

ROSS, S. W.

COURTHOUSE.

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INTERVIEW

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Elizabeth Ross
Investigator
January 28, 1938.

Interview with S. W. Ross
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Courthouse.

There was completed in 1886 the Tahlequah District Courthouse. In the same year courthouses were built in the other districts of the Cherokee Nation. The National Council had authorized the erection of the courthouses and had made an appropriation of money with which to defray expenses. All the courthouses were built upon the same plan.

In the earlier years of the Cherokee Nation the courthouses were usually built of logs, and for some time after the close of the Civil War log houses were seen. But eventually all the old courthouses were demolished or abandoned and the new buildings completed.

After completion of the brick capitol building at Tahlequah at the beginning of the 1870's court was held in that building. The Council Chamber, a long and wide room on the lower floor, was utilized as soon as the new courthouse was finished and no other terms of court were held in the capitol building. That is, except sessions of the Supreme Court which were held in the Supreme Court room on the second floor of the brick building.

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The courthouse which was completed in 1886 was built of pine lumber and was two stories high. On the first floor was the court room. There was a partition across the lower room, a railing three feet in height. In the inside thus partitioned off were the desk and chair of the judge, the clerk's desk or table, seats for jurors and for attorneys-at-law. The remaining space on the outside of the railing was available for those who attended court as onlookers.

On the second story of the court house was the office of the clerk of the Tahlequah district, and of the Solicitor, or Prosecuting Attorney. The clerk, elected every two years, attended to various matters. He issued marriage licenses, permits for non-citizens to enter the employ of citizens, and served as a police judge when persons creating disturbances in the town limits were brought before him. The clerk also served as clerk of the court when trials were being held. He was required to be in his office each week day.

The courthouse was painted white outside and inside and was substantially built, but its rooms, even the court room, were rather small and became overcrowded when trials of more than ordinary interest were being held.

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The judge of the Tablequah district often held court in the building, and at intervals a circuit judge presided. As in these days, 1938, numbers of persons were to be seen in and about the courthouse when terms of court were held.

When the Cherokee laws became obsolete the courthouse stood vacant for a rather brief period and was then demolished. On its site now stands the Carnegie library. At one time a large grove of red oak and blackjack trees surrounded the courthouse and many of the Cherokees hitched their horses to the trees upon coming to town from the country. Within recent years many of these trees have been cut down and removed. Many stones have been removed and a grassy lawn now appears instead of the rocky tract of land of years long past.