

**I was glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go into the house of the Lord.**

**Psalm 122:1**

[part of scripture used in the church dedication service May 17, 1891]

## **Introduction - An Ending**

Our story begins with an ending. On March 2, 2002, Reverend Dr. Al Bramble left this world for a heavenly home. Rev. Bramble served as Senior Pastor for First United Methodist Church of Lawrence from 1952 to 1962. He had been in declining health for many months. His obituary follows as it appeared in the Lawrence Journal World, edited here slightly.

Tuesday, March 5, 2002

Services for the Rev. Albert F. Bramble, 88, Lawrence, will be at 11 a.m. Friday at First United Methodist Church [led by Rev. Sharon Howell]. Burial will be in Oak Hill Cemetery. Rev. Bramble died Saturday, March 2, 2002, at Lawrence Presbyterian Manor.

He was born June 13, 1913, in Kansas City, Mo., the son of Fred and Frances (Seeley) Bramble. He grew up in Oil Hill, Kansas, where he attended school through the eighth grade. He graduated from high school in 1932, and junior college in 1934, in El Dorado. He finished his college work at Baker University in 1936. He earned his theology degree at Boston University School of Theology in 1939. He received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Baker University in 1958.

Rev. Bramble joined the Kansas East Conference of the Methodist Church in 1940. He served as pastor at Danvers (Mass.) Methodist Church from 1940 to 1943, at Crawford County Larger Parish from 1944 to 1946, at Parsons First Methodist Church from 1946 to 1952, and at Lawrence First Methodist Church from 1952 to 1962. He served as district superintendent of the Independence District of the Kansas East Conference from 1952 to 1968. He maintained a special services relationship to the conference while working at the Kansas Office on Aging from 1969 until his retirement in 1977.

He was an early member of Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy. He also served as delegate to a number of jurisdictional and general conferences of the Methodist Church. He served as director for various camps and institutes as part of his work in the conference.

After retirement, he helped to establish the Kansas Silver-Haired Legislature and served as its president from 1984 to 1986. He also helped to establish the Warm Hearts in Lawrence and received a Substantial Citizen Award from Lawrence Kiwanis Club in 1984. He was selected as the 1986 Distinguished Older Kansan at the 11th Annual Governor's Conference on Aging and participated in the Senior Olympics in 1989 and 1991, placing second at nationals in 1989.

He married Sadie Elvira Crommett on Sept. 5, 1937, in El Dorado. She survives of the home. Other survivors include two sons, Fred, Tulsa, Okla., and John,

Leavenworth; two daughters, Ruth Humphrey, Wichita, and Mary Brodahl, Bellvue, Colo.; and eight grandchildren.

The family suggests memorials to First United Methodist Church or to Hospice Care of Douglas County, sent in care of the mortuary.

E-mail condolences may be sent to [info@warrenmcelwain.com](mailto:info@warrenmcelwain.com), subject: Bramble.

At his memorial service in our church, some of our long time members paid tribute to Rev. Bramble and his commitment to Methodist ministry.

#### Tribute by Stitt Robinson

I appreciate the opportunity to pay tribute to Reverend Al on this occasion. I came to Kansas in 1950 to join the KU faculty and soon became a member of this Church. Two years later Reverend Al began his decade of appointments as our Senior Pastor. This was followed by his service as District Superintendent and then his work with the Kansas Office of Aging and his leadership in the Kansas Silver-Haired Legislature.

Having earlier experienced Methodism in eastern states the absolute restriction of any ministerial appointment to four years, my wife, Connie, and I were pleased that no such restriction applied here in the 1950s.

At one time during his ministry here, Reverend Al gave a series of sermons on critical issues in theology, some very controversial. Not only did he preach about these, he also made available copies of these sermons to any interested members of the congregation. These were mimeographed copies, before the time that Xerox was more readily available.

Reverend Al also had an appreciation for history, concerns for the challenges of current problems, and a vision for the future. In 1954 this Church celebrated "One Hundred Years of Methodism in Lawrence 1854 to 1954." I still have a copy of a pamphlet published in connection with an all-day program on September 25, 1954. The title of Reverend Al's sermon that day was "Past, Present, Future." The afternoon concluded with "Remarks" by three former pastors: Dr. Gordon Thompson, Dr. Robert Hunt, and Dr. O.E. Allison - a very impressive celebration!

Reverend Al contributed in many other ways. He baptized our son, Walter. He also was available as a counselor. He was especially helpful to my wife and me in reaching a decision about an offer I received to be Dean of an eastern liberal arts college. He came to our home one evening, and after a long discussion, he assisted us in concluding that we would continue at KU and as a member of this Church, a decision we never regretted.

For many years in his retirement, Reverend Al was a willing volunteer in the rotation of discussion leaders in our Sunday School Class of the Adult Fellowship where we used the International Lesson Series. In all of this, he had a keen sense of humor, an intriguing smile, and a positive outlook on issues of the time. Let me conclude with a quotation from a well-known writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Henry Adams. He stated, "Preachers affect eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops." How true for Reverend Al. His legacy lives on!

Tribute by Russell Mosser

In June 1952 Bishop Dawson announced the Albert Bramble would replace Oscar Allison as minister to the First Methodist Church. Oscar Allison was retiring and we were told a young man and young family would be occupying the parsonage on Massachusetts Street. The Bishop didn't tell us we were entering a new era, that Al would be an effective leader, a challenger of our social consciousness, and along with this a very personable, caring minister to a large congregation. He also would be only the third minister to occupy the pulpit ten years. It was my privilege to be in various leadership roles during his 10 years including lay leader for three years, and I'd like to share a few memories.

Al was a leader not only of our church but also in the community. He had a lot of knowledge and interest in social concerns so was involved in community problems and encouraged our church members to help with these. He was an early participant in the Lawrence League for Practice of Democracy. He was involved in ending segregation in Lawrence theaters and restaurants as well as working for fair housing practices. Our church organized a Committee on Social Concerns, which continues to this day.

He was also concerned with world problems. In 1956 the Hungarian people revolted and fought the Communist regime. Our church adopted a Hungarian refugee, George Saray, who had thrown Molotov cocktails at Russian tanks and managed to escape. George lived during his one school year at KU with the Brambles, Mrs. George Mendenhall, the Gene Blitch family, and our family. The church members helped with his school and incidental expenses. George eventually completed training as an architect, migrated to Australia where he felt safer from communist retaliation, and we still exchange cards at Christmas.

Al had ecumenical concerns and worked with his colleagues. During his time here both the Congregational and Episcopal churches had a lot of fire damage. Al involved our church in organizing pancake benefits to assist in their recovery. He was a leader in developing the church softball league, which continues to this time. I doubt he was allowed to pitch for our team as he was considered one of the best fast pitch players in the area.

We hosted several of the top Methodist preachers in the country. Ron Meredith, Wichita First and Bob Goodrich, First Church Dallas and I think the largest congregation in the country, not only preached on Sunday but conducted services for several evenings during the week. Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam preached in our pulpit on Sunday morning and was the KU baccalaureate speaker that evening. Bishop Oxnam was nationally recognized for his courage in opposing Senator Joe McCarthy early on.

Al's great smile and sense of humor were always there for us. We had members that took exception to his political position but that was tempered by their respect for his integrity and his respect for their position. Al took in the first black person as a member and it caused some comment from a few but did not lose their support.

Perhaps the most lasting member of his 10 years for many members was his personal ministry that isn't known to others. I have heard many instances of this part of his ministry and experienced it first hand. In 1955 I had to go to Boston for open-heart surgery. Al came to our home to counsel with Lorene and me and was sincere in offering to accompany us to Boston. We were very touched with this support but felt he was more needed in Lawrence. Members as well provided a lot of support in prayers and cards.

Finally, I would like to thank Sadie and the family for sharing Al with us. He was not just my minister but also my friend. We will remember that enthusiasm for life and that great smile.

Tribute by L. Martin Jones

I knew Al Bramble for almost fifty years. It was painful to see Al's physical and mental conditions deteriorate in recent years. But it helps recall the many years when Al was alert, active, and compassionate.

My wife, Phyllis, and I joined this church four years before Al and Sadie came to us in 1952. But it was not until Al became our pastor that we became quite active. Before he became our pastor, a rather small number of members were involved in the administration of our church. One of Al's goals was to involve many more members in church activities and church administration. He succeeded in a magnificent way. Since Al's time as our pastor, we have had strong lay leadership.

Toward the end of the ten years that we had Al as our pastor I was telling some friends, in Al's presence, that I had been at church on Sunday for service, on Monday for a committee meeting, on Wednesday for Methodist Men, on Thursday for something, and on Saturday for something or other, perhaps helping at a pancake feed. When I finished, Al smiled and asked, "Why weren't you here on Tuesday and Friday?"

Al was pastor of a church in Danvers, Massachusetts from 1940-1943. Eighteen years after Al left that church, Phyllis and I visited it. The pastor announced that we were visitors from Lawrence, Kansas, where Al Bramble was our pastor. After the service many church members eagerly gathered around us to ask about Sadie, Al, and their family.

During Al's time as pastor, two neighboring churches incurred considerable damage from fires. Under Al's leadership, our church conducted an all-day Saturday pancake feed. We split the net proceeds between the two neighboring churches. It was an act of kindness, which was very much appreciated by the two congregations.

I remember when members of our church provided funds for Al to make a trip to the Holy Land. Al appreciated this act of kindness, but he joked that he was afraid the members of his congregation might give him only enough money to buy a one-way ticket out of town.

Al's sermons always had several points we could take with us from the Sunday morning services and remember throughout the week, month, or year. His point in one sermon is a point I remember yet, after more than forty years. He said, "If we assume for a moment that Jesus was not the Son of God, if we assume that, like some people say, he was a wonderful teacher and that is all, what better way to live our lives than the way he taught us!"

Both during and after Al's ministry, he was a concerned citizen who addressed social issues in Lawrence. For example, he was one of the founders more than twenty years ago of Warm Hearts of Douglas County, which still assists low-income residents of Douglas County pay their winter heating bills.

Like the good deeds of many ministers, some of their best work, some of their most meaningful work, some of what must be their most satisfying work, is done privately and is not known to everyone. Phyllis and I will be forever grateful to Sadie and Al for the thoughtful and wonderful personal kindness they extended to us.

I was blessed to have known this gentle gentleman as my pastor and friend for almost half a century.

[The above tribute to Al Bramble was read by Rowena Pine for Martin Jones, who was ill and unable to attend Al Bramble's funeral service.]

The past links to the present and the present links to the future. At various times in our history we have referred to our church as First Church, for indeed our congregation grew from the beginnings of the first Methodist Church established in Lawrence in 1854. In the history that follows and consistent with the history included herein by Mary Patterson Clarke, our church will be referenced as First Church.

We now turn our calendar back to centennial year, 1954, near the beginning of Al Bramble's ministry at First Church. Mary Patterson Clarke, a member of our congregation, had written the first published history of First Church from 1854 to 1915. A copy of that history is available in our church library. She moved from Lawrence to Pennsylvania about 1921. After a twenty-eight year absence she returned to Lawrence in 1949 and with encouragement from Rev. Allison and others was persuaded to update the history of First Church from 1915 to 1954. She presented her unfinished work to Rev. Al Bramble with the following letter:

"Dr. Bramble:

Such as it is, here is the Church History. From my point of view this is far from complete and still farther from satisfactory. I have done only the most elementary correcting. I have corrected the most atrocious mistakes in typing. I did the typing myself and have no training in it whatever. I have also made a few additions to the original copy as more material came to light and in a few cases changed sentences a little. But much more of this sort of thing will have to be done if this ever goes to press. I am stopping now because I am too tired to go on. I worked through that hot weather except a few days when it was impossible to work; and did it under cramped conditions that slowed me up very much. I once talked with you about the possibility of doing this in the record room, but gave that up for several reasons. I kept on doing a little more here till much was done. And after we sold our old cars in July it would have taken a lot of time to go back and forth.

Now, having explained that this is not satisfactory to me, I wish to explain also how I happened to do it at all. Someone wrote me years ago when I was in Pennsylvania that someone, Dr. Hunt I think, had asked Dr. Bumgardner to bring the book down to date. Because of his own health failure and the long continued illness of his wife, he was never able to do anything but gather a little material. After I came back here he asked me to take it over. I spoke to Dr. Allison about it and he gave his approval and told me to use the top room in the south tower, which was not in use at that time and I believe had not been for years. Soon after this I was elected to the Records Committee and after months of hesitation which I believe I once told you about, I was elected chairman of it. I construed this to mean that it was my duty to collect as much material as possible and keep it under lock and key. I did not go before the Official Board and ask about the writing of the history. Perhaps that was a mistake on my part. But I saw no use in asking, for instance, for any approval of printing something that might never exist. I did not have the feeling about this book that I had about the old one. I had been away for twenty-eight years, did not know most of the people that had been active in that period, and had to do a lot of hard plodding over records before I could begin to feel that I knew anything about it. There have been many delays that it is unnecessary to speak of. Meanwhile I have advertised in the Bulletin over and over, and even made pleas in Official Board for old books, but very little has come in in recent months and from societies, nothing. I sometimes wonder now if the Official Board members had any idea what I was talking about.

Now that this study is in a way finished I want to make one thing very clear. I have no authority at all to do this, except what I may have acquired as chairman of the Records Committee. The Board is not pledged in any way to put even a penny into publication and perhaps never will. I have done this because I wanted to do it and because I think every church should have its history written up and its records saved. If you are interested in publication and wish to take any steps about it, that is all right. But I shall not take any. I hereby wash my hands of the whole affair, except that I expect to keep my old carbon copy, which is very hard to read, and hope to make corrections and additions as time goes on. I hope this copy will be saved as it is much easier to read than the other, and if nobody else wants it I should like to have it back.

If this book is ever printed and I am still here, I hope to make the further corrections referred to above, and also additions. In my carbon copy I have some further footnotes written in pencil, which ought to be added. Also, I have a lot of lists of members in different official groups of societies, a list, insofar as I could make one, of the secretaries of the church, and one of the organists, and the directors of music. I have the long list that Dr. [Edwin] Price made of people who have gone out from this church or the Wesley Foundation into full time religious work, and have been able to add a few names from the records. It did not seem worthwhile to copy that for this form of the book in such a tentative condition.

I thought I could give you a page reference to the request of Dr. Hunt for Dr. Bumgardner to write the book, but at present cannot find it. I am too tired to look any more now, and in too much of a hurry to turn this over to you and get it off my hands.

I hope I have said everything I need to say. If you wish to know anything else about this situation please ask me questions and I shall answer if possible."

*Mary P. Clarke*



Mary P. Clarke

Mary Patterson Clarke was an educator, a historian, a writer, and a Methodist. She was born on August 26, 1879. Mary graduated from Lawrence High School. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1903 and a Master of Arts in 1905 from the University of Kansas. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the prestigious undergraduate honors society. The picture of Mary shown here is taken from the 1903 Jayhawker.

Mary accepted a fellowship in history at Bryn Mawr College and a Currier fellowship in history at Yale University where she received her Ph.D. In 1943 Yale University Press published her historical work, "Parliamentary Privilege in the American Colonies."

She was a member of the faculty at Beaver College [*now Arcadia University*], Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, for twenty-six years and served as department head at the time of her retirement at the age of 69 in 1949. She returned to Lawrence in 1949 with her sister Helen Clarke and made her home at 510 Ohio. She died in Lawrence on December 27, 1959 at the age of 80.

Expressions of gratitude are long overdue to Mary Patterson Clarke. We are proud to present her work here in print for the first time. The pictures were not part of Mary's work. Otherwise, the text is faithful to her original text, edited as she was hoping someone would do. Mary was nearly 75 when she completed the history herein.