

Chapter IV

MISSIONS ACCOMPLISHED

No church has had as many "failures" in missions they have started as has Kelham. Kelham made an attempt to start at least ten missions that were not successful. At times the wrong location was chosen; perhaps another Baptist church already existed nearby. At times population shifted, and the need for the mission ceased to exist. Some missions were started in areas where there were not really enough people nearby. Many of these were abandoned for one reason or another. Even in these so-called failures, we must ask, were they really failures? Later, churches were started at the same locations in which Kelham attempted missions. Many found Christ in these "failed" missions. "Failed" missions were not anything for which Kelham should be ashamed. Many of them served the purpose for which they were established, even though only for a short time.

Although no church in Oklahoma City has had more mission failures than Kelham, the converse is also true. No church in Oklahoma City—perhaps in the whole state of Oklahoma—has established more *successful* missions than has Kelham.

In the early 1930s, R. C. Howard established what he called "Gospel Teams." These teams usually consisted of a group of laymen from the home church who went into surrounding areas and in schoolhouses and other available buildings and presented the gospel of Jesus Christ. From the reports given by these Gospel Teams, it soon became evident that the fields were ripe for the harvest and that

Christians should therefore fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples.

One of the members, who had recently built a modest four-room house not near any other church, said to R. C. one day, "Brother Howard, could we establish a Sunday School in my home on Sunday afternoons?" R. C. replied that they certainly could. The following Sunday afternoon, a group with three or four teachers met at the woman's home. The member had assembled eighteen or twenty people together, mostly children. After stating the purpose for the gathering, the group was divided into three or four classes. After teaching the lesson for the day, R. C. brought a brief message to the people and announced that the Sunday School would be held each Sunday afternoon in the future.

The following Wednesday night the matter was brought before the church, and the church voted to establish this as a mission point, extending the arm of the church. The church also elected a superintendent of the mission Sunday School. The first mission station, known as North Mission, was on its way.¹

After a few weeks attendance had grown to more than forty and the four-room house was overrun. A teacher would take four or five pupils out to a car and teach the pupils in this makeshift classroom. Soon the necessity for a house in which to meet became apparent. The church agreed to buy the material to build a twenty-by-thirty-foot building with a dirt floor. The bill for the material was \$325, including the roof. One of the men's classes agreed to build the building. The woman who had initiated the work offered two lots for a building.

¹Howard, *Local Mission Stations*, (Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, n.d.).

The Women's Missionary Union agreed to provide a chicken dinner if the men would build the building. On the appointed day about fifteen men and the pastor went out to construct the building. Although the builders were slowed considerably after dinner, the house was still finished before nightfall. The following week, benches were built for the building. An old pulpit was salvaged; someone donated a baby bed for the nursery; and the mission was in operation. From that time, on a regular basis, Sunday School was held in the building and a short sermon or exhortation was delivered by the superintendent. Prayer meeting was held on Thursday evening so that the pastor of the home church could meet with them. R. C. Howard deemed this a must for every mission station.²

Several years later this building was moved to another location in the city that held greater promise.³ Only future historians can decide whether the North Mission was a "failure" or a success, but for those seventy-five who made professions of faith there is no question that the work succeeded.

After the first mission was well under way, "an intensified mission spirit broke out" in the church.⁴ Two or three members went to the pastor and talked about establishing missions at other points. One young man and his wife and a helper or two, with the approval of the church and the pastor, went to a schoolhouse several miles out in the country and started a Sunday School that met on Sunday afternoons. However, "the roads were so muddy in the winter that a car could not get there and the work was abandoned."⁵ This is likely what was known as the

²Ibid.

³This became the building for the Sixty-Third Street Mission, established in March 1935 (*Baptist Messenger*, May 18, 1939).

⁴Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

"Mexican Mission."

Not many months elapsed until the man who had been superintendent at the first mission felt that someone else could do a better job there. He wanted to move on to a new field. A schoolhouse, located "some two miles from the home church on the same side of town and not close to any other church,"⁶ was chosen for another mission site. With the permission of the trustees, an afternoon Sunday School was started in the basement of the schoolhouse. This was called Crooked Oak Mission. After establishment of the mission, R. C. Howard held a two-week revival, resulting in twenty-seven professions of faith, most of whom were baptized. Ground was leased, and a forty-by-fifty-foot tabernacle, with sawdust floor, was erected. The building cost \$1,200.

The mission continued to grow, and about "200 souls were baptized from the mission."⁷ When the home church deemed the mission "large enough to be self-sustaining,"⁸ it was recommended that it become a church. The church was organized in 1934 with 122 charter members. It was called Eastern Avenue Baptist Church. The name was later changed to Victory Baptist Church, located at 2205 Southeast Fifteenth. Victory, in turn, sponsored Sooner Mission, which became the Sooner Baptist Church. This church established the Westminister Road Mission. Victory Church is still a functioning Baptist church in 1989.

R. C. Howard, "hearing of the discontinuation of an Interdenominational Sunday school, six or seven blocks from our State Capitol,"⁹ and the pending sale of the

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

building, went out on the day of the sale. The building was to be offered to the highest bidder by sealed bids. The building was about twenty-by-thirty-feet with a sawdust floor. According to his own account, R. C. figured someone might bid seventy-five dollars or possibly seventy-six dollars; so he bid seventy-seven dollars. His bid was the highest; so he bought the building.

The following Wednesday night Howard told the church what he had done, and they voted to reimburse him for the building. The building was in a poor location because of muddy conditions; so with ropes, a Ford car, and several helpers, the building was moved to a better location. Located on rented land, the church's fourth mission, to be known as Capitol Mission, was established.¹⁰

This mission was set up like the previous ones, with a Sunday School superintendent and teachers from the home church. Young preachers with no place to preach began to appeal to Brother Howard for a location. Many of these young preachers got their training in this and other Kelham missions.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Howard's missionary spirit comes through in his comment on this occasion: "One of our largest churches in the city at the time I bought this, refused to buy it or to have a mission, saying we didn't need over four churches in Oklahoma City, or five at the outside." The 1987 Annual of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma listed eighty-three churches reporting in the Capital City Association!

Capitol Mission

Capitol Church, 1951

In 1941 the Capitol Baptist Mission was constituted into the Capitol Church, with eighty-seven charter members. All property was given to the new church. A new building located at Northeast Twenty-eighth and Phillips was completed and dedicated in 1948. The pastor at that time was W. A. Squyres, father of Ray Squyres, current Kelham member.

Capitol sponsored two missions, Ridgecrest and Crestline. In 1954 Capitol had five hundred members with an average of three hundred and ten in Sunday School.¹¹ In later years, due to a shift in the population, Immanuel, the mother church of Kelham, merged with Capitol.

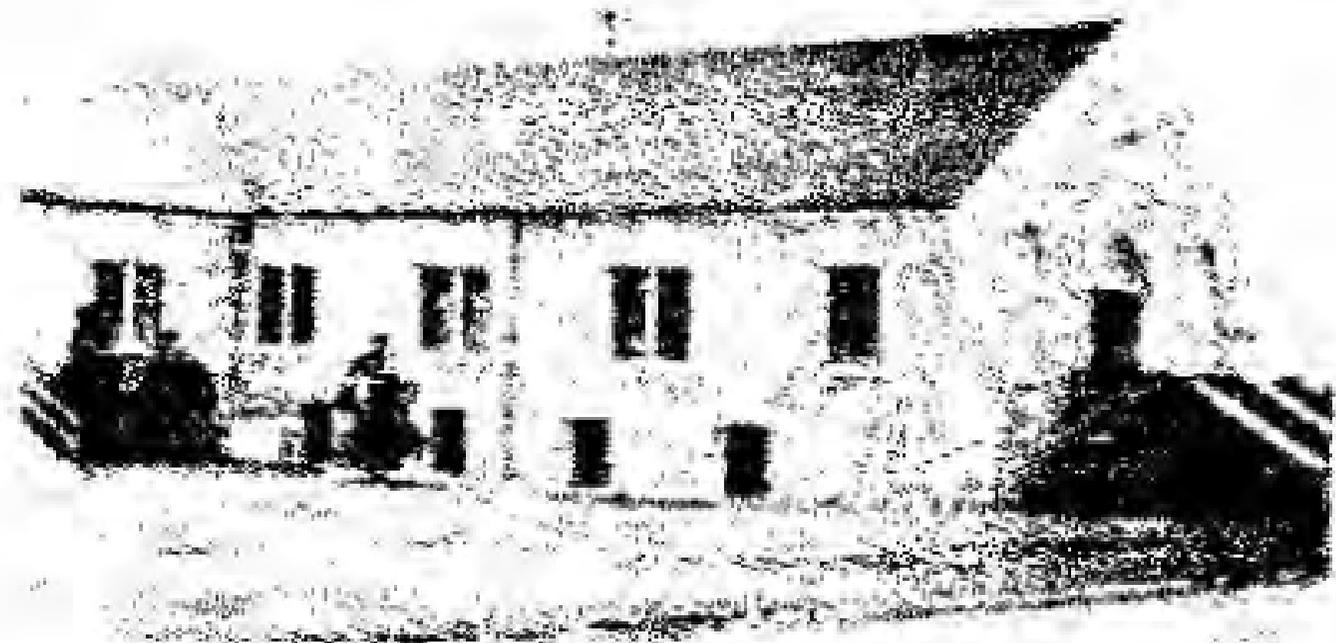
The fifth mission commenced by Kelham was located in the northwest section of the city. There was no Baptist church within two or three miles. Some people in the neighborhood sent word that if Kelham would build a building, the people would procure the lots.¹² The church voted to establish a mission there and to move the building from the first mission site, located on north Kelham Avenue. The people bought a tax-title lot for fifty dollars

¹¹"Capitol Baptists Plan Ceremony," *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 1, 1954.

¹²Howard, *Local Mission Stations*, recounted that this mission arose out of concern for an impoverished widow lady who told him she could not afford the \$1.75 it cost to take her children to Sunday School by streetcar.



Capitol Misslon



Capitol Church, 1951

CAPITOL BAPTIST
CHURCH

1948

DEDICATED TO GOD

PASTOR W. A. SOUTHWELL

and the building was moved onto the lot. A three-week revival was held and forty-eight people were baptized from this mission. Within a month the members outgrew the original building; so a new auditorium forty-by-fifty-feet was built, and the original building, "the whole thing, bell and all,"¹³ was moved around to the back to be used for Sunday School purposes.

This mission was known as the Sixty-Third Street Mission and also as University Heights Mission. Established in 1935, this mission became University Heights Church in 1942. It was located at 701 Northwest Sixty-third. Later it became Westernwood Church, located at 13024 north Western Avenue.¹⁴

University Heights
Mission, 1951

University Heights Church, 1939

In December of 1934 the sixth mission was started. It was known as Foster Mission.¹⁵ It was located in the southeastern section of the city, in the newly developing oil field. This mission was first established in a home. Later a good tract of land was donated by Henry Vernon Foster,

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Howard noted that the first superintendent of this mission later surrendered to preach. One of his first converts was his own eight-year-old son, who himself surrendered to preach.

¹⁵*Baptist Messenger*, May 18, 1939.



University Heights
Mission



University Heights Church

president of the Indian Territory Illuminating Oil Company.¹⁶ This company brought in the discovery well on December 4, 1928, in the Oklahoma City field, when Oklahoma City Number One began production. The mission was located at Southeast Fifty-fifth Street and Foster Road.

Foster Mission, 1939

¹⁶Howard (*Local Mission Stations*) later reflected that he had made a mistake in not asking for a whole block of land, instead of the half block Foster's representative offered.



Foster Mission, 1939

After receiving the land, construction was immediately started on a building that was forty-by-fifty-feet with a wooden floor and a shingle roof. The cost of the building was about twenty-five hundred dollars. It was completed in February 1935.¹⁷ A. E. Teem, who was killed in the service in World War II, was the first minister.¹⁸ Within a year the congregation outgrew the original building, and an educational building was added. In 1940 Foster Mission was constituted into a church. The name was later changed to Twin Oaks Baptist Church, and they relocated to Southeast Twenty-ninth and High. Still later the name was changed to Crossroads Baptist Church, at 929 Southeast Twenty-ninth.

The next mission project Kelham began, located near the downtown area, where no organized church work was being done, was known as the Downtown Mission.¹⁹ This was among a very destitute group of people in the heart of the Depression. A licensed preacher found a vacant store building in which he wished to start a mission. The matter was brought before the church, and it was voted to start a mission and sponsor the preacher there. Howard lamented, "We could only pay him \$5.00 a week, but he threw papers and did other things to help out."²⁰

Several revivals were held at the mission, and one man, who later became pastor of a Baptist church near Oklahoma City, was saved. Another Baptist church started a mission only a few blocks away; so Kelham's mission was abandoned.

¹⁷*Baptist Messenger*, May 19, 1939.

¹⁸Arvil E. Teem is mentioned in detail on page 81 in Chapter V, "A Prince Has Fallen."

¹⁹Kelham also supported Brother Ballew in the Kiamichi Mountains beginning in 1935 (Mary Fike, "History of Kelham Baptist Church").

²⁰Howard, *Local Missions*.

The other church operated their mission for a few months and then quit. Was this Kelham mission a failure? One man, who became a licensed minister, was saved, and he was instrumental in the salvation of many more. A failure? Hardly, by eternal standards.

The eighth mission, Irving, was established in December 1937.²¹ A committee searching for a building in which to meet was unable to locate anything. Kelham's people decided to bring Mohammed to the mountain. "We decided that the next best thing, until we could find a place, was to take our cars and go down . . . and take them over to our home church, and then take them back again. . . . Sometimes as many as 15 to 18 cars would go, and sometimes it was necessary to make two trips."²²

When a building finally was rented, it was close to the downtown area. Irving Mission "was organized in a little store building," according to Brother Howard.²³ In 1938, Kelham "bought a seven-room dwelling" at 308 Northeast Seventh for the mission, and it quickly outgrew it. In 1939, the Sunday School attendance was "over 250 per Sunday" and "more than 150 have been saved at this mission." Irving rapidly grew, and even though there were as many as two hundred in attendance and one hundred and four baptized in Kelham through this mission in 1945, there were setbacks. The neighborhood was in transition, and there was another Baptist church located in the area. Out of this mission came several Baptist preachers, two of

²¹Irving Mission sprang from the missionary heart of a member of Kelham, a former foreign mission volunteer who had been turned down because of health. As a schoolteacher at Irving School her heart went out to the hundreds of children she saw who had no Sunday School or church life. She approached Brother Howard and placed a burden on his heart for the area.

²²Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

²³*The Baptist Messenger*, May 18, 1939.

whom became full-time pastors in Oklahoma City churches.²⁴

Irving Mission constituted as a church in June 1946.²⁵ Later that year the church was able to purchase the building of what was "formerly the Maywood Presbyterian Church."²⁶ Kelham "voted to give them \$200, and individual pledges were made for \$335."

Irving Church (formerly Maywood Presbyterian Church)

On April 18, 1956, Irving voted 58 to 8 to sell their deteriorating building.²⁷ The building was bought by New Zion Baptist Church for "\$8000 cash . . . and a note from them for the balance of \$22,000 at 7% interest."²⁸ The

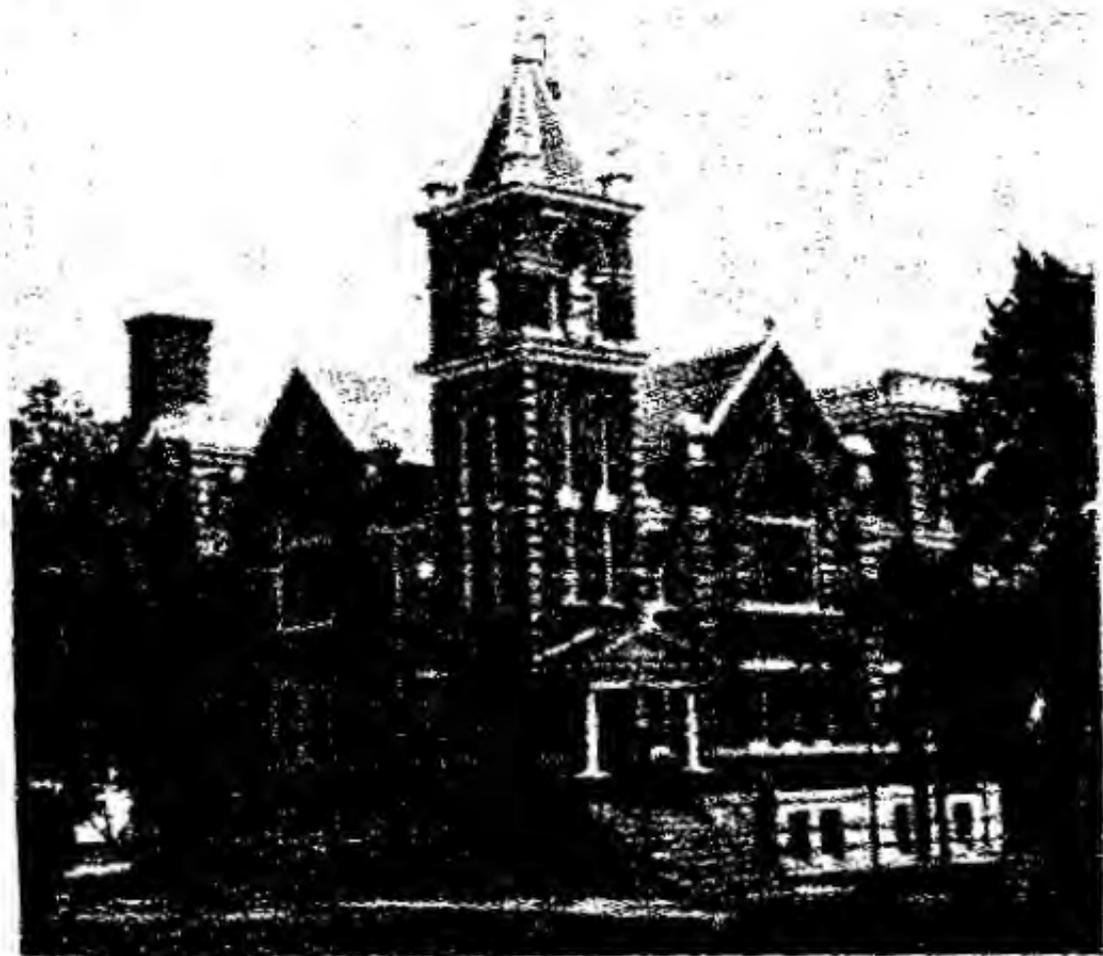
²⁴Ibid.

²⁵*The Baptist Messenger*, June 7, 1946.

²⁶*The Informer*, Kelham Baptist Church, November 24, 1946. The property was located at the corner of Ninth and Stiles. Kelham gave Irving their original buildings and site, which they sold to use toward the purchase price. In addition, Kelham cosigned the note with the Home Mission Board.

²⁷Minutes of the Irving Baptist Church, April 18, 1956 (Kelham Baptist Church Collection). Only five years earlier the property had been valued at fifty thousand dollars.

²⁸Three months later the church voted to sell the note without recourse, accepting a discount if necessary.



Irving Church (formerly Maywood Presbyterian Church)

church then voted to borrow money "to purchase Airforce [sic] chapel & hospital buildings, [and] have them moved to new location." In September 1956, Irving changed their name to Utah Avenue.²⁹

As the number of Kelham's missions began to multiply, R. C. Howard established a practice of holding a monthly meeting during which he and the pastors from the various missions met to discuss the progress and the problems of the missions. These meetings were started in 1939, but during the war because of rationing of gasoline and tires, they were suspended.³⁰ While they were held, they were very effective in solving the problems that inevitably arose.

The tenth³¹ mission started by Kelham was Lone Star, located at Northeast 109th and Eastern.³² It was started in a schoolhouse, pastored by a young preacher who was paid enough to enable him to commute back and forth to Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, each week.

Morris Roe, one of the preacher boys who finally

²⁹Minutes of the Irving Baptist Church, September 2, 1956. The minutes reveal the church chose "Utah Avenue" over "Sunset Baptist." Minutes for September 12 reveal that Kelham cosigned the note for the Utah location until financing was arranged through the Home Mission Board of the Convention. (See Chapter VII for the strange odyssey that brought Kelham and its former Irving Mission back together again in the Utah Avenue building.)

³⁰Another helpful practice was a monthly "Sing-Song" in which the members of the missions and Kelham gathered one Sunday afternoon a month for a short joint service. This reinforced their ties with the home church. This, too, was stopped by wartime rationing.

³¹There was actually another mission of sorts begun during the Depression when a Baptist preacher who was out of work approached Howard. Kelham rented a vacant building that already had pews in it near Union Depot. The work lasted until the preacher was elected as superintendent of a school in another town, where he also served as pastor of a country church. Kelham had helped a preacher feed his family, and several made professions of faith through this work.

³²*The Oklahoma County Baptist*, September 1951 says that "Kelham opened the work at Lone Star in 1933."

graduated by means of this arrangement, got his start at Lone Star Mission. During the war Roe was a chaplain in the South Pacific and baptized many people from the Navy into the membership of Kelham. After the war most of these were lettered out to local churches in various areas of the country.

Lone Star Mission, 1939

Kelham operated Lone Star Mission for about eight years. A church located much closer to the mission wanted to assume sponsorship; so it was transferred.³³ After operating Lone Star for two months the other church abandoned the mission and it went out of existence for some time. Later, however, the work was started up again, this time successfully.³⁴ By the time of its constituting in 1959, Lone Star mission was the "oldest in the Oklahoma County Baptist Association."³⁵ At the time of its

³³Kelham Avenue Baptist Church minutes for July 8, 1942, note, "Motion carried to discontinue the work at Lone Star."

³⁴Lone Star was adopted again by Kelham in special business session on October 27, 1946 (Minutes, Kelham Baptist Church). At that time Richard Skeel ["Skiel" is the spelling in "Mission Coming of Age at Ripe 15," *Oklahoma City Times*, October 17, 1959] was elected as pastor of the mission by Kelham.

³⁵"Mission Coming of Age at Ripe 15," *Oklahoma City Times*. The article noted that the mission "dates back to 1931." That may be correct. The article also observed that the work "was revived in 1944." The mission likely struggled from 1942 until 1944, when it was begun again and sponsorship was then assumed again by Kelham in 1946.



Lone Star Mission, 1939

constituting, Jack Rodgers, who was married to the daughter of Gene Strahan (the "taxi driver" who began the work at Plainview), served as pastor.³⁶ Jack Rodgers' father, O. T. Rodgers, was a deacon of Kelham. At the time of its constituting, the pastors of Lone Star Mission had been Orval Ray, Richard Skiel, James Alexander, Milo Riggs, and T. H. Holt.³⁷

Another mission, whose genesis and fate is lost in the shadows of time, was called "Riverside" mission.³⁸ It was begun in 1934 and lasted only some two months. It was located in what was called "Mulligan Flats." It was probably not R. C. Howard's unnamed benevolent mission started near Union Depot.³⁹ At the same time Kelham began support of an unnamed mission in China.⁴⁰

According to R. C. Howard, the eleventh missionary effort, the identity of which is uncertain, was "some twelve miles"⁴¹ out, at Spencer. The location had a

³⁶The *Oklahoma City Times* noted that "Lone Star is one of 29 missions established by Kelham in its long history. Seventeen of these have become independent churches." This count may be accurate, but there is no way of actually determining these numbers with anything approaching certainty.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Mary Fike, "History of Kelham Baptist Church" (1961).

³⁹See above, page 54, n. 29.

⁴⁰Mary Fike ("History of Kelham Baptist Church") noted that in 1931 "Lina Beck Hoppel came as church missionary, and she started a Great Commission Band, who with its pennies and offerings helped to start mission work in China. Kelham supported four foreign missions. This had nothing to do with the Gospel Mission Movement in China at the first of the twentieth century; it was simply the outreach of a *missionary* Baptist church. Support for another unnamed China mission under a Reverend Johnson was begun in 1934 (Fike). Beginning in 1931 Kelham supported a mission started by a Reverend Wilcox in Brazil. His picture is in Kelham archives in the Howard Memorial Library. Later (see note 86, page 72) Kelham supported work in Egypt (beginning in 1936 according to Mary Fike's "History of Kelham Baptist Church") and in South America.

⁴¹Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

Baptist church but it had gone under and the building had been abandoned. The people could not pay a pastor even five dollars a Sunday. Kelham voted to send a young preacher out and pay him five dollars a week. The work grew; times got better; and the work was reorganized into a functioning church. "We had been used of the Lord to re-establish a dead church."⁴²

One of the oldest Baptist churches in Oklahoma County was the Dickson Baptist Church.⁴³ "It had never had a building, but had met in homes and in the Star School house."⁴⁴ It had conducted preaching services now and then (mostly then!) and had finally ceased to exist. A member of Kelham was attending Oklahoma Baptist University and wanted a place to preach. Kelham sent some men out to assess the situation. They contacted the trustees of the school, who agreed to allow a Baptist Sunday School in the building.⁴⁵ A Sunday School was started, but there seemed to be nothing but trouble. "People who were not Baptists didn't understand why they couldn't take the Lord's Supper with us. They fussed because we used Baptist literature and refused any other kind."⁴⁶

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³The minutes for the Central District Baptist Association for 1913 show "Dixon" with L. L. Scott as pastor (Tiefel Collection). Associational minutes for 1919 do not show either "Dixon" or "Dickson." The name also appears in the *Minutes of the Oklahoma Baptist Association of Oklahoma* as "Dixon." In 1940 "Dixon" is noted as a new church in the statistical tables.

⁴⁴Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

⁴⁵The "wall of separation" between church and state was not viewed to be as high or as solid it is now.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Dickson Baptist Mission, 1939

Dickson Baptist Church, 1951

The old Dickson Church had at one time purchased about one-half acre of land at 2000 North Spencer Road, which was still in their name. A deal was made whereby Kelham and the defunct Dickson Church joined forces. A building was erected on the land, and Kelham's twelfth mission was born. The mission grew, and in 1940 it was constituted into a Baptist church. It is still operating in 1989.

The thirteenth mission was one that Kelham inherited, so to speak. Some members of another Baptist church, using money loaned by R. C. Howard, had built a small building.⁴⁷ The other church tried to operate it as a mission, but soon gave up, asking Kelham if they would take it over. It was known as Packerstown Mission, because it was located in the Packerstown area. When the mission was established it was the only place of worship in an addition in which five hundred people lived. Due to a shift in the population, however, this effort was finally abandoned.

Barnes Mission was the next mission established by Kelham. Started in 1936, it was located at Southeast Fifty-ninth and Anderson Road and originally met in the Barnes School. The preacher that first started it soon gave up, but Kelham continued to support the mission. Kelham purchased a tent, put it up in the area, and held a revival. A good number of people were baptized. The mission slowly grew, and soon enough money was accumulated to build a

⁴⁷Howard noted that "it was on the opposite side of town from us, and I have tried not to establish missions in the territory of other Baptist churches; so I loaned the man the \$20.00."



Dickson Baptist Mission, 1939



Dickson Baptist Church, 1951

building forty-by-fifty-feet.⁴⁸ The church continued to grow, although very slowly. It finally reached the point at which it could be self-supporting, and on January 13, 1958, it was constituted into a Baptist church, with Gene Palmer as pastor. The church continued as a mission of Kelham for twenty-two years. The name has since been changed to Crestview, and it remains an active church, located at 7715 South Hiwassee Road.

Barnes Mission, 1939

Barnes Mission, 1951

May Avenue Mission had originally been established as a mission of Northwest Church.⁴⁹ At the request of Northwest, Kelham took responsibility for May Avenue in 1939.⁵⁰

Southwest Friendship Church, 1951

⁴⁶*The Oklahoma County Baptist* (September 1951) describes the location at that time as "5 miles East and 1 mile South of Midwest City."

⁴⁹Mary Fike, "History of Kelham Baptist Church."

⁵⁰*The Baptist Messenger* (May 18, 1939).



Barnes Mission, 1939



Barnes Mission, 1951

In 1941, the building was moved around the corner onto Southwest Thirteenth.⁵¹ In June, Gene Strahan, who was serving as mission pastor brought a request from the church to change the name to Friendship Mission.⁵² Later the church moved to 3001 Southwest Sixteenth and the name was changed to Southwest Friendship. It was constituted into a church in 1948.⁵³

The third Baptist church to be organized in Oklahoma City was the Washington Avenue Baptist Church.⁵⁴ After thirty or so years, it fell into the hands of a man who styled himself after J. Frank Norris. These were the days of Norris's heyday. Due to a divisive spirit, the church split several times,⁵⁵ and wound up losing its property, some of

⁵¹"May Avenue News," *Oklahoma City Star* (Kelham Avenue Baptist Church Edition), May 2, 1941.

⁵²Minutes of the Kelham Avenue Baptist Church, June 4, 1941.

⁵³*The Oklahoma County Baptist*, September 1951.

⁵⁴In all likelihood, Capitol Hill, which also began in 1902, was the second church in Oklahoma City, though some from Washington Avenue seem to have claimed that in later years (1936–1938 in associational records) by calling the church "Second Baptist Church." The street on which the building, built in 1927, is located is now called Second, but it was not renamed until later. Associational minutes in later years indicate 1902 as the date of Washington Avenue's constituting. The minutes for 1913, list 1903. Nineteen hundred and two is the date listed in the minutes for several years for the Second Baptist Church at the same address as Washington Avenue. This was evidently one of the many splits the church suffered or an attempt to change the image of the church by changing its name.

⁵⁵The associational minutes for 1926 do not show Washington Avenue. In 1928 associational minutes report a membership for the preceding year of 545, with current membership of 497 and 39 baptisms. Minutes for 1929 report has no figure for total members but lists 59 baptisms. In 1930, membership was reported as 437, with 71 baptisms. The associational minutes for 1931 do not mention Washington Avenue. It is absent until 1939, when Kelham took it over as a mission. In 1937 Second Baptist appears in the minutes with the same address (601 W. Washington) and founding date (1902) that Washington Avenue reported. That year Second Church reported Clarence Cain as pastor, 32 baptisms and a total membership of 70. Carl Nunn, son-in-law of Clarence Cain, founding pastor of Fortieth Street stated that when he came to Wash-

which was foreclosed on by the creditors and sold at a sheriff's sale.⁵⁶ With the help of three others, who were cosigners on the note, R. C. Howard bought the building for seventy-five hundred dollars.⁵⁷ The building had originally cost more than twice that amount and was in excellent shape.

Kelham voted to start a mission there, but Kelham could not afford to purchase the building; so R. C. Howard carried the note on the building. It was in the downtown area and had an auditorium that is reported as seating five hundred people.⁵⁸

The first Sunday there were four people in attendance. The next Sunday there were seven from the community and four from Kelham.⁵⁹ The next Sunday there were eleven from the community. The work grew slowly, but within six months it was able to support a full-time minister. In 1939, it was organized into a church. At that time, R. C. Howard sold the group the building for what he had paid.⁶⁰ The church operated for several years until conditions ap-

ington Avenue in 1938, the old-timers called it Second, as it is reported in associational records for 1936-1938 (Telephone Interview, May 15, 1989).

⁵⁶Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

⁵⁷The Minutes of the Oklahoma County Baptist Association for 1939 under petitionary letters asks that "the 40th St. Baptist Church, which was organized in regular form May 7th, 1939, be received into our fellowship." Financial records for Kelham Avenue Baptist Church reveal that Kelham took over financial support of Washington Avenue from May 1939 to September 1939, at which time evidently they became self-supporting. Associational Minutes for 1940 reveal that Washington Avenue petitioned the association for membership and were received. Carl Nunn stated that Fortieth was started because the group did not want to be a mission of anybody (Telephone Interview, May 12).

⁵⁸If this is the building standing at 215 S. Dewey, the calculation must have been a typical case of ministerial overstatement!

⁵⁹Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

⁶⁰Ibid.

parently deteriorated again.⁶¹ Associational records for 1941–1946 continue to show Washington Avenue as a church, and no letter petitioning for membership is recorded. It may be that Kelham (through R. C. Howard) took over some financial support of the church, but that the church did not consent to becoming a mission of Kelham.

Washington Avenue ceases to show up on associational records in 1947. If, as this writer assumes, Washington Avenue depended on R. C. Howard for financial support, at his death in May 1947, the church-mission went out of existence. The neighborhood was in transition, and urban renewal and Interstate 40 subsequently destroyed most of the area. Thus was the strange genesis of the second Washington Avenue Baptist Church, the building of which still stands and is visible on the north side of Interstate 40 downtown. It is located at 215 S. Dewey, just west of Walker. The northeast side of the building proclaims the name in raised brick.

In 1952, *The Sunday School Builder* ran an article on the history of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and its missions through the years. On the cover, a graphic portrayal shows Kelham and its missions, listing Fortieth Street but not listing Washington Avenue. No sources available to this writer show that Fortieth Street ever became a mission of Kelham.⁶² The published minutes of

⁶¹Minutes for Kelham Avenue Baptist Church, March 12, 1941, record this puzzling entry: "The pastor and deacons present the following recommendations: (1) That we extend an arm of the church to Washington Avenue and receive it as a mission, with the assurance that the pastor ["the" is struck through with "our" inserted] would bear any financial responsibility." Kelham Baptist Church deacons' meeting minutes for March 10, 1941 indicate that Washington Avenue was "to be disbanded" and the church to become "an arm of our church" with "Pastor to guarantee operating expense." Financial records of Kelham for the period immediately following do not show any money from the church going to Washington Avenue.

the Oklahoma County Baptist Association for 1940 contain this statement: "We, your committee, on reception of new churches, recommend that the 40th St. Baptist Church, which was organized in regular form May 7th, 1939, be received into our fellowship." The church, pastored by Clarence Cain, came out of the defunct Second-Washington Avenue Church and first met at the pavilion at Belle Isle Park, east of the present Penn Square Mall.⁶³

⁶²Contemporary sources that list Fortieth Street as having been a mission of Kelham are *The Oklahoma County Baptist*, (August 1951), Kelham's Building Dedication Day program (September 7, 1952), and Dycus's, "A Stranger Looks Inside a City Church: Kelham Baptist Just 'Grows and Grows,'" *Daily Oklahoman*, April 28, 1954 (Brewington Collection). All omit mention of Washington Avenue as a Kelham mission. The associational minutes for the Oklahoma County Association for 1946 list 1939 as the date of constituting of Fortieth Street. That date is the date Fortieth petitioned the association and was accepted. The minutes for 1945 report 1945 as the date of constituting. That is the date included in all sources that list Fortieth as having been a mission of Kelham. Associational minutes for 1945, however, list only two churches as being admitted to the association at the annual meeting: Midwest City and Pennsylvania Avenue. Records for 1944 list no new churches. During this whole period Clarence (E. C.) Cain is listed as pastor. There is probably no solution short of heaven to this puzzle—if heaven keeps associational minutes!

⁶³Telephone Interview with Carl Nunn.



Fortleth Street Baptist Church

Fortieth Street Baptist Church

With the available records, it is not certain exactly where the sixteenth mission was located. "There was a struggling Baptist church in the edge of Oklahoma City, with another non-cooperating Baptist church just two blocks away."⁶⁴ Finally a pastor was called who thought the situation could not continue in this manner for long. He proposed that the two churches consolidate, with Kelham operating it as a mission. The two churches and Kelham agreed, and the building and lot were deeded to Kelham. The pastor served the church for a few months and then resigned to attend Oklahoma Baptist University. The church building was sold to another denomination, and the money was used to build a building at Barnes Mission.

Soldier Creek Mission was the next mission sponsored by Kelham.⁶⁵ There had been an interdenominational Sunday school operating in the schoolhouse at Soldier Creek for several years. First one kind of preacher would pastor for a time, then there would be no preacher for weeks. It was a very ineffectual operation. Finally a young licensed preacher who had no place to preach asked R. C. Howard if Kelham would sponsor him if he tried to establish a Baptist church in the area. The members of Kelham approved the plan, and the young preacher went to work. "Soon a Baptist from the city moved out into the country. He began to tithe, and the Lord blessed him greatly."⁶⁶ He gave five

⁶⁴Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

⁶⁵In the same year the "Louisiana Boat Church," with Ira Marks as pastor, was started, according to Vogt's "History of Kelham Baptist Church" (unpublished). Minutes of the business meeting for August 11, 1943 report, "That we give Bro. Ira Marks \$100.00 for Louisiana extension work."

⁶⁴Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

hundred dollars for a building to move the mission out of the school, and a building was built. The work progressed so well that by 1943 the mission was constituted as Soldier Creek Baptist Church.

Soldier Creek Church, 1951

Almost fifty years later, the church, located at 9020 Southeast Fifteenth, is still ministering to the spiritual needs of the area.

The exact location and name of the eighteenth mission is another that is lost in the clouds of time. It was started in a small store building located "out some five miles on the highway."⁶⁷ The work was carried on there for about two years, baptizing "quite a number,"⁶⁸ with about forty to fifty attending Sunday School. When the sixteen-by-eighteen-foot building burned the work was abandoned.

The next mission adopted was Franklin Mission. Located some six miles east of Hollywood Corner on Franklin Road,⁶⁹ twenty miles south of the city, Franklin had functioned as a church for several years. During the Depression population shifted, and the church ceased operation. With financial help and faithful support from Kelham,⁷⁰ the

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹"Hollywood Corner" was the name given to the intersection of U.S. 77 and Franklin Road because of the little community called Hollywood located there.



Soldier Creek Church, 1951

church was reactivated. After about two years as a mission, it was in a financial condition again to operate on its own.

The twentieth mission begun by Kelham was started in a honky-tonk. A member of Kelham, a taxi-driver, Gene (D. E.) Strahan,⁷¹ had felt the call to preach.⁷² Brother Howard told him that if he could locate a place to start a mission, Kelham would sponsor it. Shortly afterward, Strahan reported that he had located a building on North Lincoln, on Highway 66, some "five miles north of the Capitol."⁷³ It had been known as The Lucky Penny Bar,⁷⁴ but it was now closed. The man who owned the building said that he had been getting fifty dollars a month rent, but he was so disgusted with the renters that he would rent it to the church for twenty-five dollars a month. He offered to sell the building for \$2,250. The church rented the building with a ninety-day option to buy.⁷⁵

Strahan, was sent out with two or three helpers, and a

⁷⁰Joe Lynch and Al Perry attended often.

⁷¹Gene (D. E.) Strahan served as mission pastor at May Avenue (Friendship) Mission prior to this. He is reported as pastor of Capitol Church in the minutes of Kelham when Irving was constituted on June 9, 1946. He retired from associational missions work in Texas in 1983.

⁷²A letter, dated July 24, 1942, from the Friendship Mission and signed by its Secretary, Mrs. Eula Poage, says, "We, the members of Friendship Mission, feel that our pastor, D. E. Strahan, who has been with us the past sixteen months, has had sufficient time and opportunity to prove to our satisfaction that he is truly called of God. In conference, we voted to petition the Home Church to ordain our brother into the full ministry of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Minutes of the Kelham Baptist Church, August 1942).

⁷³Howard, *Local Mission Stations*. The distance estimate is R. C. Howard's and is not correct. Howard noted that "it is in a tourist camp community, with not many residences nearby."

⁷⁴"A Stranger Looks Inside an Oklahoma City Church: 'Little White Church on Hill' Is Getting Bigger Fast," *Daily Oklahoman*, n.d. (Brewington Collection).

⁷⁵Howard, *Local Mission Stations*.

mission was started. Strahan put out circulars, telling the people that the one-time dance hall was now a soul-winning station. The first Sunday there were fifty-two in attendance. Miss Wilma Meyer, a long-time member of Kelham, was one of the most dedicated helpers. The mission operated in The Lucky Penny location for some time, but when a revival was to be held it was held in a tent on four lots donated by George Leach, a Baptist layman.⁷⁶ This was located at Northeast Forty-sixth and Lincoln. The group voted to stay in the tent and not return to The Lucky Penny. The preacher at the time was John Roe,⁷⁷ who believed the church would eventually get a building and move out of the tent on George Leach's lots.

Finally, Kelham voted to build a building at 205 Northeast Forty-sixth, on the lots donated by Leach. Lincoln Mission, which became Plainview Baptist Church on September 5, 1948, stayed at this location until the area became too industrialized to support a church. At that time they built a new building at 7105 North Kelley.⁷⁸

⁷⁴"A Stranger Looks Inside an Oklahoma City Church: 'Little White Church on Hill' Is Getting Bigger Fast."

⁷⁷Ibid. In 1951 Roe was in the Crippled Children's Hospital with polio (*The Oklahoma County Baptist*, September 1951).

⁷⁸The church moved in 1961, according to "Silver Anniversary Sunday," *The Oklahoma City Times*, November 10, 1973.

Plainview Church, 1951

Plainview began its own mission, Southeast Baptist Chapel, which became Beverly Hills Baptist Church, located at 400 Southeast Fifty-ninth. Some of the ministers who have served Plainview were Jimmie Rogers, John Roe, Kenneth Witt, Dick Fisher, Roy Critchfield, and his brother, David Critchfield.⁷⁹

On August 5, 1945, the East Reno Mission was started. It was located on three acres of land in a developing neighborhood.⁸⁰ This was the twenty-first local mission supported by Kelham. The mission was started with a revival in an old tent. The tent was pitched in a cornfield, and when the tent was destroyed by a windstorm, a neighbor, Mr. Pace,⁸¹ allowed the group to meet in his basement.⁸² Construction was started on a rock building with an auditorium and basement. The new building was ready for occupancy in six months. Within four months after the founding of the mission, Sunday School attendance was up to eighty.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Howard (*Local Mission Stations*) recounts his concerns for the Meadowview subdivision in Midwest City: "In this particular locality, I saw one house after another go up. I have been scared half to death that someone else would get in there and build a church of some other denomination. I tried to buy the acreage mentioned but could get no price offer. The owner seemed not to care to sell, but finally last summer we got a proposition out of the owners and bought some three acres, and now we have a whole block, a most beautiful location." It is a fitting tribute to R. C. Howard's vision that the church started there is The Howard Memorial Baptist Church.

⁸¹Pace is called "Bro. Frank Pace" in *The News-Bulletin* (Kelham Avenue Baptist Church Edition), July 29, 1949; so he may have been a church member.

⁸²Mrs. Pace said that one morning they had eight-nine downstairs in the sixteen-by-thirty-foot basement, not counting those upstairs in the bedrooms, which were used for Sunday School rooms (Telephone Interview, May 17, 1989).



Plainview Church, 1951

About the first of January 1946, it was decided to change the name to Meadowview. On December 14 of the same year, it was voted to change the name to Howard Memorial, in honor of Kelham's long-time pastor, R. C. Howard. Howard Memorial Mission became a church on Sunday July 31, 1949, with 213 charter members. Orval Ray was pastor when it was constituted as a church and continued as pastor until early 1956.⁸³ Howard Memorial was the twelfth church to be constituted from twenty-three local missions, sponsored by Kelham during the years R. C. Howard served as pastor.

Howard Memorial Church, 1951

The twenty-second mission was started because the women of the neighborhood of Northwest Fifty-eighth and May Avenue asked help from Kelham in the establishment of a Sunday school.⁸⁴ It was started in a two-room house

⁸³Telephone Interview with Mrs. Ray, May 1989.

⁸⁴Howard reported the beginnings: "In October, 1945, a lady called one day on the telephone and said ...'My husband and two sons were converted and baptized from one of your missions, three or four years ago. I thought maybe you would be interested in helping us. We have found a little two-room dwelling that is vacant and the owner says we may have free rent for three months if we use it for church purposes.' We told her we would be interested and would be right out, so my



Howard Memorial Church, 1951

that had no electricity and no heat. It was eight miles from the home church. The first Sunday afternoon a Sunday School was held. The first meeting had thirty-two women and children and one man in attendance. A student at Oklahoma Baptist University was secured as pastor.

The mission was first called Milam Mission, from the name of the housing development in which it was located.⁸⁵ Mrs. Clara King, a real pillar of the church, devoted her untiring efforts to further the progress of the mission. Some of those from Kelham who labored at the new location were Bess Graham and Marie Daugherty.

The first pastor was Jimmy (James H.) Bitner, who was later a missionary to Chile. The next pastor was Johnny Brewster. Then came Buddy Magruder. About this time Jack Rodgers came as song leader. Then there was a Mr. Dyer and a Mr. Holt. Other pastors who received some of their training at this mission were Paul Sanders, Skip Buford, and Damon Corley. The name of the mission was later changed to Linn Avenue.⁸⁶ Mr. and Mrs. Claud Holland, stalwart members of Kelham, attended Linn Avenue and served in various positions.

assistant and I got into my car and in thirty minutes we were out on 58th and May, eight miles from our church."

⁸⁵Howard recalled the subdivision: "There is about one house to a block, a few blocks have two houses; it is probably 80 acres of land, most of the house are two and three-room affairs." Howard did not note in *Local Mission Stations* that he bought the lot to secure property for the mission and then sold it to Kelham for what he had paid for it. A warranty deed in the minutes of Kelham records that.

⁸⁶May 7, 1946, was the date, according to "Church History Notes" included in the August 7, 1946 minutes of Kelham Baptist Church.

Linn Avenue Mission, 1951

The twenty-third mission, and the last one to be established under the leadership of R. C. Howard, was Crutcho Mission, located on Northeast Twenty-third, near the Taylor Boy's Home. Started on January 11, 1946, there were thirty-four present the first Sunday. R. C. Howard impressed upon those attending that this was a greater number than the thirty-one who had attended the first Sunday he preached at Kelham. The mission progressed, and in 1952 it became Crutcho Baptist Church.

R. C. Howard served as pastor of Kelham for twenty-three years, during which twenty-three local missions were supported or established.⁸⁷ Though there were other missions Kelham established after R. C. Howard, we could well say, "Missions accomplished!"

⁸⁷There were other missions established after R. C. Howard's day. The total number of missions is difficult to determine and depends upon the historian's criteria for what is classified as a mission. Records indicate a mission called "Magerus," a short-lived effort in the home of John Quickle during November 1949–January 1950. Kelham also had four foreign missions during R. C. Howard's service. One was in Egypt, pastored by Seddik W. Girgis. The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention took over support of this work in 1958. At one time, the Egyptian work was the only Southern Baptist work in the whole country. Minutes for May 3, 1944, show San Martin, Argentina, also was a mission site, with Kelham spending almost \$2000 to build a mission church building.



Linn Avenue Mission, 1951