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## Reflections of the Ghost of Martha Methodist Church

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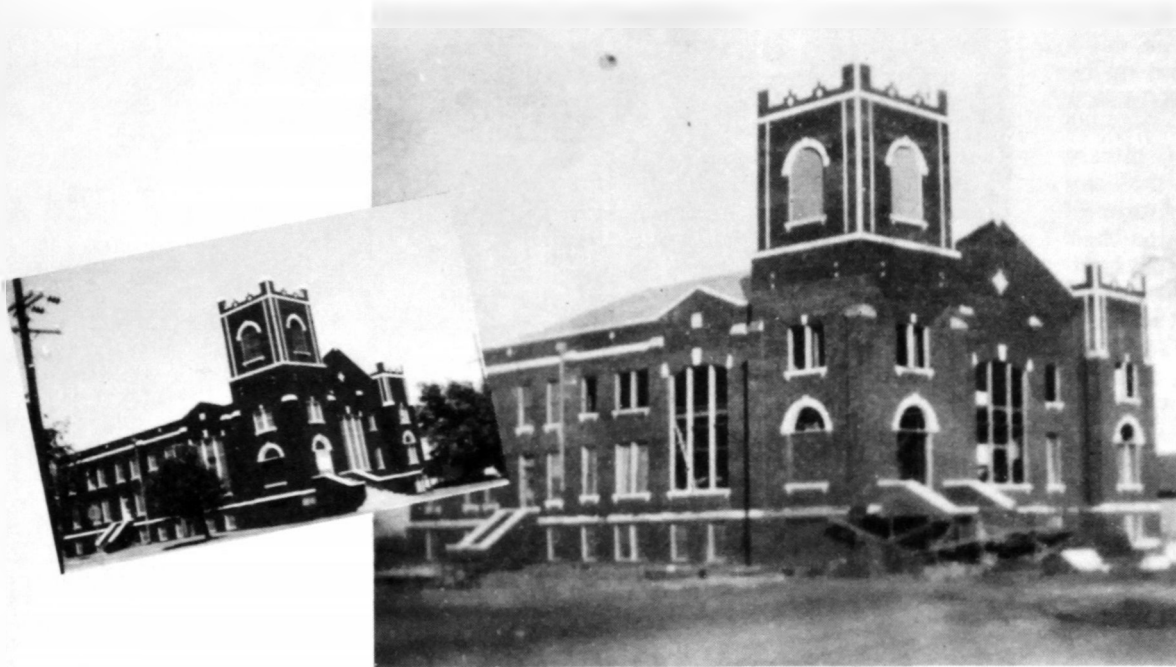
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*New Methodist Church  
is built where Willia and  
Edgar Watts once lived.*

## Reflections of the Ghost of Martha Methodist Church

*by Kate Jackson Lewis*

I am the ghost of Martha Methodist Church. I can remember when children sang and worshiped in my lovely old church building. Their parents did, too. Back then, children spent much time watching the sun shine through my stained-glass windows if they didn't understand the preacher's sermon. A portrait of the Good Shepherd is pictured in the center as if he were watching his sheep.

Three years ago, in June, the people closed my doors for the last time. I heard them say that church attendance had grown too low. It was a sad time for me after the children went away, but I still have a place to live. Now I've heard that my thirty-two colorful windows are up for sale. How drab this place will be without them. But, then the building may be made into an apartment house. My fine old church will lose its identity without its windows, nameplates, and furniture.

My builders, God-fearing pioneers, came here to this last great area with a dream to build a monument to their Almighty God. They sacrificed to build me even before they had the time or

means to build nice, comfortable homes for themselves. I was made of pine lumber, covered with brick and mortar and floored with fine hardwood. After the windows were installed, the rostrum carpeted, and my furniture covered with crushed velvet, the sanctuary was fit for a king.

My people completed me in 1926 at a cost of \$25,000, but my valuation went up to \$40,000 when the donated labor of these "salt of the earth people" was figured in.

I liked my first name, "Martha." Not only is it Biblical, but it is my town's name and it was named for Martha Medlin, who was responsible for the first organized school and for securing a charter for the new community. The worthy Christian miss was named post-mistress soon afterward. The mail came by stagecoach from Vernon, Texas.

Miss Medlin taught the first school, an enrollment of 12, in a half dugout. The subscription School was paid for by me here whose children attended it. One home to build afraid that children would lose their God. They tall grass, plowed a they had

furrow from his home to the school.

Other pioneer teachers at Martha were Miss Bertie Newcomb, Mr. Nye, Mr. Watkins. A. S. J. Shaw, well-known State Auditor, taught at a much later date than did the others.

When one of my people relates history, I "am all ears." Free lancers keep asking if Martha is a ghost town. Nelson Doughty's answer is, "No, Martha is a small town struggling to stay alive." Being a resident here and president of The First State Bank of Altus seems to be a desirable lifestyle for Doughty. The bank is family-owned and was operated, first at Martha and later moved to Altus. Several of the Doughtys still work there. Among them are Lee, Nelson's son, and Harold, one of Nelson's siblings.

Then, one day in 1964, I overheard an elderly lady member of the church telling a local teacher how the earliest Methodists served God when they migrated here from other states, "My preacher husband, J. F. Hosmer set up the first church and Sunday School in our homestead, one and one-half miles north of Martha. We had an organ, so we just invited the people

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to worship there." That was in 1888, according to Mrs. Hosmer. After her husband died, the lady married a Presbyterian minister, a Rev. McNamee, but continued teaching organ lessons for many years.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the church, 1939, three of its thirteen charter members were present--Mrs. McAnally, formerly Hosmer, Mrs. Lillie Cotney Cox, and F. M. Doughty. Mrs. McNamee was honored for serving thirty-nine years as teacher of the Adult Sunday School class.

Almost 500 people attended one or more of the three services held on that memorable day.

Generations have passed and friendships have ripened into romances that resulted in families. The church congregation increased, people prospered, and the town thrived. Then began a population decline brought about by a changing economy as people looked for jobs.

Now, it is a time for reminiscing for Martha Methodist Church members and friends. It began when the doors closed in 1981 and accelerated when Jack and

Velma Smiley bought the building. Nelson Doughty recalls that fifty members of his family were on the church's active roll at one time. "This church means a lot to me," he said. "All four of my children were baptized here." His daughter, Donna Cullen, Norman housewife, said that her earliest memory is of attending church camp at Red Rock Canyon at Hinton. "I'll miss the old church," she said. It's like losing an elderly friend."

As a friendly ghost, I feel a glowing pride for my people who selflessly dedicated themselves to serving their Lord.

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manifest when one of her families suffers the loss of a loved one. Not only do the members express sympathy and offer prayers in behalf of the mourners, but they make a special effort to help their friends go on living in faith and trust after the funeral is past.

These people are givers. From pioneer days when they had nothing to give but themselves and the work of their hands through days of plenty, the work of their church has flourished. Not always easy nor peaceful was the transition from the European system of church dues to the present method of free-will giving for the joy of it. In response to the question, "What is the annual budget of Peace Church?" an officer of the church, who prefers not to be named, explained, "We have none. If there is a need, we meet it when it comes."

Nowhere is the concern of the church more apparent than in its care and

encouragement of her youth. Approximately 80 confirmation classes have been conducted. The young people, after being instructed in Bible concepts and in the beliefs of their church as expressed in Luther's Catechism, are asked to make a commitment for themselves. Usually the children of the church are ready to take their vows of loyalty to God, to their Savior, and to the church in their early teen years. So they become confirmed members. Continued participation of the youth at Peace Church is reinforced by the leadership of their present pastor. The Rev. Don Brewer is head of Youth Activities for American Lutherans in Oklahoma.

Not always do individuals nor groups measure up to their own ideals. These people see themselves as sinners saved by grace. They feel in need of daily forgiveness. They believe in absolute reliance on Jesus Christ as their Savior. No human effort, they are convinced, can

bring about their salvation. Expressed in lay language, their attitudes seem to include reliance on a Power much higher than human, a need for daily forgiveness, careful training of their young, the expression of devotion through action, love for one another and for others around the world, and a sincere prayer life in the homes.

Could these attitudes, however imperfectly attained, be the reasons why this rural church has been active and strong through 90 years? Could these reasons explain why the "children of the church" tend to bring their spouses and their own children back to their rural church home even though they are no longer farmers?

Although they are not today a completely rural people, it just may be that the faith of their fathers reinforced by individual commitment keeps alive and active rural religion in one church in Western Oklahoma.

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