

Central Region has just completed a year of celebration of the 150th anniversary of its founding. Rev. Robert Simerwell was one of those present for the June 6, 1860 organization of the Kansas Baptist Convention. Robert and his wife, Fannie, served at the Pottawatomie Mission (Pottawatomie Baptist Manual Labor Training School) in Shawnee County. The three-story stone building with housed Indian children who were taught manual arts, as well as reading, writing, arithmetic and religious subjects. The building has been restored and is located on the grounds of the Kansas Historical Society & Museum in Topeka. Simerwell descendants remain active in Central Region life; the original farm remains in the family.



The following is a portion of an article published in 1882:

In the spring of his 16th year, Robert Simerwell, with his parents, four brothers and one sister, embarked for America and landed in Philadelphia, May 7, 1813. On the very day of landing, sickness found its way in the family and soon brought seven out of the eight to languish under its oppression. Robert was left alone, a stranger in a strange land, much enfeebled by fever, and with only three days allowed him to find a home in that strange city. At a time when war was raging between this country and England, this youth was cast upon the cold charities of that city.

His own words, *"Three days only allowed. I passed the first night without much sleep, and in the morning went in search of a man who wanted an apprentice, without regard to occupation, as a home was more to be desired than a trade. The Lord protected me, and I soon found myself standing between the forge and the anvil. I had a home until I was of age (21), receiving food and raiment and one quarter's night schooling."*

It was while attending to his duties as an apprentice that his industrious and careful regard for his honor and reputation for good workmanship was brought out. At the age of 22, he united with the Baptist Church of Philadelphia. He then felt it his duty to prepare for the work of preaching the Gospel, and applied himself to reading and study while working at his trade.

In 1824, he received an appointment from the American Baptist Home Mission Society as missionary among the Pottawatomie Indians. In 1833, he came to the Shawnee Baptist Mission in Johnson County, where he labored about four years amid privation and sickness such as not often falls to the lot of man, even of the earlier settlers. In 1848, he moved to the Baptist mission in Shawnee County, where he translated the New Testament into the Pottawatomie language. Teaching and preaching among the Pottawatomie and Miami Indians occupied his time until 1854.

While not engaged by any church or society in his declining years, he could not be idle during the exciting times of the next ten years. When quite aged, he was still busy going from settlement to settlement, encouraging the scattered forces to remain faithful.

Stephenson, R.I. "Baptist History – Robert Simerwell," *The Kansas Baptist*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Clay Center, Kan., Sept. 20, 1882.