. Hannah, his daughter Bess Hannah, unidentified female, unidentified male. Front row, I-r: Anne Magruder McCormick, her father-in-law Dr. E.G. McCormick, c.1915. (Photo from the Prairie Grove, Arkansas Centennial History 1888-1988. Siloam Springs Printing: George and Essie Wiswell, 1988. p.247. Original photograph at the Joy Webb House).

Campbell, Mrs. E.G. McCormick, Miss Myrtle McCormick, Mrs. Emma C. Maupin, Miss Bess Maupin, Miss Alice Mateer, Mrs. Roberta C. Magruder, Miss Anne Magruder and Mrs. Margery Magruder. Officers were elected and the members agreed to hold once a month meetings at alternating members' homes. A "reader" was appointed by the president, and it was agreed to begin mission studies from the countries of Japan, Mexico, and Korea. Society members also paid dues each meeting ranging from a nickel to ten

cents or twenty cents.7

Fundraising for missions was a priority of the Society, and the group gathered pledges in support of specific foreign missions. The majority of the donated money was given to help the mission work in Mexico by the Rev. Hervey Ross of Cane Hill. Rev. Ross often served as pulpit supply for the Church. The group was also successful in raising money for their projects by holding numerous fundraising events. Through their efforts, the Woman's Aid Society was able to acquire the Church's first organ in 1907.8

In the early 1930s, the Society renamed itself the Woman's or Ladies Auxiliary and continued their work for foreign missions, along with community projects that were organized by a Circle committee. The young people of the Church also formed groups throughout the Church's history that would include Bible Study and community work. In a report to the "Presbyterial Historian" in 1936, Mrs. Oscar Dearing wrote that the Auxiliary collected clothing and food for the local needy, a quilt was made for Mrs. H.L. Paisley, wife of the current pastor, and the Girls' Circle gathered food for a Thanksgiving meal to be distributed in the community.

The Woman's Auxiliary began calling itself the Women of the Church, or W.O.C., in 1948 and later changed its title to Presbyterian Women. The Presbyterian Women are still involved in raising money for foreign and domestic missions, doing community outreach work, and conducting Bible study classes at members' houses.⁹

During its first year in 1905, Session minutes indicate most of the Church's business concentrated on adding new members to its roster and arranging its finances. However, almost a year-and-a-half later on August 3, 1906, the minutes suggested a scandal of sorts had arisen. The Clerk of Session, Dr. McCormick, reported:

The good of the church was discussed and it was mentioned that the custom of having dances at one of the residences of one family, a part of which belonged to the church, was having a disastrous effect on the church and was injurying [sic] the cause of Christ in the community. It

was resolved to take such steps as would discourage this practice and it was hoped relieve the church of this odium.

No more was written on this topic, so one can assume the dancing issue was resolved to the Session's satisfaction.

In December 1906, the Church added eleven new members to its roster. Dr. McCormick explained the increase:

It was announced that the Big Springs Church with the church building etc. had been transferred to this church by action of the last Presbytery.

These new members were Judge R.O. Hannah, Mrs. Susan Hannah, Gracie Elizabeth Hannah, Mollie Lee Maddox, W.H. Maddox, Emma Jane Dearing, and non-communicants, or non-members, Clara Helen Hannah, James Berry Hannah, Maggie Hannah, Robert O. Hannah, and Nora R. Carney. Judge Hannah was also elected Elder.

During this time, members were still holding their services at the Methodist Church. Talk of having their own church building became a serious topic for congregational members as well as the ruling Elders. At a May 4, 1907, Session meeting at Judge Hannah's house, the Judge reported that lots 9 and 10 of the Rogers addition were on the market for \$100, but were available to the congregation for \$75 from owners Dorse and Martha Ann (Mattie) McCormick. The Session agreed to purchase the lots, and Dr. Moore, W.H. Maddox and Dr. McCormick were elected Trustees for the Southern Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove. A Building Committee consisting of Judge Hannah, Dr. McCormick, Dr. Moore, John McCormick, J.W. Mateen, L. Maupin and W.H. Maddox was also appointed. Judge Hannah then purchased the lots from the McCormicks for the church.

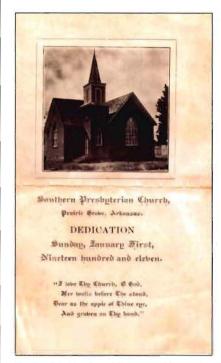
Raising funds to construct a church building was the next big step. Reverend J.S. Harrington informed the Building Committee during the summer of 1907 that \$761 had been deposited in the Church's checking account. The money had come from several sources including the church extension fund which contributed \$200, Presbytery sent another

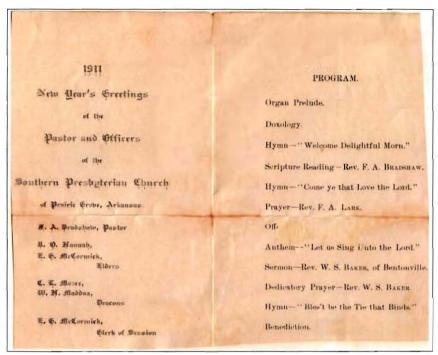


The earliest known photograph of the Southern Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, probably taken soon after its completion in 1908. (Photograph by Jacob H. Suttle, submitted by Cheryl Thompson West).

\$200 that had come from the sale of a Dardanelle church, and the remaining \$361 was raised locally. Additional fundraising and contributions from both local sources and Presbytery was expected.

On September 5, 1907, Judge Hannah hosted a congregational meeting at his house. A resolution was read and adopted unanimously giving the Board of Trustees authorization to accept donations from the Presbyterian Church of the United States' General Assembly, and the Board was also put in charge of maintaining all legal documents, including mortgages. The congregation then unanimously voted to have the Building Committee sell the weather boarding from the Big Springs Church building and use the money from the sale for the construction of the Church. Later that month, brick for the Church was purchased from the Prairie Grove Lumber Company. However, six months passed





The Church held its formal dedication of the new building on January 11, 1911, almost three years after it was built. (From the First Presbyterian Church Anniversary Observances and Dedications file, Joy Webb House).

without the bricks being used and it wasn't until a Session meeting in Dr. McCormick's office that the Building Committee agreed to hire N.D. Hanks as the bricklayer foreman and proceed with the building of the church. The delay in starting the brickwork wasn't mentioned, but the onset of winter or lack of funds were two possible culprits.

The local Mason organization in Prairie Grove held a special meeting on December 7, 1907, in order to lay the cornerstone of the Church. The members placed the stone "according to the ancient ceremonies of the Craft," and also set a box containing the following items inside the cornerstone: A Bible; copies of the Arkansas Gazette, Prairie Grove Herald, and Christian Observer; a list of state and local officials; members' names from M.W. Grand Lodge of F. & A. Masons of Arkansas; a list of members and officers of the Church's Ladies Aid Society; the names of contribu-

tors who helped build the Church; and a list of non-communicants, members and officers of the Church.¹⁰

The Methodist Church continued to serve as the Church's home until the Presbyterian building was completed in 1908. On July 6 of that year, the congregation held its inaugural service¹¹ and the Session's first meeting in the building was on July 2.

One month later, on August 24, the Session adopted a resolution inviting the Presbytery to hold its spring meeting at the new church building. The Presbytery accepted the invitation and the meeting was held from March 31-April 4, 1909.

In a report to the congregation on December 19, 1908, Dr. McCormick announced that Oscar D. Moore had raised \$142.25 for the purchase of pews. The Church had received bids from "seating companies" that included the American

Seating Company in Chicago, a company in Memphis, and the DeLooef Furniture Company in Garnett, Kansas. The American Seating Company's bid was \$365, and the company in Memphis submitted a bid of \$249 for pews of plain oak, with a freight fee of around \$26. The Memphis company also suggested that their price could be lowered. The DeLooef bid was the lowest at \$177. A committee was formed and given authorization to purchase pews.

The Woman's Aid Society apparently helped buy the new pews for the Church. In an April 23, 1909 entry, their minutes noted that "\$12 [was] paid on the \$25 promised toward the seats." ¹²

In December of 1908, Dr. McCormick began planting trees around the new Church. On the inside back cover of the first Session book he recorded the following:

On December 23rd 1908 Dr. McCormick secured three (3) Sugar Maple trees and planted one near the South west corner of the Southern Presbyterian Church lot, one on the South east Corner and one in the rear of church. On same day he planted an elm, a soft maple in the rear of church and a hackberry near the North east corner. Dated Dec. 28the [sic] 1908. In the Spring of 1909 Dr. McCormick planted a poplar in front of Church near center of lot. The tree on South East corner was reset Nov. 1909 by Dr. McCormick[.]

Rev. J.E. Wylie had joined the Church as pastor during July 1908 and was with the Church until the spring of 1910. During a congregational meeting that summer, it was agreed to ask Rev. F.A. Bradshaw to become pastor of the Church.

In November 1910, the Session approved the use of a weekly "envelope system" for offerings which would help pay the pastor's salary. The Session also reached a consensus to try to eliminate the church building's debt of \$240 before Christmas.

A dedication was held on January 1, 1911, to celebrate the Southern Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove's new



Seminary student I.D. Terrell and Rev. F.A. Bradshaw, 1918. (Photo from the Frank A. Bradshaw folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

building. The ceremony was most likely postponed until the bank note was paid off. In the Woman's Aid Society minutes from October 14, 1910, secretary Anne Magruder wrote:

The subject of the church debt was placed before the society by our pastor and the society was in favor of trying to raise the money by the first of Jan. 1911.

A chicken pie dinner and candy sale was held soon afterward, and Miss Magruder reported in the January 13, 1911, minutes that a total of \$30.25 was raised and the proceeds donated to help pay off the Church debt.¹³

Money woes concerning the building continued for

the Church members. In March of 1911, the Deacons were given authorization to borrow \$4 in order "to pay a printing bill held against the church" for printing the dedication programs.

In June 1911, the Prairie Grove School district had constructed a new three-story school building and offered to sell two older school buildings by sealed bids. One was a wood frame building, the other brick. The Session was interested in building a manse on property it had yet to purchase and was looking for building supplies. Judge Hannah made an offer for \$301 to purchase the frame school building, which turned out to be the winning bid. Previous to the bidding, Judge Hannah, Dr. McCormick, and a Dr. Willis, who was either the county or state Home Mission Committee chairman, had inspected the building. Dr. McCormick described it in the following Session minutes:

...it had been constructed of first class pine throughout, put together with old fashion cut nails:..it could be taken down in a manner that would leave the lumber in good condition:..It being only necessary to purchase shingles for the roof for the proposed manse and perhaps some

inside finishing lumber.

This structure was most likely the old school that was located north of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. ¹⁴ A Building Committee was organized to dismantle the structure and begin setting up plans for construction of a manse. On July 22, 1911, Dorse and Mattie McCormick sold five lots for \$300 to Dr. McCormick, Dr. Moore, and W.H. Maddox, who were Trustees for the Church. Fundraising for the construction of the manse began soon after this transaction was made, and apparently work on the building

itself, just north of the Church, was underway by the end of the year.

By spring, work on the manse had been completed.

On April 1, 1912, the Session asked Rev. Bradshaw to invite Dr. Willis to Prairie Grove for a visit to the Church and "new manse." Unlike the Church building, the manse's debts were taken care of rather quickly. At the next Session meeting on April 21, the Session reported that a total of \$394.78 had been contributed to the Manse Building Committee, but only \$376.05 was needed, which left the Church a balance of \$18.73.

In 1913, the Church had 55 members and 82 participants in the Sabbath School program. The Church had also started another Sabbath School class for people who lived in the Stonewall area west of town. Referred to as S.S. number 2, in 1913 there was a total of 50 members involved in that outreach program. It is not known how long this association lasted, but it is noted in the

Session minutes in 1938 that it was starting up again.

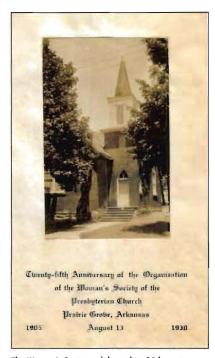
Area churches in the past had come together on one Sunday during the summer for a "union meeting." In the summer of 1913, however, the Church wrote a resolution describing why they would not be participating that year. Apparently the union meeting was moved to Spring Park, now Mock Park, which was characterized as "low and damp, especially so at night," and "adequate seating of the Park with seats taken from the Moving Picture Show and Auditorium would necessitate unnecessary labor on God's Holy Sabbath day." And finally, "We do not approve of the band for Sacred Worship."

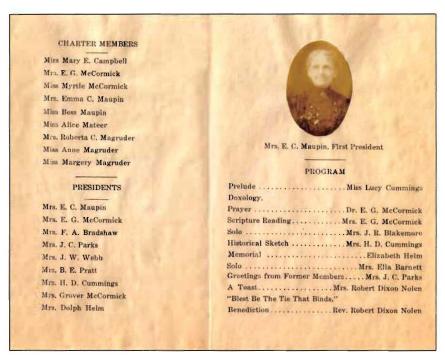
On October 6, 1913, Reverend Bradshaw announced at a Session meeting that an anonymous donation had been made to pay for the completion of "the walk, the lights and enough [money] to put in a hedge around the church property."

Ten years after the organization of the Church, the to-



Grover C. Bidwell, seminary student, about 1919. Rev. Bidwell began his first service as pastor in the summer of 1920. He left five years later and returned again as pastor in 1946. (Photo courtesy of Kathryne Bidwell Delap).





The Woman's Society celebrated its 25th anniversary at the "Virginia Home" at 202 east Bush street, where the first meeting of the society was held on August 13, 1905. The home also hosted the first organizational meeting of the Church in April 1905. (Courtesy of Elizabeth Helm Ryker)

tal number of communicants in 1915 was 58, and Sunday School participants numbered 82. Rev. Bradshaw's salary for the year was \$600, miscellaneous expenses and "Presbyterial Tax" amounted to \$350, and the congregation had contributed \$310 to various organizations.

At a Session meeting in April 1916, a proposition to federate with the Presbyterian Church in Cane Hill was discussed. A federation between the two churches would have resulted in a joint Session and some shared expenses. The Session decided to politely reject the proposal...

in the spirit of Christian courtesy and with every consideration for the pleasant relations that had prevailed between the two congregations during the past years.

Believing, however, that such a federation would not be promotive of Presbyterianism in this community and capable of very serious complications and divisions in the future.

1917 was an eventful year for the Church. In what was to become a recurring problem throughout the years, the Session noted in January that the roof leaked. On a less frustrating topic, the Session agreed in February to have a "Birthday Box" for birthday contributions, and the Campfire Girls were approved to use the boys' classroom for their meetings.

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered World War I. Rev. Bradshaw appointed Dr. Charles L. Moore and Mr.



Rev. Robert Dixon Nolen and his wife, about 1931. (Photo from the Robert Dixon Nolen folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

B.E. Pratt to represent the Church in its effort to conserve food as initiated by the Presbyterian churches at a national meeting in Washington, D.C.

The Session authorized Dr. McCormick in September 1917 to purchase a load of wood and two tons of coal for the Church's use during the coming winter. However, at the next Session meeting in November, Dr. McCormick reported that he was only able to purchase one load of coal and "he had been unable to secure the load of wood on account of the conditions of the roads which had resulted in a fuel famine." The Session agreed to purchase the fuel at a more convenient time.

In February 1918, the Session discussed the need of a janitor and also someone to take care of "the hedge and grounds." It was decided to take a special evening collection to obtain funds for "incidental expenses." Rev. Bradshaw was authorized to meet with the Ladies Auxiliary to find a janitor.

A congregational meeting to elect a new Deacon was to be held on April 14, 1918, but a smallpox quarantine closed churches for two weeks. The meeting was held on April 21, and Dr. J.W. Webb was elected Deacon.

On May 5, 1918, the Session reluctantly agreed to grant Rev. Bradshaw a leave of absence in order for him to join the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) to minister to the spiritual needs of the American soldiers serving overseas during the war. 15 Rev. Bradshaw submitted his resignation in July. A Columbia Theological Seminary student, I.D. Terrell from South Carolina, served as the Church's temporary pastor during the summer. At an August 25 meeting, the Session offered the position of Church pastor to Reverend John H. Davies of Black Rock, Arkansas, who accepted. Rev. Davies was with the Church until August 10, 1919. It appears that after his resignation, Rev. J.P. Kidd helped moderate the Session meetings until Rev. Grover C. Bidwell from Ward, Arkansas, began preaching in the summer of 1920. He was hired as the Church's fulltime pastor in April 1921.

On September 27, 1920, The Prescott Daily News reported that the Washburn Presbytery elected Dr. McCormick as moderator for the state meeting held at Charleston in September of 1920. Prairie Grove was selected as the site for the Presbytery meeting in April 1921.¹⁶

In a meeting held on March 31, 1921, the Session agreed to give the gasoline generator and unused fixtures in the Church to a Benton County church, Hazel Glen, located in the Vaughn community, with a payment amount to be decided by that church.

The Church's need for additional Sunday School class-rooms began early in 1922 and was a repeated topic of discussion throughout the years. In a Session meeting on January 3, there was a decision made to enlarge the existing Sunday School room. It was agreed on July 9 to deposit the Sunday School collection money from the first Wednesday and fifth Sundays in a Sunday School building fund.

During Rev. Bidwell's term as pastor, the "men's work" organization was first established. One of their primary

tasks was to lead the Sunday evening services once a month. This fellowship apparently ceased its activities sometime later, but was reorganized in the early 1930s.

Rev. Bidwell resigned as pastor of the Church in September 1925 and left to minister to several churches in west Texas. The Rev. J. Frank Turner attended his first Session meeting as moderator on February 21, 1926. He left the Church sometime in 1929.

In the spring of 1928, the Church began a fundraising campaign in order to raise funds to put new roofs on both the Church and the Manse. Renovations inside both buildings were also planned. The roofs were finished in the summer at a cost of \$437.69. The Church interior was redecorated, window frames repaired and painted, walls painted, and the ceiling papered. Screens were added to the windows in the summer of 1930.

In May 1931, the Session discussed organizing a Bible School for the upcoming summer. However, at the next meeting held in October there was no mention of the Bible School outcome. The first documentation of a successfully completed Vacation Bible School was in 1935, when the Church and the Christian Church together held a two week program.

Rev. Robert Nolen, who became pastor in June 1930,

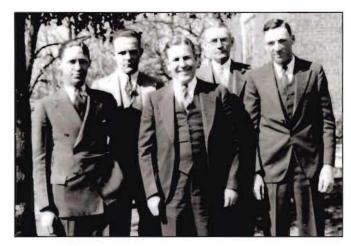


Rev. Henry Lewis Paisley, about 1936.

(Photo from the Henry Lewis Paisley folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

created the first Church bulletin which was approved by the Session on March 7, 1932. He also served as a class reporter for the church camp's newspaper in the summer of 1932. The Chiggerville Chatter documented the activities of summer camp held at Moore's Creek in Rhea's Mill. The four page paper chronicled the camp being set up, events that were held, and included a song written about the camp titled "Go With Us to Old Moore's Creek" by Louise Delap. It appears many adults, young people and children attended the camp.17

A reorganized men's work group and Sunday School Class was



L-R: Jack S. Harlan, E.S. Davidson, Rev. Nolen, W.G. McCormick, Clayburn Alexander, about 1934. (Photo from the Robert Dixon Nolen folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

started in February 1933 with 34 men attending the inaugural meeting.

The Session approved this budget for the Depression year of 1934:

Pastor's Salary - \$600 Benevolences - \$100 Presbyterial tax - \$14 Lights - \$25 Fuel - \$10 Insurance - \$20 Envelopes - \$4.70 Total estimated budget - \$773.70

In January 1935, the Deacons were asked to embark on a fundraising mission in order to pay for the installation of water in the Manse's kitchen and yard. After successfully meeting their goal, the Manse's water pipes were put in for a total cost of \$20.50.

Rev. Nolen announced his intention to resign from the Church in 1935 in order to become pastor to a church in Mena. Soon afterward, Rev. H.L. Paisley began preaching



Rev. Henry Lewis Paisley and Elizabeth, about 1936. (Photo from the Henry Lewis Paisley folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

to the congregation and remained with the Church for almost three years.

Effects of the Depression on the congregation and Church are noticeable in the Session minutes during the mid-1930s. During Rev. Paisley's stay, the Church began to experience difficulties in paying his salary and meeting the Church's budgeted "subscription" or monetary giving goal. At the May 2, 1937, Session meeting, Rev. Paisley reported that the Church was almost \$200 behind in his salary, and subscriptions were \$250 less than what was projected in that years budget. It was recommended that J.S. (Jack) Harlan speak to the congregation at the end of the next Sunday service to let them know of the situation and ask them to try and increase their contributions to the Church.

Rev. Paisley left the Church at the end of May 1938 for the First Presbyterian Church of Murphy, North Carolina. From June until the first part of December the Church was without a regular pastor but services continued with visiting preachers. One guest pastor, the Rev. Harold G. Wise from Arlington, Texas, preached a morning and evening sermon on October 30. Church members were impressed with his preaching skills and asked him to become their new pastor, promising him an annual salary of \$660 and one month of

vacation. Rev. Wise began his service with the Church in December. Prior to his arrival, some repairs to the Manse, along with re-wallpapering and painting several rooms were completed at a cost of \$77. The Ladies Auxiliary "also provided a generous pantry shower of groceries" for Rev. Wise and his mother upon their arrival.

The Church once again restarted its outreach efforts west of town. On December 18, 1938, the Session approved an "outpost Sunday School and Preaching Point" for the community of Stonewall.

A joint Vacation Bible School was held with the Methodist Church from June 6-17, 1938. The average daily attendance was 72 children. The Church also joined other churches in Prairie Grove on February 12, 1939, "at the hour of Evening Worship, upon the occasion of Mrs. J.F. Holmes, presenting the High School Glee Club with a program of Negro Spirituals at the Christian Church." The Session minutes later reported a full house for the Glee Club's presentation.

The first "Church Council" meetings were held at the Manse on January 16, 1939. This group was made up of the Minister, Elders, Deacons, and representatives of the different groups within the Church and addressed the work of the women's, young people's, and Sunday School organizations, and local mission endeavors. Mention was made of the meetings of outreach programs in the Moffit Out-Post Chapel that met at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in that community, and the ongoing work with the Stonewall Outpost Sunday School and Preaching Point. The latter group earned the Church five new members in February 1939. The Stonewall Sunday School class, which met on Sunday afternoons at 2:00, had around 30 members. The Moffit program met on the first Friday of each month and usually had 38 to 40 people attending. In addition to Moffit and Stonewall, Rev. Wise also preached once a month at the Apple Hill Out-Post Chapel west of Prairie Grove.

Mrs. J.W. Webb was a member of the Church Council who was invited to a Session meeting on March 2, 1939. She and Mrs. Hugh Douglas (H.D.) Cummings and Miss Mary Cummings were to speak about an upcoming "Evangelistic meeting" and their attempts to find an evangelist, as well as other arrangements for the event. The Session welcomed

the women, and they "were asked to speak with liberty." This may have been one of the first times women were invited to participate in a Session meeting in the Church's history.

In that same meeting, upon Rev. Wise's request, the Session agreed to allow him to build and maintain a tennis court on the Church's property.

The Moffit Out-Post Chapel was discontinued in April 1940, and the Session wrote a letter of thanks to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Moffit for the use of their church building.

Rev. Wise accepted a position as pastor in the fall at a church in Louisiana. His last Session meeting was in September 1940. His replacement, Rev. B.B. Long, came to Prairie Grove from Texas and is first mentioned in the February 1941 Session minutes.

Economic times had improved somewhat from ten years earlier when the Church had difficulty paying the preacher's salary. At a congregational meeting and covered dish supper held on April 7, 1944, the Church authorized that the salary of Rev. Long be raised from \$1200 a year to \$1500. This was done at the request of Presbytery. However, at a March 1945 Session meeting, the budget for the next year was approved with the pastor's salary set at only \$750. It was raised to \$900 in 1946.

Rev. Long left Prairie Grove in May 1946 to lead a Presbyterian Church in Sulphur, Oklahoma. Returning as pastor was Rev. Bidwell, who had served the Church from 1920-1925.

The July 2, 1950, Sunday evening service was canceled so Rev. Bidwell could participate in the installation of Rev. Stanley Bright at the Hazel Glen Church in Vaughn.

The lack of space for Sunday School rooms was a topic of discussion once again, and a Building Committee was appointed in February 1952 to consider the construction of either an "educational building or annex."

Rev. Bidwell accepted the pastor position at the First Presbyterian Church in Glenwood, Arkansas in 1954, and the Rev. Stanley Bright arrived from Vaughn to become pastor at the end of that year.

In February 1955, the Church joined its longtime friend and neighbor, the First United Methodist Church, to conduct a survey in town to see what denominations the



Rev. Bidwell conducts the marriage of Troy Wayne Cox and Mary Elizabeth Fidler, with Billy Wayne Morrison as best man, April 5, 1952. (Photo courtesy of Kathryne Bidwell Delap).

population considered themselves. (Unfortunately, no survey results have been found). Also that month, the Women of the Church asked the Session to set up a memorial fund for monetary gifts, which was approved.

The Church held an evening service led by Rev. Bright on Wednesday, April 6, 1955, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its organization. A history of the Church written by Dr. McCormick, was read by Bernice McCormick Brooks, Dr. McCormick's granddaughter. Two charter members were present at the service, Dr. Charles L. Moore and Myrtle McCormick Parks. The Cummings family presented a pulpit Bible to the Church in honor of their father, H.D. Cummings. Afterwards, Mrs. Lena Carl Helm hosted a "social hour" for the congregation, who enjoyed a white and gold birthday cake with the number "50" on top. 18

A joint meeting of Elders and Deacons was held in July 1955 to discuss architecture plans that had been submitted



Rev. Stanley Bright, 1958. (Photo from the Stanley Bright folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).



Florence and Rev. Stonley Bright, January 1955. (Photo from the Stanley Bright folder; Pastor's, 1st Presbyterian Church file, Joy Webb House).

for a restroom and kitchen.

The Elders and Deacons agreed in February 1958 to embark on two projects in the sanctuary that consisted of redecorating and replacing the existing floor with oak flooring. The projected cost of both ventures was \$750.

The Session agreed to discontinue the Sunday evening services after March 30, 1958.

Also that year, Rev. Bright resigned as pastor, but remained as pulpit supply until Rev. John William (Bill) Bolton was hired in 1962. The Fellowship Hall was dedicated in 1959 to Rev. and Mrs. Bright.

The family of Mrs. Lucy Elizabeth Carl presented memorial gifts of a Celtic cross (made by Rev. Bright), dossal (the ornamental drapery hanging behind the pulpit) and baptismal font in February 1963. All three are still in the main part of the sanctuary.

In preparation for an upcoming Bible School, the Dea-

cons informed the Session in February of their plans to clear and burn the lot located just northwest of the Church to use as a play area. Twenty-four children attended the first day of Vacation Church School on May 27, 1963.

On March 25, the Session approved the Deacons' plan to install "walks" around the Church.

Two topics were discussed by the Elders and Deacons at a June 24 meeting. Ordination of women within the Church was discussed briefly, then tabled. The second subject, air conditioning the Church, garnered more deliberation among members. Three different methods of installation were brought up, and the Deacons were directed to get estimates for each. In a copy of the proposed budget for 1964, a total of \$1,000 was included for Arkansas Western Gas to install a "heating and cooling unit".

Later in 1963, the Deacons were given the task of putting signs on the restrooms, hanging curtains, and paint-



Rev. Bill Bolton with Myrtle McCormick Parks, 1964. (Photo courtesy of Betty Parks).



L-R: Rev. Bolton, Florence Bright and Emily Bell, 1964. (Photo courtesy of Betty Parks).



Back row, I-r: Randy Ironside, David Parks, Carol Parks, Ritter Arnold, Susan Parker. Front row, I-r: Charlotte Thompson, Paul Arnold, Kathy Parker, Cheryl Thompson, 1961. (Courtesy Cheryl Thompson West).

ing the walls before the Presbytery held its meeting at the Church during February 1964.

Problems with the heating system were resolved in early 1965, and a representative from Arkansas Western Gas promised to include, at no charge, a gas range in the kitchen.

Rev. Bolton left in the summer of 1965 for Richmond, Virginia, to study at the Union Theological Seminary, and Rev. Bright was notified in September that the Church needed him to act as a temporary preacher. Rev. Bolton's name appears again in the June 1966 Session minutes when it was approved to send him and his fiancee a wedding gift.

Deacon Wilford Thompson was nominated to purchase doors to enclose the Sunday School rooms and folding doors for the "central" Sunday School room in December 1967. In the same meeting, Rev. Bright told the Session he would preach on the first, third and fifth Sundays beginning in January 1968.

Improvements to the Fellowship Hall were discussed in the summer of 1968, and Sunday School rooms were again the topic. Clerk Jack Harlan wrote that the Session would like to install "tracks and curtains to make four class rooms[,] also to put partitions in old SS room and to repair



A visit from Santa, 1961. L-R: Neva Barnes McMurry, Santa Claus, Cheryl Thompsan, unidentified, Reta Thompson. (Caurtesy Cheryl Thompson West).

leaks, tear down old garage, paint wood work on Manse[,] also to make improvements inside." In addition, a search was begun for a full-time pastor, and a cleanup day was set for the men of the church. The women of the church would do their part on cleanup day by serving coffee and sandwiches. In October 1969, improvements to the grounds were rec-



Children's Choir, 1963. Back row, I-r: Gary Tate, Randy Ironside, David Parks, Carol Parks, Colleen McMurry, Susan Parker. Front row, I-r: Charlotte Thompson, Debbie Tate, Kathy Parker. (Courtesy Cheryl Thompson West).



In the early 1970s, the Sunday School class had a picnic at Lake Wedington. Kneeling, I-r: Linda Thompson, Leslie Springer, Cathy Thompson, Susan Parks. Standing, I-r: Judy Durham, Amy Springer, Charlotte Thompson, Cheryl Thompson. Top, I-r: Chris Thompson, Karen Parks. (Courtesy Cheryl Thompson West).



Easter egg hunt participants, about 1968. Back row, l-r: David Parks, Carol Parks, Susan Parker, Vivian Faulkner, Kathy Parker. Middle row, l-r: Craig Campbell, Stephen Stills, Jimmy Porks, Charlotte Thompson, Cheryl Thompson, Pam McNair, Carolyn Goss. Front row, l-r: David Stills, Blake Compbell, Karen Parks, Susan Porks. (Courtesy Cheryl Thompson West).

ommended again, with the Session voting to remodel the Manse.

Rev. Morris Springer came to the Church from Lau-

renceburg, Tennessee, as the new pastor in the spring of 1970.

In April 1971, a special meeting was held and the Session voted to approve the Church as a supplemental food distribution participant for the federal government.

Yet another discussion was scheduled about the need of additional rooms for Sunday School classes in August 1972. Wilford Thompson, Myrtle McCormick Parks, Kathleen Harlan, and Peggy Parks made up a committee to pursue plans of adding to the existing Sunday School room.

At the beginning of 1973, the Session nominated Wilford Thompson to get bids on repairing and covering the church pews with a foam cushion.

In a historic event for the Church, on April 29, 1973, the Nominating Committee selected Kathryn More to serve as the first female Elder and Clerk of the Session. Kathleen Harlan and Debbie Tate were also nominated as the first female Deacons.

The Session accepted a resolution in October 1973 to purchase a 50-foot strip of land west of the church from Charles Thompson.

In January 1974, the Session agreed to host E.O.A.'s Meals on Wheels program. There was plenty of discussion



Lindsay West, left, and Natalie West light the candles at the beginning of the Easter service, 1986, while Rev. John King looks on. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).



Reta Thompson, far left, Bernice McCormick Brooks and Wilford Thompson outside the Church, Easter 1987. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).

that winter on the much-needed repair of the Church roof. In June, the ceiling tile was to be replaced after the roof was repaired, and the Session accepted a bid of \$1481 in December 1974 to reroof the Church. Issues with the roof continued into 1975, when Dillon Dexter was asked to resolve the Church's pigeon problem.

Session minutes from April 13, 1975 noted that a speaker suggested for May Family Week was Rev. John

King, who eventually filled in for Rev. Springer while he was on vacation in June.

In October, the Session voted to change church rule and use the unicameral system rather than deacons and elders. The unicameral system has one governing body made up of elders.

Family night suppers and spring cleanups were

Ina Thompson, left, and Grace Geiger, 1985. (Church photo).



held during this period of the 1970s. During the cleanups, men were asked to bring tools, while women brought sandwiches and drinks.

Morris Springer resigned on October 31, 1976. The Church once again embarked on a mission to find another pastor. At a special Session meeting on November 19, delegates from the Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church attended. At this time, the Prairie Grove church was uncertain that it could afford to pay a full-time minister, and Walnut Grove had expressed interest in combining monetary resources with Prairie Grove to hire two ministers for both churches. Members from each church discussed this proposal, and the Walnut Grove delegation said it would have to take this idea to its members before it could be approved. This offer apparently never went beyond the discussion stage. John King began filling in as a temporary service supply and Ralph Thiesse from Lincoln would oversee communions and occasionally preach.

In August 1977, the Session agreed to extend John King's service as temporary supply another six months. Renting the Manse was also approved, with a monthly rental fee set at \$150.

From the 1980s through the early 2000s, much of the



In the summer of 1988, the city of Prairie Grove celebrated the 100th onniversary of its founding. Church members, including Emily Bell and Wilford Thompson pictured here, marked the occasion by taking turns ringing the Church bell. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).

Church's work was involved in building maintenance as well as continuing to serve the community's needs. The remainder of this text features highlights taken from the Session minutes.

The memorial stained glass windows were installed in the fall of 1985, and the task of repairing and painting the Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary was undertaken throughout the year.

After nine years of serving as a temporary supply, John King was installed as the Church pastor on November 6, 1985.

Due to a leaky roof, the Manse received a new roof in November 1986.

The "Rice and Pinto Beans" program, later called "Beans and Rice," was started in February 1987, and in the first three months of the project, 300 pounds of beans and 500 pounds of rice were distributed. The Session also agreed to allow the local Alcoholics Anonymous group to meet in the Fellowship Hall, which they did for the next 20 years. The new steeple was put in place in the spring of 1988 and the procedure was videotaped.

Vesper services with other area Presbyterian Churches began in August 1988.



L-R: John McMahon, Betty Parks, Dot Kelly, Reto Thompson and Barry Parks after the Easter service, 1988. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).

The pulpit bible given to the Church by the Cummings family in 1955 was repaired for \$470 at Muskogee, Oklahoma, in the fall of 1988.

The Sunday School rooms were repaired and redecorated in the summer of 1989 and the Church kitchen was remodeled in 1996.

Sanctuary renovation, which included the installation of new carpet, occurred in the fall of 1998, and new pews were purchased in 2005.

In the spring of 2007, the lot and building southwest of the Church was purchased from the Assembly of God. Built in 1931, the structure was Prairie Grove's elementary school until a new school was built in the 1960s. ¹⁹ The building was then purchased by the Assembly of God, who used it until it was put up for sale in 2007. The Church plans to use it as an activity center and annex, hosting groups such as the local Alcoholics Anonymous, Girl Scouts and the Church's summer Vacation Bible School.

The First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove continues to serve the community through its weekly worship service, its involvement in Life Ministries, the Beans and Rice program, and its willingness to share the Church with other local organizations. The congregational duty of help-



The Cummings sisters, I-r: Roberta, Lucy and Mary, 2003. (Photo by Cheryl Thampson West).



John and Lynne King with the car the congregation purchased for them in celebration of John's 25 years as the Church's pastor, 2000. (Church photo).

ing those in the community and within the Church, as well as nurturing its own members' spiritual lives, is a reflection of the hard work and commitment that was initiated by its founding members and continues to the present.



The Sanctuary during the Christmas season, 2003. (Church photo).





Barry Parks, left, and Donald Parks, 2003. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).



Howard (Buddy) Helm, left, with Donald Parks, 2003. (Photo by Cheryl Thompson West).

Charter Members of the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove:

Mrs. Ella Barnett Miss Mary Elizabeth Campbell Mrs. Sarah Emiline Maupin Miss Mary Rebecca Maupin Dr. E.G. McCormick Mrs. Mamie McCormick Miss Myrtle McCormick Mr. Henry Clay Magruder Mrs. Roberta Campbell Magruder Miss Anne Rebecca Magruder Miss Mary Emma Magruder Dr. Charles L. Moore Mrs. Maud Moore Mrs. Fannie Rogers





Members of the Sunday School class from the early 1950s with their teacher, Peggy Porks. L-R: Mary Nell Geiger McForland, Katie Helm Rieff, Coretta (Toady) Wilson Edwards, Charlene Brewer, Eddie Delap, Peggy Parks, Camilla Bidwell Buller, Sue Wilson Swab, Kathryne Bidwell Delap, 2003. (Church photo).

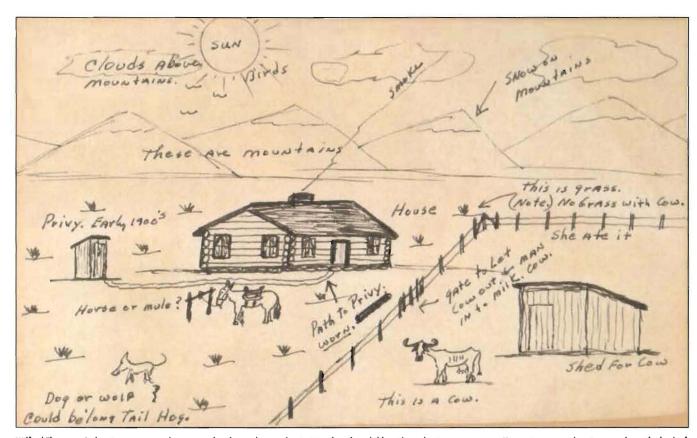


Rev. John King, 1992. (Church photo).



Bottom row, I-r: Betsy Allen and Carmen Weaver. Top row, I-r: Ed Allen, Chris Weaver, Wilson Weaver, 2003. (Photo by Charles Kittrell).





Wilford Thompson's drawings were popular among church members and entertained restless children throughout many sermons. His most common drawings, made on the back of church bulletins, were of outhouse scenes. This undated drawing was made on a regular piece of paper and given to Betty Parks. (Submitted by Susan Parks-Spencer).



First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove Roster of Ministers

H.L. Ross April - October 1905 June 1906 - July 1907 J.S. Harrington J.E. Wylie July 1908 - Spring 1910 F.A. Bradshaw August 1910 - July 1918 I.D. Terrell Summer 1918 August 1918 - August 1919 John H. Davies Grover C. Bidwell Summer 1920 - September 1925 J. Frank Turner March 1926 - 1929 Robert Dixon Nolen June 1930 - September 1935 September 1935 - May 1938 Henry Lewis Paisley December 1938 - September 1940 Harold G. Wise February 1941(?) - May 1946 Byron B. Long September 1946 - October 1954 Grover C. Bidwell Stanley Bright December 1954 - June 30, 1958, served as pulpit supply until summer 1962 September 1962 - June 1965 John William Bolton 1965 - 1969 Stanley Bright Morris H. Springer March 1970 - August 1976 John E. King August 1978 - present

Listed below are some membership numbers from the Session minutes book, 1905-1965. Members include resident and nonresident communicants. "Sabbath" or Sunday School attendance numbers included officers and instructors, along with the children.

Year	Church Members	"Sabbath" or Sunday School Enrollment
1905:	14	*
1909-1910:	32	63
1919-1920:	49	63
1930-1931:	66	61
1940-1941:	82	81
1948-1949:	89	65
1958:	102	78

ENDNOTES

- 1 Goodspeed's Washington County History: Washington County, Arkansas. (The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889), p. 308.
- 2 Webb, Mrs. J.W., "Distinguished Citizen Recipient." Flashback, vol. XIX, no. 1, February 1969, p. 28.
- 3 Copy of the Big Springs session minutes. Church Historical Papers file, Early Presbyterian History folder, p.7. These files are currently stored in the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove.
- 4 McMurry, Neva Barnes. "First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove," History of Washington County, Arkansas. (Spring-dale, Arkansas: Shiloh Museum, 1989), p.p. 709-710.
- 5 Goodspeed's Washington County History: Washington County, Arkansas, p.p. 306, 307.
- 6 "Society Observes 25th Anniversary, Aug. 13," Prairie Grove Herald, Aug. 21, 1930, p. 1.
- 7 Secretary's Book of Minutes 1905, Missionary and Aid Society of the Prairie Grove Presbyterian Church. Information from the Treasurer's records. From the Presbyterian Women's Files, Joy Webb House, Prairie Grove, Arkansas. (No page numbers).
- 8 "Society Observes 25th Anniversary, Aug.13," p. 1.
- 9 Information on the W.O.C. and its history was taken from the Presbyterian Women's Files located in the Joy Webb House, Prairie Grove, Arkansas.
- 10 "Proceedings at an Emergent Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Arkansas, F.& A. Masons, For the Laying of the Corner Stone of Southern Presbyterian Church Building at Prairie Grove, Arkansas, December 7th, 1907." Title, publisher and date of publication unknown, p.p. 3-4.
- 11 Flashback, p.28.
- 12 Secretary's Book of Minutes 1905, Missionary and Aid Society of the Prairie Grove Presbyterian Church.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Prairie Grove, Arkansas Centennial History 1888-1988. (Siloam Springs Printing: George and Essie Wiswell, 1988), p.p. 142, 154.
- 15 Captain Ralph Blanchard, USN, ret. "Doughboy Center: The Story of the American Expeditionary Forces; The History of the YMCA in World War I," http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/ymca.htm; Internet; accessed September 9, 2006.
- 16 "Dr. M'Cormick is Moderator," The Prescott Daily News, Sept. 27, 1920, p.1.
- 17 Chiggerville Chatter, August 5, 1932, p.p. 1-4.
- 18 "Presbyterian Church Observes Fiftieth Anniversary April 6," Prairie Grove Enterprise, Apr. 14, 1955, p.1.
- 19 Prairie Grove, Arkansas Centennial History 1888-1988, p.p. 139, 155.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blanchard, Captain Ralph. USN, ret. "Doughboy Center: The Story of the American Expeditionary Forces; The History of the YMCA in World War I." Available on-line from http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/ymca.htm.

Chiggerville Chatter, August 5, 1932.

Copy of the Big Springs session minutes. Church Historical Papers file, Early Presbyterian History folder. These files are currently stored in the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove.

"Dr. M'Cormick is Moderator." The Prescott Daily News, September 27, 1920.

Goodspeed's Washington County History: Washington County, Arkansas. The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889.

McMurry, Neva Barnes. "First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove," History of Washington County, Arkansas. Springdale, Arkansas: Shiloh Museum, 1989.

Prairie Grove, Arkansas Centennial History 1888-1988. Siloam Springs Printing: George and Essie Wiswell, 1988.

"Presbyterian Church Observes Fiftieth Anniversary April 6." Prairie Grove Enterprise, April 14, 1955.

"Proceedings at an Emergent Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Arkansas, F.& A. Masons, For the Laying of the Corner Stone of Southern Presbyterian Church Building at Prairie Grove, Arkansas, December 7th, 1907." Publisher and date of publication unknown.

Secretary's Book of Minutes 1905, Missionary and Aid Society of the Prairie Grove Presbyterian Church. From the Presbyterian Women's Files, Joy Webb House, Prairie Grove, Arkansas.

"Society Observes 25th Anniversary, Aug. 13," Prairie Grove Herald, August 21, 1930.

Webb, Mrs. J.W., "Distinguished Citizen Recipient." Flashback, vol. XIX, no.1, February 1969.

Information for this history was also taken from the following sources:

Church history notes from Dr. E.G. McCormick, Neva Barnes McMurry and Mrs. Joy Webb. These notes are found in the Church Historical Papers file, Miscellaneous Session Notes, 1931-1971 folder, First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, Arkansas.

First Presbyterian Church Minutes, 1971-1999.

First Presbyterian Church Minutes, 2000-

Minutes of the Session of the Prairie Grove or Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States. 1905-1918.

Minutes of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, Arkansas. 1918-1934.

Minutes of the Session of the U.S. Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, Arkansas. 1934-1946.

Minutes of the Session and Congregational Meetings of the Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove Arkansas. 1946-1971.

Presbyterian Women's Files located in the Joy Webb House, Prairie Grove, Arkansas.



The congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Prairie Grove, Easter 2007. Photo by Lindsay West.

