

ROSS, ELIZABETH

SPECIAL STUDENTS--CHEROKEE SEMINARIES

#12335

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Elizabeth Ross, Investigator
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Students by Special Permission.

Although the Cherokee National Seminaries were operated for the exclusive benefit of Cherokees by blood, there were three white students, brothers, who completed the prescribed course at the Male Seminary, which was situated approximately two miles southwest of Tahlequah.

The white students were Lewis, Eugene and Herbert Rights. They were the sons of the Reverend and Mrs. T. M. Rights, a Moravian minister and missionary.

The Reverend T. M. Rights was long resident among the Cherokees. His home during the greater portion of his stay in the Cherokee Nation was the Woodmount Station, a short distance south of the town of Tahlequah. The station was about one-half mile from the Male Seminary.

Because of the high standing of the Reverend Rights and his interest in the advancement of the Cherokees, the Cherokee National Board of Education gave permission for the sons of the minister to attend the Male Seminary, which was established by the Cherokee Nation and maintained at the expense of that body politic.

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The Rights brothers attended the National Institution regularly and eventually each was graduated, but not in the same class. The oldest brother, Lewis Rights, was graduated in the class of 1887; Eugene Rights was graduated in 1888; and Herbert Rights, the youngest, early in the nineties. Each received a diploma and later attended the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Some of the more narrow minded Cherokee citizens looked with disfavor upon the action of the board of education in allowing the white students to attend the famous Indian Institution of learning, but the majority were favorable to the action of the Board. During the many years' existence of the Male Seminary, the Rights brothers were the only students of white blood who attended and completed the course of study offered at the institution.

Upon the records of the Cherokee National Female Seminary may be found the name of a solitary white graduate, that of Miss Florence A. Caleb, now Mrs. Florence A. C. Smith (the widow of Henry B. Smith of Tahlequah), who was a member of the graduating class of June, 1885. As in the case of the Rights brothers, exception was made in the case of Miss Caleb.

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Her step-father was the Reverend Walter A. Duncan, himself on several occasions a member and president of the National Board of Education.

Also enrolled was one other white student, Miss Helen Leinbach, whose father, the Reverend J. Benjamin Leinbach, was the Moravian pastor of the church at Oaks. Her mother was a sister of the Reverend T. M. Rights. Miss Leinbach was a pupil in the seminary at the time of its burning, April 10, 1887, at Park Hill. The misses Caleb and Leinbach were the only white young ladies ever to attend the Cherokee Female Seminary.

Three boys once attended the Female Seminary when it stood in the Park Hill locality, they being James H. Antoine, Leon C. Ross, and William Devier. The three were allowed the privilege of attending the Female Institution because two of them lived temporarily at the seminary, and one at no great distance away. At that period there were no other schools in operation in the locality.