

ROBINSON, ALLEN M.

OKLAHOMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND #12769

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ROBINSON, ELLA. OKLAHOMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND. 12769
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OKLAHOMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND.

In the year 1897, Miss Lura A. Rowland, a young woman totally blind, came to the Indian Territory from Arkansas where she had graduated and taught at the Arkansas State School for the Blind at Little Rock. She, being deprived of physical sight, was by no means lacking in spiritual and intellectual vision. Naturally her interest and sympathy were with those who lived under the same handicap.

There was no institution of learning for the blind in the Indian Territory and no provision made by any of the tribal governments for them due to the fact that there were practically no blind people among the Indians. However, the white people brought with them diseases that caused blindness. Seeing the need of an institution of learning for the blind in the Territory, Miss Rowland took upon herself the task of soliciting funds with which to establish such an institution in the Territory.

Miss Rowland not only had the endorsement of the teachers of the Little Rock School but also that of Governor Daniel H. Jones of Arkansas as well as those of all educators in the Indian Territory.

Encouraged by the success she met, Fort Gibson was chosen for the location, and the old barracks building in a very dilapidated state on Garrison Hill was leased for the home of the school.

For the first four years the school was operated solely by private contributions from sympathizing friends in the Territory and neighboring states.

The school had an enrollment of 50 students. Miss Rowland was assisted by a small corps of instructors who gave their time voluntarily. During that time William Lowrey, a young Cherokee, entered the school as a student. Since he and Miss Rowland were of like minds and both interested in educational work for the blind, they decided they could work more efficiently together so they were married. He then assumed the responsibility of business manager and co-worker in the institution.

In 1900 the Choctaw and Chickasaw Governments made appropriations for the blind in their respective tribes. Repeated efforts were made to have Congress, through the administration of Indian affairs, aid the school but without success. A continuous correspondence was carried

on between Mr. and Mrs. Lowrey and the representatives in Congress from this section of the country. These included Hon. Charles Curtis of Kansas who was interested in the school but was unable to render assistance.

In 1907, for reasons variously stated, the school was moved to Wagoner but was shortly thereafter relocated at Fort Gibson. The first legislature of the state of Oklahoma in 1907 appropriated \$5,000 for the maintenance of the Lura A. Lowrey School for the Blind.

The act was approved May 29, 1908, and by the same act it was provided that the school would be under the control of the State Board of Education.

In 1911, Mr. Oscar W. Stewart, an itinerant minister of the Methodist Episcopal South was appointed superintendent, Mr. and Mrs. Lowrey retiring.

As a state institution, the school was supported by legislative appropriations ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per annum. The school remained at Fort Gibson until June, 1913, at which time by an act of the State Legislature, it was moved to Muskogee, greatly against the will of the Fort Gibson citizens. However, the Board of Education,

carefully considering the development and welfare of the school, chose Muskogee as a more suitable location on account of railroad facilities and other advantages to be had in a rapidly growing little city.

A three-story brick building formerly occupied by Spaulding College, a Methodist school for girls (now the Muskogee General Hospital) was leased. The building was

adequate for the accommodation of the school, notwithstanding the rapid increase in attendance each year.

On October 17, 1913, the contract was let for four buildings on the present site east of the city. A 25-acre tract had been donated by Governor C. J. Haskell.

In the selection of Mr. Stewart as the man to carry on the educational work for the blind no mistake was made.

Mr. Stewart, like Mrs. Lowrey, had been educated in an institution for the blind although he had partial sight. Being a man of high intellectual attainments and having the interest of the blind at heart, as no person with perfect vision could have, he set about to get the best in every particular for the school. Improvement was his watchword.

At the meeting of each State Legislature he went before that body and plead the cause of the institution. Wholly trusting in Mr. Stewart's judgment and integrity, they granted as far as possible his requests. One of his ambitions was to have a pipe organ, for he realized the important part in the life of the blind that music plays.

In 1921 he had the satisfaction of seeing his dream come true, when one of the finest organs in the state was installed. A class in pipe organ music was organized and has become a prominent part in the music department. None but the best of instructors in each department has been retained on the faculty.

After the death of Mr. Stewart in September, 1925, Mrs. Stewart was appointed without opposition to the superintendency of the school and has held it continuously to this time, 1933. She has carried on the management of the institution along the lines she so well knew from close association with the school and from being her husband's helper and counsellor.

From the small beginning at Fort Gibson in 1897, by the efforts of one frail, little woman, handicapped by total blindness, the school has developed into one of the strongest

institutions of its kind in the country. Starting with the 25-acre tract donated by Governor Haskell, land has been acquired from time to time until the land owned by the school is a tract of 99 acres. The student body at the present time has an enrollment of 150. The faculty numbers 24. A pay roll of 50 is maintained, including supervisors, nurses and those who carry on the manual labor. Twenty large buildings and a number of small ones occupy the campus. A fine dairy herd started by Mr. Stewart supplies the school with all dairy products. The curriculum of the school corresponds with the highest grades in state high schools. The music department is second to none.

An orchestra, organized by Mrs. Davenport, totally blind, which is now under the direction of Mr. Tony Goetz of Muskogee, is one of the most attractive features of the school.

It has been truly said "Where there is, no vision, the people perish." The marvelous growth and development of the Oklahoma State School for the Blind is due to the little woman who founded it and that of the man who followed her, who possessed not only a vision of complete educa-

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tion and equal privileges for the blind but also possessed
the courage and determination to carry his ideas and ideals
to a successful end.