

"PREACHER TOMMY"

by Connee Brayboy

Much has been written about the Indians of Robeson County. They are known for many attributes. Foremost among them is for being devoutly religious. Indeed, several persons have come from the midst of the Indian people whose entire lives have revolved around the spiritual well being of mankind. Such a man is Rev. T. M. Swett—a man in a statue, yet humble in spirit.

In talking with Rev. Swett one is amazed at his vast knowledge of the Bible. He is quick to quote the appropriate scripture and even quicker to "reveal" the meaning of it. Often during conversation his face lights up in one of the most sincere, encompassing smiles I've ever seen. His speech is flowered with the phrases and terminology from our past—that Early Elizabethan brogue adopted from the early English colonists and handed down from generation to generation. He is very impressive with his smile, vast knowledge, simple faith, combined with his dedication to the winning of souls.

During his seventy-six years in Robeson County, "Preacher Tommy" has touched the lives of countless people. He has been an inspiration to many—ministered to thousands—had compassion for and been a friend to all who came into contact with him. His life has been an example of unceasing

dedication and love coupled with a desire to serve his fellowman.

Not actually a native of Robeson County, Rev. Swett was born in 1898 to the late Frank Swett and Maggie Owens Swett, both natives of South Carolina (near Latta). In 1900 Frank and Maggie Swett moved to Robeson County where their son, Rev. T. M. Swett, has remained. The late Frank Swett served for many years as a Deacon at Little Zion Church which was located near Shoehill Creek outside of Maxton.

Rev. Swett married the late Beulah Strickland in 1916. She was the daughter of the late Noah and Pricilla Strickland, both natives of Robeson County. They moved to the Rowland area and spent their first years together on what is called the "Smith's place." In 1925 they moved to Rev. Swett's present location, off Highway 74.

Rev. Swett said he "married a Methodist girl." Having said that, we went into a discussion about the early Missionaries. Rev. Swett recalled that Mr. Henry (H. H.) Lowry was the man who began Methodism among the Indians.

Marrying a Methodist girl may have been a contributing factor to Rev. Swett's joining the Methodist Conference upon being "called to preach." He confessed Christianity in 1919.

In 1922 he began preaching the gospel in the Lumbee Methodist Conference. He first served the New Bethel Circuit, consisting of Rowland and Fairmont, etc. He helped to establish the New Hope Methodist Church in South Carolina, near the location of his birth. His 20 years in the Lumbee Methodist Conference included pastoring at New Hope in South Carolina; Union Chapel Methodist Church, New Prospect Methodist Church, and Cherokee Chapel Methodist Church, all in Robeson County; and Macedonia Methodist Church in Hoke County. He exhibited humble pride in revealing the fact that he had ministered in all the churches in the Lumbee Methodist Conference, except Hope Well Methodist Church. Smiling softly he said, "Of course, I have been on a funeral at Hope Well, but I was never pastor there, you understand. I have served on funerals at all denominations in the county—including the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)."

It is easy to understand why Rev. Swett went into the ministry—aside from being called by God, he has a love for church work. In conversing with him it is very difficult to sway the topic from Christianity and the foundation of the church. He seems to apply the basic principles of Christianity to everything around him. His

entire being seems centered around his "God called work" of living the principles of Christianity.

I was surprised to learn, however, that Rev. Swett, who has been referred to as that "old John the Baptist" began his ministry in the Methodist Church. He spoke quite emphatically and emotionally about being referred to as "John the Baptist." Said he, "Thank God, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, telling people to get ready. I tell them He sees something good in every one of us. And He does too!"

"The important thing is to stay with it. That's what I've always tried to do...aiming at it as I go—like Paul," he continued.

After twenty years in the Methodist denomination, Rev. Swett became a Baptist. He, as always, was very specific in stating when the decision to change denominations was made. He told me that in the Methodist Conference the Bishop decides where the pastor is to go. He was, at the time of his decision to change, being moved from one church to another. "I was riding along when the thought came to me: 'Who am I doing it for?'"

So, in the fall of 1942 he joined the Burnt Swamp Baptist Association. One of the reasons he stated for this change was that the Baptist congregation makes the final decisions, whereas the Methodist Bishops decide. He spoke of the tears and sad feelings involved in departures from one church to another. The decision to change was not made, I am sure, without much meditation and prayer.

He began his work in the

Baptist Association as part time pastor of Bear Swamp where he serves as full time pastor today. While serving Bear Swamp he also served Mt. Olive Baptist Church from 1942-1947 and from 1949-1966. Mt. Olive Baptist Church from 1945-48; Gray Pond Baptist Church and Beulah Baptist Church. He also served Deep Branch Baptist Church as part time pastor from 1945 until 1972. Only recently has the pace of Rev. Swett's life slowed down. He has been full-time pastor of Bear Swamp for only four years, serving 30 years as part time pastor.

When asked how much formal education he had, Rev. Swett replied, "It's very limited. I finished the 5th grade." This fact, however, is not apparent in conversing with him. This fact may have been instrumental in his realization of the need for education. He quoted an old friend who told him one time, "Education can help to develop one into becoming an intelligent person—it can also go the other way and make a fool out of some."

"Common sense," he continued, "has a big place in one's life. But education helps to sharpen the mind. A saved and educated man is a real tool." He stressed the up lifting of God and mankind. His six surviving sons and one daughter, evidently, believed what he was preaching and teaching. They have all obtained various post secondary degrees and all lead quite successful lives.

James F. Swett was the eldest son of T. M. and Maggie Owens Swett. He was born in 1918. He graduated from Pembroke High School as Valedictorian of his class. He then went to the Indian Normal School ("Old Normal")

as Rev. Swett still refers to it) after which he obtained a B. S. Degree in Chemistry from the University of Virginia. He returned to Pembroke where he began teaching eighth grade at Pembroke High. Before his first year of teaching was completed, he volunteered for the Army Air Corps—this being during World War II. He received his wings and began flying B-24s, B25s and B-26s. He was flying transport from Puerto Rico to Africa when his plane crashed in the Caribbean Sea in 1944. He was married to the former Mary Porter, a then resident of Robeson County.

The second child of Rev. and Mrs. Swett was a daughter, Vergie. She died as an infant, being approximately 8 months old.

The third child was Furman S. Swett who is now 53 years of age. Furman was graduated from Pembroke High School as valedictorian of his class. He attended Pembroke Normal School then went to Chicago, Ill. to attend an Electronics School. After Electronics School he began working for Western Electric in Chicago. He also entered the Army and spent three years on duty over seas. After his tour in the armed forces he again worked for Western Electric. In the late 1950s he began employment with Associate Electronics as Regional Sales Manager. He later became employed with Linkert Electronics, a subsidiary of General Telephone and Electronics. Presently he is National Sales Director for Linkert Electronics in San Carlos, Calif. where he and his wife, the former Gladys Powers of Chicago, Ill. reside.

Vardell Swett, 51, is presently pastor of Terryville Congregation Church in Terryville, Conn. He was the fourth child of Rev. and Mrs. Swett. He also entered the armed forces shortly after completion of high school. Rev. Swett had three sons on duty overseas during the same time. Vardell attended Pembroke State College for one semester and then transferred to Stetson University in Deland, Florida. During his school years at Stetson he was known locally as the Bible salesman. He received a B. S. Degree from Stetson. He then went to Eastern Theology Seminary where he received a Bachelor of Divinity Degree. For 18 years he served as pastor of a church in upstate New York. Vardell and his wife, Audrey, have four children.

Rev. Swett said that he raised two sets of children. The second set begins with Purnell Swett, now 42 years of age. This was said because there was a 9 years difference in the ages of Vardell and Purnell.

Purnell graduated also from Pembroke High School and Pembroke State College. After which he taught in the Robeson County Public School System. He has served as principal of Rex-Rennett School. He received his Mas-

ter's Degree in Public School Administration from Western Carolina University. He is presently employed as the Associate Superintendent of the Robeson County Schools. He is married to the former Annette Locklear of Pembroke.

Dorothy Swett Blakely, who is 39 years of age, was the only surviving girl. She is an elementary physical education teacher in St. Peters, Mo. She received her B. S. Degree from Pembroke State College and has done some graduate work. She has taught also in the public school system of Robeson County.

Rev. and Mrs. Swett's seventh child was Tommy Dorsey Swett who is 37 years old. Tommy, too, graduated from Pembroke High School and Pembroke State College. He obtained his Master's of Education at East Carolina University. He is presently Director of Special Programs at Pembroke State University. He was also the top vote getter in the recent nominations for members of the Robeson County Board of Education. He is married to the former Otha-C. Brewington.

The baby in the Swett house was James Bruce Swett. He also finished at Pembroke High School. He attended Pembroke State for a summer, however, he decided to receive training in areas other than those chosen by his brothers and sister. Bruce went to Fayetteville Technical Institute where he became a machinist. Presently he is a Representative for the American Family Life Assurance Co. Bruce is well known for his role in the gospel singing group, the New Harpstones. He is married to the former Peggy McGirt.

Said Rev. Swett after I commented on the educational accomplishments of his children, "I always encouraged college. But I did not insist. I gave my views, but abided by their decision."

The late Beulah Swett departed this life in 1967. In 1968 Rev. Swett married the former Clatie Oxendine and she and he reside on his residence near Highway 74.

Talking with Rev. Swett was a refreshing change for me. I was reminded anew of the always sustaining faith that Indians in general have. We pay great homage to those Native Americans who have become successful economically, and especially those who rise in the political arena. I contend that our success is deeply indebted in those great church leaders who have kept us spiritually well by being an example of love and offering a promise of life. So has been the faith of our fathers since first we adopted the religion brought to us by the missionaries 200 years ago. Such a man is Rev. T. M. Swett.



Rev. T. M. Swett

REFLECTIONS By Alta Oxendine

"The first thing I notice about a person is their facial expression."

The second thing is their personality.

The third thing is their clothes.

The last thing is their color."

Besides helping individuals to develop basic reading and writing skills and helping persons find solutions to personal or family problems, I enjoy the opportunity to get to know other workers also engaged in this process of helping people to help themselves.

After staff meeting one day at the Center, one of the other literacy workers and I were carrying on an informal conversation. As we were talking, she casually made the statement above. To me it sounded rather profound, so I asked her if I could quote it for my column. She seemed flattered.

When I get to know people, I forget about their back grounds. But, to make my point clear, the words above were uttered by a sincere young white woman who grew up in Robeson County. Since we met last spring, she's been

treating me the same as if I, too, were in my early twenties instead of my late forties. No wonder I enjoy being around her!

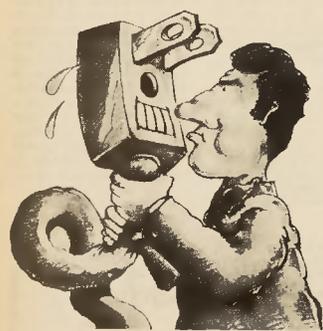
She also reminds me of my cowgirl cousin, Betty, from Montana—back in the days when we were college students sharing a room with our aunt and uncle in Emporia, Kansas.

I had transferred for the University of Montana, but it was Betty's first year away from home and the horses—she loved. Since she could no longer ride horseback every day, she plastered her half of the wall with huge pictures of horses and covered her table with miniature horses of every kind and color. Like my friend at the Center, Betty enjoyed writing and many other activities. But she stayed home on the ranch the following year. That fall she rode with her brother on the annual cattle roundup, where she met Lee, a cowboy who the following June became her husband. Betty and Lee, whose son and daughter are now grown, live in a trailer across the road from my parents' somewhat modernized home stead cabin, moved to that site around 100 years ago. Having Lee and Betty just across the way has been a real comfort to me, since I am about 2700 miles away.

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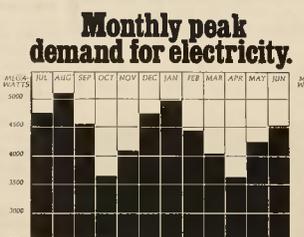


What to do about the cost of electricity. Besides just complaining.



load period occurred on August 25. Whenever it comes this year, it determines the maximum generating capacity we have to supply. During recent years, peak load has continued to climb, requiring us to invest in more generating capacity. And with building costs higher than ever before, eventually this means higher prices for your electricity.

You don't want that. And neither do we. The trick is to keep the peak load as low as possible.



The best way to help do that is to use less electricity between the peak load hours of 9 AM and 10 PM during the hottest months, June through September. (As you can see from the chart, summer usage starts getting high around 9 AM and stays high until 10 PM).

Do your laundry either

during early morning or late evening hours, preferably with cold water.

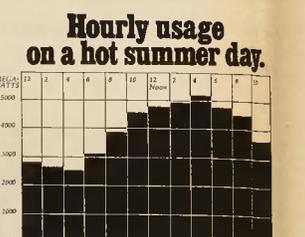
When you have to use the dishwasher, wait until it's full and turn it on just before you go to bed.

Try to take showers before 9 AM or after 10 PM.

Try serving cooler meals; avoid cooking as much as possible during peak load.

And finally, keep your air conditioner at the warmest possible comfort setting.

Of course, these and other conservation measures we



talk about will always help you keep your costs down.

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And, in the long run, the less we have to spend to make electricity, the less you'll have to spend to use it.



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