

ROSS, ELIZABETH.

A. FLORENCE WILSON.

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Elizabeth Ross,
Investigator,
March 18, 1938.

MISS A. FLORENCE WILSON.

Miss Florence Wilson was born in Arkansas, in the vicinity of the small town of Evansville, which is one of the oldest towns in the western part of that state-- a frontier town in Washington County. Her age is not definitely known but probably she was born about the year of 1842, being a teacher in Arkansas before the Civil War. She died about 1909.

Early in the period of the seventies of the last century Miss Wilson arrived in Tahlequah for the purpose of applying for a position as teacher in the Cherokee National schools. The headquarters of the National Board of Education was maintained at Tahlequah, in the brick capitol. Miss Wilson was appointed teacher of the Tahlequah public school which was among the first schools established by the Cherokee government, after its establishment in Indian Territory and her conducting of the school proved so satisfactory that in the year 1875 she was appointed by the board as the

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principal teacher in the National Female Seminary, then situated in the Park Hill locality.

Not far from the Wilson home there was an educational institution known as "Miss Grahams select school". Here Miss Wilson attended school for some time, after which she went to the La Grange Female College near the town of Jackson, Tennessee, there completing the course of study offered and graduating with honors at the age of sixteen years.

She then went to Mount Holyoke, South Hadley, in Massachusetts, where she graduated in the year 1842. Upon returning to her home she accepted the position of intermediate teacher in the academy at Van Buren, the principal teacher being Miss Amanda Buchanan who also was a graduate of Mount Holyoke College. There were two other teachers at the Van Buren academy, one of whom was Miss Letitia Harrell, the daughter of Reverend John Harrell, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who for many years was a missionary to the Cherokees, both in the old and new nations. Miss Wilson, for a time, became assistant to the Reverend

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N. Givens, in a school at Russelltown, also in Arkansas. School work was disrupted by the Civil War and she taught no more until she became principal of the Tahlequah school.

In connection with the services of Miss Wilson as principal of the Cherokee National Female Seminary it is usually said that she held the position for twenty-six years, but her service was less than that number of years. She was absent during the year 1881, attending an educational institution in Oswego, New York. And from April 10, 1887, until August 28, 1889, there was no school.

The building was burned to the ground on Sunday afternoon, April 10, 1887, and after the National Council, in session at Tahlequah, had provided for a new building, the site was selected at Tahlequah. In August, 1889, the new seminary was completed and equipped with the necessary furniture. So there were three years and four months when there was no school at the Female Seminary. Twenty-six years, however, had elapsed since the date of Miss Wilson's first appointment to the year when she severed all connection with the institution. A short while before the

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retirement of Miss Wilson a member of the Cherokee senate introduced a resolution, which, had it been passed by the legislative bodies, the senate and council, would have had the effect of making Miss Wilson principal teacher during the remainder of her lifetime.

When the original seminary was destroyed by fire many of the former students and patrons of the seminary desired that the institution be rebuilt on the old site, but citizens of Tahlequah purchased a site in that town and donated it to the Cherokee Nation, and then an act was passed in the Cherokee council providing for the erection of a new building on this site.

When school work was begun in August, 1889, Miss Wilson, as principal, had as her assistants Misses Jessie Lieb, Mae Duncan, (who later became the wife of Harvey W. G. Shelton), Mary B. Church, and Sallie G. Morris, (Mrs. Charles Pendleton). The number of pupils at the beginning of this year of school was more than two hundred—a noticeable increase in number since the beginning of school in the original seminary at Park Hill, on May 7,

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1851, when it was related. "The school opened with twenty-five young ladies, the flower of the Cherokee Nation, as pupils". Ever after, the seventh of May was, and still is, (in 1938), celebrated in commemoration of that eventful day.

Upon retiring from her position as principal of the female seminary, Miss Wilson spent the remainder of her life at Little Rock, Arkansas.

As a memorial to Miss Wilson there now stands on the campus of the Northeastern State Teachers College at Tahlequah, a brick column, built of bricks from one of the columns of the original seminary at Park Hill. A marble tablet attached to the column bears the name of "Florence G. Wilson". Upon dissolution of the Cherokee government the seminary building became the property of the state of Oklahoma, and is now known as the Administration Building of the Northeastern College.

There, too, is a girls dormitory completed in 1937, on the campus of Northeastern College which also bears the name of "Florence G. Wilson"; and has a capacity of 184 residents. (The names however, should be "A. Florence Wilson").

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The parents of Miss Wilson were among early settlers in vicinity of Evansville, Arkansas, and are said to have been personally known to many people of the Cherokee Nation.

A number of former pupils of Miss A. Florence Wilson, after establishing homes, and becoming mothers of daughters gave them the name of Florence Wilson—a name that is beloved and honored among hundreds of Cherokee women and men of the state of Oklahoma.

Authority:- Personal recollections,
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