

Chapter III
 THE FIRST FIVE YEARS
 1855-1860



REV. A. H. ETHRIDGE

As has been stated in a previous chapter, Elder S. G. O'Brian was elected pastor of the Perry church upon its organization in 1855, about the first of March. This first pastor was an illustrious preacher. He came to Texas in 1852 and took the position as Professor of Mathematics in Baylor University at Independence. Although he was a capable teacher of Mathematics in Baylor, it took only one year to convince him that he ought to preach the Gospel since the Lord had called him to do that kind of work. Let Rev. Z. N. Morrell in his book, "Flowers and Fruits of Forty-Six Years in Texas" tell about how Elder O'Brian began his work. "In the fall of 1855, I received information that he was willing to resign his position in the school, where he received a salary of twelve hundred dollars, and accept a position as missionary or pastor, if one half this amount could be secured for him. I had never seen him, but this made a deep impression upon my mind, as we were greatly in need of ministers among our feeble churches, and I wrote to him and urged him to visit us. He came, and in the spring of 1854, settled in Waco, and for six years served that church (Waco) in connection with others in surrounding country".

The Waco (First Baptist) church was organized by Elder N. T. Byars, on the 31st. day of May, 1851, with four members. Elder Byars

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served as pastor until the arrival of Elder O'Brian, at which time the church numbered nineteen members. Under his ministry this church steadily increased in numbers and efficiency, until in 1860 it numbered one hundred and forty-four members. The other churches in the surrounding country Bro. O'Brian served in connection with his work with the Waco church were the Bosqueville Baptist church, organized in November, 1854, and the Perry church. The fourth church to be organized was the Bold Springs (West) church in 1858, and the Onion Creek (McGregor) church in the same year. Speegleville followed in 1859.

We believe more should be said about Elder O'Brian. He was a man of education, and believed, as a Christian, that it was our duty to train the mind for effective service in the Lord's vineyard. He was the first president of the Trinity River Associational Baptist High Male School at Waco in 1856. This school was later known as Waco University, and still later became a part of Baylor University, now at Waco. His appearance, in public or private circles, commanded respect. Something over medium height he weighed about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. His manners were simple, natural, and earnest. He possessed a free, open countenance and was so perfectly conscious of his own honesty of purpose that he did not suspect others.

About 1864 or '65 Elder O'Brian was called to serve the historic churches at Cameron, Port Sullivan, and Little River in Milam County. There is no doubt but that he had much to do with

the success of the Port Sullivan Baptist College, and organized several churches in that district which are testifying for Christ to this day. In September, 1867, Elder S. G. O'Brian died at the young age of forty-seven years. He was serving the three churches mentioned above at the time of his death.

In the McClain family which came from Perry, Illinois and settled here, was a fine young man by the name of John. John was born November 26, 1826, in Knox County, Tennessee. Very soon after his birth his parents moved to Illinois, where at the age of twenty-six, he became a Christian and joined the Baptist church at Perry. The Lord had not only saved the soul of young McClain, but had laid His hand upon his life as a minister of the Gospel. Before starting on the long journey to Texas, the church there licensed John to preach. He was not ordained until August 9, 1857 at Owl Creek, near Gatesville, upon the request of the Perry church. He was present at the organization of the Perry church, and was one of its charter members.

In 1857 Elder S. G. O'Brian resigned the pastorate at Perry, and the church began looking about for a worthy successor. The pulpit committee did not have to look far nor long in order to find someone who could take up the work and carry on. Even though the prophet of old, and Jesus later on said;—"a prophet is without honor in his own country", here was a young man who held the respect and confidence of his own people enough that he was elected pastor of his own home church. So it was that

Elder John McClain served lengthy pastorates of the Perry church, and for several years served as Missionary for the Leon River Baptist Association. Churches in Coryell, Bell, Williamson and Milam counties also shared in the usefulness of this great man of God.

"Uncle John McClain," for he was known by that name, in his later years lived at Eagle Springs, just over the line in Coryell County, Texas. Here he lived, where he could view his former fields of service, among an endless number of friends and relatives. Twenty-six years ago on June 13, he quietly passed over the Jordan to be with the Father, and friend, and loved ones.

Thus far we have intentionally talked more about the first two pastors of the Perry church, than we have about the work of the church itself. This has been done for three reasons. First, the actual work of the church is not known since the clerk's records can not be found; second, by giving to the reader an insight to the life of the first two pastors, they can easily see the type of work the church would be expected to do; third, here are two preachers who laid the foundations for the present work, and are therefore worthy of an honorable mention.

Soon after the organization of the church it joined the Trinity River Association, an Association which extended north and east over a very large territory. Four years later, in 1859, it joined the Leon River Baptist Association. During this year the church held a very promi-

nent place in the Association under the leadership of its fine pastor, Elder John McClain.

One of the great meetings held in the history of the church occurred soon after Elder McClain became pastor, Elder W. B. Eaves, one of the ministers who sat on the presbytery which ordained Elder McClain, assisted the pastor in the meeting. There were about fifty additions to the church, thirty-seven being by baptism. This is the first revival we have any record of being held in the church. We are sure, however, that some good ones were held under the leadership of Pastor O'Brian.

And so the curtain falls on the first five years with Christ in Perry Baptist church. We can sum the period up by saying that it was a prosperous one, and good that it was, for soon the dark clouds were to gather and hang heavy over the hearts of the little congregation.