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J. Ruth Farrar

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an honored man

The Days of Lucien Volney Rector

By J. Ruth Farrar

Lucien Volney Rector was born in Brazil, Indiana, on September 21, 1868, the son of a Union Veteran of the Civil War, Benjamin VanCleve Rector, and Elizabeth Shattuck Rector. (The Shattuck family history, MEMORIALS OF THE DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM SHATTUCK, was published in Boston in 1855.)

Helen May Duffy Rector was born March 22, 1877, at Fowler, Indiana, the eldest child of Michael and Jeannette Templeton Duffy, farmers and cattlemen. May's mother died when she was 17 and a senior in high school, so it was necessary for May to stay home to provide for several younger brothers and sisters. Her school awarded her an honorary certificate of completion since she had always earned high grades.

Lucien V. Rector attended Indiana State Normal School, Terre Haute, under difficult financial conditions. He transferred to Depauw University School of Theology, Greencastle, Indiana, and earned a Doctor of Divinity Degree and a teaching certificate. He became a pastor of Methodist churches in Indiana, serving seven years.

In 1901, Rector decided to come to Oklahoma Territory. The 33-year-old bachelor arrived in Weatherford, still the end of the Choctaw Railroad, having made the long journey in a boxcar with his mare, Molly, a tent, hay, and a basic survival gear. He found a relinquished claim in the Chapel Hill School District eleven miles west and two miles south of Weatherford or seven miles southeast of the present location of Clinton, which hadn't been founded yet. Chapel Hill needed a minister and a teacher, so

Rector occupied his claim and began to "prove it up." He lived in his tent until, with the help of George Giles and other neighbors, he was able to build a two-story house with dirt floor.

Rector returned to Fowler, Indiana, in September of 1902 to marry Helen May Duffy on 9-17-02. Even though May's father, Michael Duffy, liked Rector, he certainly didn't like losing his eldest daughter, who had been "mothering" his children, managing his household, and helping him with his farms, cattle, and elevators. Worst of all, he was fearful of her going to that "Wild Oklahoma Territory." Despite objections, Rev. and Mrs. Rector returned by train to their new home at Chapel Hill, as it was time for school to begin, and the first Chapel Hill one-room school building had to be finished.

Mrs. Rector was a musician, and her pump organ was shipped by her family to the railroad station in Weatherford. Lucien went to Weatherford, loaded the organ on a wagon, and started home on the rough trail. On a steep bank of Little Deer Creek, the wagon overturned, dislodging the organ. Lucien couldn't reload the heavy organ alone. After a while, two young men on horseback offered their services—at a price! They would help, they said, only if they could borrow the organ that night for a neighborhood dance. This was quite a dilemma for a Methodist

minister, who strongly opposed dancing. Since he was given no choice, they delivered the organ to the young men's family home and Rector went home empty-handed, wondering if his new bride would ever see her organ again. Fortunately, a few days later the young men brought the organ to their home intact.

Rector helped to complete the building of the Chapel Hill District School in late 1902 and became its first teacher at a salary of \$35 a month. He conducted church services in the school building until the Chapel Hill Methodist Church was built. The Rectors held prayer services and sing-meets in their home with Lucien leading the singing and Mrs. Rector serving as organist. Their home was the setting for many marriages involving early-day families.

Good friends of the Rectors were Dr. C. H. and Mrs. Laressa Cox McBurney. Mr. McBurney taught in the nearby Lone Star rural school and later became a medical doctor in Clinton; his wife published poetry and biographies. Another good friend was Thomas J. Mabry, who taught at the neighboring Prairie View School and later became Governor of New Mexico.

Rev. Rector "supplied" in many early-day Methodist churches and continued to do so all his life in Western Oklahoma. Mrs. Rector served as organist and taught Bible classes





several years. One of the early-day churches was at Parkersburg (nothing remains today except the cemetery), a booming railroad town, which had eleven saloons and not one church building. Rector taught school here beginning in 1906 and held church services in the schoolhouse. He traveled by horse and buggy eight miles morning and afternoon, fording the Washita River at Rocky Crossing. When the Washita flooded, he had to leave his horse and buggy at the railroad bridge across the Washita and walk the rest of the way to Parkersburg.

While living at Chapel Hill, the Rectors had three children, all born at home in Oklahoma Territory (all of whom survive). They are Ruth Farrar, retired public-school teacher formerly of Weatherford, now of Yukon; Miriam Fly, retired piano teacher of Fort Collins, Colorado; and John Duffy Rector, farmer and electrician of Hammon.

In 1903, Lucien's mother, Elizabeth Shattuck Rector, came by train from Indiana to see her newborn grandchild, Ruth. She was intent on making her visit a surprise. She arrived in Clinton late at night and hired a hack to take her to her son's farm home. On arrival, she knocked on the door and Lucien called out, "Who's there?" There was no answer as Elizabeth had a hearing problem. Again, Lucien called out, and

again there was no response. Since there were still outlaws and horse thieves riding the countryside, Lucien took his gun and was prepared to fire when he called out the third time. "Who's there?" and his mother answered for the first time. It was a very shaken son who welcomed her into his home.

Lucien's father, sixty-five-year-old Benjamin VanCleve Rector, made a rather spectacular journey in 1909 to visit his three grandchildren after his wife had died. He had an opportunity to see land the Atchison-Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was promoting in the Texas Panhandle by going on a special train from Chicago to the Texas Panhandle. He decided not to buy the land, but did decide he wanted to see the Alamo. He set out afoot and walked over seven hundred miles to San Antonio to visit the Alamo, birthplace of the Texas Republic. The area was very sparsely settled, and he spent most of his nights under an open sky. After completing his visit to San Antonio, he again walked over seven hundred miles to Lucien's home for his family visit. It is believed that he returned home to Indiana by train from Clinton.

Even though the Rectors had "proved up" their small acreage in the Chapel Hill School District, the land was poor and unproductive. In late 1909, Rector found rich land for sale in the Quartermaster Creek-Washita River Valley,

seven miles northeast of Hammon, and took possession of it on January 1, 1910. He purchased the first quarter-section from Red Bird, Indian widow of Spotted Horse, and her daughter, Mary Walking Woman, and son, Roman Nose. He also leased eighty acres of Indian land on the Washita River, known as the Spotted Horse Picnic Grounds. (Later he purchased additional acres to the west of Quartermaster School District. The Charles Whiteskunk family lived across the creek to the east of the Rectors. The Rectors had a very "good neighbor" relationship with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian families and welcomed them to use the Spotted Horse Picnic Grounds for family reunions, fishing, swimming, and pow-wows. Some of their good friends were Red Bird's family, the Whiteskunks, Chief White Shield, the Fred Standing Waters, the Roman Noses, the Howling Waters, and the Homer Harts.

Rector started building a small three-room house on the new farm in 1910, hauling the building materials from the Clinton railroad station. He moved his family and cattle to their new home in 1911 in time for the children to enroll in the Quartermaster School fall session. Later on, Ruth was sent into Hammon for her eighth and ninth years to board and room with the Rev. H. J. Kliever family, early-day

Mennonite missionaries to the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indians. The Kliewers spoke German in the home part of the time, so Ruth enrolled in German I in the Hammon High School. She went to church with the Kliewers on Sundays and sang hymns in Cheyenne with the Indians. When the children became 15, 13, and 11 years of age, they drove a Model T Ford to the Hammon Schools.

Through the years, the Rectors developed the land, built a large concrete in-ground silo, planted an orchard, and cultivated a large irrigated garden. They added six rooms to the original three-room house, plus a three-room concrete basement, laid with copper tubing to bring running water into the house from the cistern below the basement. When their son, John, returned home from his studies at Coyne Electrical Institute in Chicago, he wired the house for electricity, and they purchased a 32-volt generator. He also built a wind charger, providing an additional six volts. Their farmhouse was one of the first in Western Oklahoma to have running water, a modern bathroom, electric iron, and toaster. The concrete cellar was used for a tornado shelter, and for the storage of fresh and canned vegetables, fruits, meat, and eggs. They cured their own hams and raised their own bees, furnishing all friends and neighbors with free honey.

The Rectors were progressive thinkers--many years ahead of their time. They were proponents of the women's vote and firmly believed that all individuals--regardless of nationality, color, gender, or religion--should be allowed equal opportunity in all pursuits of life. They were disturbed and angry to find it necessary to give protection to their Black hired hands, a couple who were the only permanent Black residents of the area for several years. They were also distressed to find that their granddaughters would not be allowed to play basketball, enroll in shop, woodworking, engineering courses, and other studies reserved for boys only. They were avid readers and always encouraged continuing education as the means to a more successful life.

In the horrible Washita River flood on April 4, 1934, the Rector family was involved in the rescue of two neighbors. A neighbor, Claude Parks, came to tell them that the Laurence Taylor home had been washed downriver and that

screams had been heard. The Rectors--along with neighbors K. T. Richardson, Claude Parks, Ed McCall, and Gladys McCall--quickly built a heavy-duty raft of railroad ties, tied together with rope and steel wire. They used the downed telegraph wires to hook onto the raft. John Rector poled his way to the swirling waters of the Washita to rescue Laurence Taylor and his little daughter from one-half of the roof of their house. Mrs. Taylor and another daughter had already been swept to their deaths from the other half. Mr. Taylor was so traumatized by having seen his wife and small daughter go crashing to their deaths that he did not want to be rescued. John had quite a job removing them from the housetop caught in the cottonwood trees--and a worse job was approaching! The raft caught on a submerged hay baler with tangled baling wire while being pulled in. John had to go into the vicious swirling flood waters underneath the raft several times to remove the tangled baling wire holding the raft. His mission was successful; however, seventeen victims died in this flood in the Hammon-Butler area.

On October 11, 1949, 81-year-old Lucien V. Rector celebrated one of the happiest days of his life at the last Chapel Hill school reunion. This story was published in the 10-16-49 SUNDAY OKLAHOMAN and other newspapers. Thirty-five of his students from the 1902-1904 classes attended, with their husbands, wives, children, board members, and neighbors. Rev. Rector was invited to ring the school bell and call the roll for the last time. Rev. and Mrs. Rector were honored with speeches, music, and feasting during the day.

Rev. Rector died at an Elk City hospital in 1955, a few days before his eighty-seventh birthday. He had always enjoyed good health except for blindness in one eye from a childhood accident and near-blindness in his other eye the last few years of his life. Mrs. Rector died in 1957 at age 80 and was buried beside Lucien in Hammon's Red Hill Cemetery. ■

J. RUTH RECTOR FARRAR, SOSU alumna, is a retired teacher now living at the Spanish Cove Retirement Village in Yukon. This memoir is her second published work in WESTVIEW.

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