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Burning of Spaulding Institute
September 25, 1899

The well known Institution that had developed from a little school in the old "Rock Church" on the corner Muskogee, Oklahoma, of Cherokee and Okmulgee Avenue, sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was destroyed by fire September 25, 1899. The fire was discovered in the boys' dormitory at 5:30 P.M. while supper was being served in the dining room. The dormitory being a frame building, the flames spread rapidly and were soon beyond the control of the fire department, which was inadequate to cope with the situation. Smoke was seen coming from the second story windows, the alarm was sounded by a switch engine in the Katy Yards. Twenty minutes later, the entire mansard roof of the main building was in flames. Had sufficient water been available, the brick building could have been saved.

As the town had no water system and had to depend on the cisterns on the premises and with only a small company of firemen, it was soon apparent that any effort to save the buildings would be futile and all attention was turned to saving the personal effects of the teachers and pupils and as much furniture as was possible.

As is always the case, everyone lost all presence of mind and books, chairs, mirrors, mattresses, in fact, everything that would go through a window, was thrown to the ground. Lace curtains, portiers and pillows were dragged across the street in the dust. Three fine pianos were saved and two were lost. Quantities of furnishings were taken to the W.C.T.U. Building on C Street, half a block away.

Teachers and pupils alike were busy the next morning trying to find and identify their belongings.

The firemen worked like heroes until the danger of falling walls compelled them to leave the burning building.

The origin of the fire was unknown, but some half hour before the alarm was given, several small boys (not pupils of the school) were seen playing in the gymnasium which was on the first floor of the dormitory. It was supposed they had been smoking and had carelessly thrown the matches away.

The total loss of the main building and dormitory was \$15,000; \$2,000 on furnishings.

Several substantial improvements had recently been made to the institution. Mr. H. B. Spaulding had given \$5,000 to the fund. A complete steam-heating system and

an electric lighting system had been installed, of which the entire faculty together with the pupils and Superintendent were duly proud. Muskogee did not boast of many modernized buildings at that time.

All residences within the proximity were in danger of the fire brands blowing from the burning building.

The teachers and pupils, who were wild with excitement, not knowing where they were to sleep that night, were taken into the homes of friends all over town. No matter how small a house was, hospitality was offered to them.

Reverend C. M. Coppage, President of the school, was on a business trip to St. Louis at the time of the fire. He was notified of the disaster and started home immediately.

A meeting of the Board of Control was called early the next morning to formulate plans for the continuance of the school work. The members of the board were: Reverend Joseph S. Key of Sherman, Texas, (afterwards Bishop Key); Dr. Walter R. Lambuth of Nashville, Tennessee, who also was made Bishop; Dr. J. H. Pritchett of Nashville, Tennessee. The meeting of the Board of Directors also was called, they were: Rev. Joseph F. Thompson, Salina, I.T.; H. B. Spaulding, Muskogee;

Honorable N. B. Ainsworth, McAlester, I.T. From three large comfortable buildings housing some 100 pupils and a faculty of 15 members to a mass of smouldering embers, was a matter of some three hours time.