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Christian training ground

By Carol Bates

Jabbok's Faith

In 1899, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Eisenhower, uncle and aunt of President Dwight Eisenhower, claimed a homestead on a site one half mile south of Thomas. In 1901, the Eisenhowers received a patent from the territory of Oklahoma for the purpose of preaching the gospel in every land, for maintaining a missionary home and Bible School for the training of home and foreign missionaries, for setting up a holiness school, and for publishing Christian literature. An orphanage was thus established and maintained by the Eisenhower family until 1909, at which time a petition of transfer was made to the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church. After this transfer, many changes took place for the Eisenhower orphanage.

On April 24, 1909, the first change occurred when a will was written. It conveyed the farm and buildings to the church on condition that an annual sum of \$500 be paid to the donors for life. This payment was terminated in 1953 upon the death of Mrs. Eisenhower. The orphanage was maintained by volunteer workers and teachers. When the number of orphans dropped from a high of fifty-five to a low of seventeen, the orphanage was closed in 1924.

Another change that took place was the addition of more buildings. The first building for the Jabbok Orphanage was a two-room wooden structure built in

1907. Then a thirty-by-thirty brick building was constructed in 1929. That building was converted from a grade school, which had operated as such until 1929, to a dormitory for boys. In 1910, work was begun on a building later to be known as "Old Main." The cost of the two-story, forty-by-sixty-foot building with a basement was approximately \$8,800. To make use of the existing facilities and to carry out another provision of the original patent, another change took place.

The Board of Trustees under the leadership of Bishop D. R. Eyster and Rev. J. P. Eyster decided to open Jabbok Bible Academy on September 14, 1925. Thirty students enrolled with Rev. P. J. Wiebe, who served as the first president. Approximately three hundred students from fifteen states attended Jabbok. Many of the graduates and students served as missionaries, church administrators, pastors, Sunday School teachers, church board members, and Christian lay workers. The school was closed in 1955.

Although the school was closed, a dairy that was begun during the Eisenhower years continued to operate as a source of income and student employment until 1963. For twenty-seven years, Jess and Ruth Eyster delivered milk to the Thomas community. For most of these years, they made their deliveries in a horse-drawn wagon. They ran the dairy until they retired a few years ago.

Since the closing of Jabbok, the members of the Thomas Brethren in Christ congregation have cultivated the land, the proceeds going to the mission program.

All that are left now are the fertile land and a granite monument donated and erected by the Jabbok Alumni Association. In 1983, the Oklahoma Historical Society recognized Jabbok as a part of the history of Western Oklahoma and erected a historical marker giving directions to the site. The memories of the people who attended Jabbok Bible School, as well as those who lived and worked there, will go on forever. ■

CREDITS: Mrs. Paul Lady, the Jabbok Alumni Association.

CAROL BATES of Thomas, mother of three sons, is a SOSU student who has hopes of becoming a registered nurse.

