

ROBINSON, ELLA.

CHEROKEE SEMINARIES.

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Investigator,
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CHEROKEE SEMINARIES

From the early part of the nineteenth century, records show that the Cherokee Tribe was the most intelligent and progressive of the Five Civilized Tribes. They fully realized, even at that time, that it was through Christianization and education only that they, as a tribe, could make advancement and become equal to their white neighbors in point of civilization. Missionaries from various churches in the North and East went among the Cherokees and began preaching and establishing schools as early as 1801, when the Moravians established a school at Spring Place, Georgia, near the home of Mr. Joseph Vann. Other denominations that worked among them were the Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists.

In 1817 Brainard Mission was established by the Congregationalists, and is perhaps the best known of all the Mission schools. However, earlier than that a number of young Cherokee men felt the need of school advantages and went into nearby provinces where they were able to

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attend school. The Cherokee leaders realized the great good that was being done among their people by the missionaries and gave them all the cooperation possible. They also realized that the efforts of the missionaries were limited by their means and capacity. The Cherokees possessed an inherent craving for knowledge and the leaders began to think in terms of action. In 1835 the treaty made provision for a system of education whereby all children could have the same opportunities and also for higher educational work that would favorably compare with that given in nearby states. Among those who advocated such a movement were Elias Boudinot, John Ridge, Archibald Smith, Samuel Bell, William Davis, John West and Ezekiel West. A bill was incorporated in the treaty of 1835 that was in strict accordance with Section six, Article nine, of the Constitution of the Cherokee Nation which read as follows: "Religion, Morality and Knowledge being necessary for good government, the preservation, liberty and happiness of all the people, schools and all means of education shall be forever encouraged in this nation and that

end, we recommend that all means of education be given full support of all legislative bodies so far as the financial condition of the nation allows."

Immediately after the treaty of 1835 came the great upheaval between the "Five Tribes" and the United States Government. Then the tragic removal of the Cherokees to their Western home. After the question of providing places to live and improving farms in their new home the matter of schools that was still in the minds of the leaders began to be revived, but it was not until 1846 that real action was taken to establish schools of higher education. In 1846 the Cherokee Council passed an act providing for the creation of two substantial brick buildings and work of making brick for them was begun. The first contract for the brick was given to two or three Moravian brothers who had come into the Indian Territory. They were not allowed to finish the work, however, as it became known that they were secretly preaching their religious doctrines through the country. They were given notice to leave the country at once. It was some time before another contract for the work

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was given and work on the buildings was delayed. The Female Seminary was located three miles south of Tahlequah, and the Male Seminary one and a half miles southwest of Tahlequah. Each building was one hundred and eight-five feet long by one hundred and nine feet wide. Part of them were two story and part were three story, with double porches on three sides. The walls were all two feet thick. The erection of the buildings was begun in 1847. The cornerstone of the Female Seminary was laid by Chief John Ross, June 21, 1847, and the building was completed in 1850. The Male Seminary was opened May 5, 1851, and the Female Seminary the next day, May 7, 1851. The council meeting in October, 1850, passed an act regulating the conduct of the schools. The Seminaries, as well as all other schools in the Cherokee Nation, were maintained by the interest from funds invested in registered bonds with the United States Government. The interest was drawn annually and used exclusively for educational purposes. Adequate provision was made for two hundred students and the required number of teachers. Board was \$5.00 per month, which was added to the school fund. That sum pro-

vided for the student's board, room, laundry, heat, lights, medical care, text books and all necessary supplies. The students furnished bed linen and blankets, towels, comforts and all toilet articles. Provision was made, also, for the accommodation for fifty students each year who without any expense to themselves or to their parents, were entitled to all advantages given the boarding students. That department was designated as the indigent department.

A steward was appointed by the council for each school whose duty it was to purchase all supplies, collect the board due each term, pay all bills, and employ all assistants in the domestic department. The superintendent of the domestic department had general supervision of the supplies, disbursed clothing to the students of the indigent department. Provision was also made for a reputable physician to supervise the health of the student body and look after the sanitation. A matron was appointed by the council whose duty it was to see that the rooms were kept in order and report all illness to the doctor, and to assist the regular nurse, who was also appointed by the council, in caring for the sick.

It had been said that the Cherokees did nothing by halves. After the completion of the buildings in 1850 the most important problem was yet to be solved, that of securing competent teachers for both institutions. For years before the Cherokees came west, numbers of young men of the tribe had been sent North and East to colleges, thus the matter of selecting teachers for the Male Seminary was easier settled than that of the schools for the girls. The parents had always held to the idea that it was all right for boys to go a long distance from home to attend school, but girls should be kept nearer home. However, some girls had gone as far North as New England and some had attended Mt. Holyoke at South Hadley, Massachusetts. Among them was Miss Delilah Vann. In their deep interest in the success of their institutions they, above all, wanted to make no mistake in the selection of teachers. They turned to Mt. Holyoke for help. As the missionaries who had labored among the tribe in the East were from the North, the Cherokees were familiar with their methods of teaching and their attitude in general regarding educational work. Not only did those in authority hope to

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secure instructors proficient in all educational work, but in religious work as well. Deciding that personal contact was the surest means of securing the best teachers two of the leading young men of the tribe, William P. Ross, nephew of Chief John Ross, and David Vann were sent to South Hadley to study the plans by which N. H. Holyoke was governed and secure teachers for their own school. After a careful study, they wrote the Acting Principal, Miss Mary W. Chapin, for further information. This letter remains in the Historical Collection at N. H. Holyoke and reads as follows: "Miss Chapin: We are asking you to engage for us the teachers we were looking for on the occasion of our late visit to your Institution. Should you think Miss Worcester and Miss Whitmore suitable, we are willing to take them, it being agreeable to themselves, unless you have some one in mind, whose age and experience would better qualify her for the position as principal teacher. The law requires teachers capable of teaching all branches of literature and science generally taught in the Academies of the United States and one of whom must also be able to teach vocal music. The terms of admission to the school

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are: a good examination in reading and spelling the English language, in arithmetic, Geography and Grammar. The sum of eight hundred dollars had been allowed for the purchase of books and all necessary equipment to put the school into operation with twenty-five pupils the first year. Not knowing what books will be needed we have, respectfully, to request that you will do us the favor to make out a course of study for four years and let us know what will be necessary for the first year. We regret to impose so much on your valuable time and labor, but we have not known to whom else to apply, but to yourself and associates for the information and assistance we desire. Hoping, therefore, that you will excuse the liberty we have taken, we remain yours with high regards.

David Vann
 Will P. Ross."

All that this letter asked was fulfilled. When the Seminary at Park Hill opened, Miss Ellen Whitmore came out as Principal teacher and Miss Sarah Worcester came as her assistant. Working among the Cherokees was not a new thing for Miss Worcester as her parents were

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missionaries among them in the East and she had been born and reared among them. Mr. William Ross went North to accompany the young ladies on their western journey, which was a great undertaking and took some three weeks time.

The school opened with twenty-five young lady pupils. Opening day was a grand occasion. The rooms and halls were decorated with wild azaleas, honey suckle and roses. The Military band from Fort Gibson was on hand, through the courtesy of General Belknap.

Miss Whitmore's stay was short. In response to her earnest plea, Miss Chapin filled the vacancy she left with Miss Pauline Avery, whom she sent out as principal teacher. She, too, belonged to the teaching staff of Mt. Holyoke.

The salary of the teachers had been fixed at thirty dollars per month, including all expenses, which was considered a fair salary.

It was the policy of the Board of Education that they follow the working plans of Mount Holyoke as nearly as possible. Truly the Female Seminary could be called the Cherokee daughter of Mt. Holyoke.

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The religious life of the student body was by no means a secondary matter. From the beginning, church services for every Sunday were provided. Sunday school was in regular order each Sunday and each pupil was required to attend unless prevented by illness. Different ministers were invited to preach. In 1854 Miss Eliza Ross, niece of Chief John Ross, joined the faculty.

The teachers from Mt. Holyoke fitted themselves into the life, not only of the schools but into the community life as well, and formed lasting friendships among the Cherokees. Miss Avery proved to be just the one to fill the place of principal teacher and in a letter to her friends at Mt. Holyoke expressed herself as being highly pleased with her work and at the end of the second year reported the school in a flourishing condition.

In 1854 Miss Charlotte Raymond came out from Mt. Holyoke to fill the place of Assistant Teacher. As the student body increased each year, additional teachers were employed. One of the common features of all educational work at that time were the public examinations held at the close of each term, and as the result of these

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examinations, the student's grades were regulated.

Visitors were invited and welcomed, as all instructors were glad to show the progress of their students. During Miss Avery's principalship a publication was begun at the Female Seminary called "Cherokee Rose Buds", devoted to "The Good, the Beautiful, the Fine." The second number was dated August, 1854. The year prior to that the young men at the male seminary had started a publication, "The Sequoyah Memorial", embodying the principles of "Truth, Justice, Freedom of Speech, and Cherokee Improvement."

Both Seminaries had an advantage over many institutions of their kind in that the teachers and students lived in the same buildings and were associated together, which was advantageous to the students. The teachers also had direction of the outside reading courses, and one teacher was detailed for duty each Saturday in the library.

Students were admitted at the age of fourteen, provided they had passed a satisfactory examination given by the public school teachers.

The daily program for each school was as follows:

Students Rising Bell..... 5:30 A. M.
Study Hall..... 6:00 - 7:00

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Breakfast and detail.....1.7 - 8:30
 Chapel Exercises.....8:30 - 9:00
 Recitations.....9 - 12
 Noon Hour.....12 - 2:00 P. M.
 Recitations.....2 - 4
 Military Drill.....4 - 4:30
 Sup-er.....5
 Study Hall.....6:45 - 8:45
 First Retiring Bell.....9
 Second Retiring Bell;.....9:15

The schools were thoroughly graded, and a three years preparatory course was required before entering the Seminary work proper. The first year work consisted of Penmanship, Rhetoric, Reading, arithmetic, geography, English composition, history and spelling. Advanced work in each subject were given in second and third years.

The first year of the Academic Department work consisted of Latin, English Grammar, geography, ancient history, United States history, higher arithmetic, algebra, physical geography and philosophy. In the sophomore year the following subjects were given: ancient languages, analysis, English, rhetoric, Caesar, English history, algebra, geometry, chemistry and natural philosophy. In the third or Junior year, the subjects given were ancient languages, Cicero, Ovid, Thucydides, modern language, French, German English Literature, American Literature, mental science,

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political economy, moral philosophy, trigonometry, geometry, botany and geology. The fourth or senior year offered ancient languages, Virgil, Homer, Livy, modern languages, Moliere, Goethe, English literature, mental science, mental philosophy, theology, aesthetics, surveying, Calculus, astronomy, zoology. All courses were straight courses with no electives. A student having met the required standards was entitled to a degree, usually conferred by other institutions of the same rank.

After having been in operation for some five years, both seminaries were forced to close in 1856, on account of lack of funds. The male seminary closed October 20, 1856, and the female at the end of the regular fall term.

During the time the schools were in operation, no time was lost in preparing classes for graduation. The first class was ready in 1855, showing that the regular four years course had been completed. The members of the graduating class of the female seminary in February, 1855: Mary Buffington Adair, Caroline Elizabeth Bushyhead, Eliza Forrester, Catherine Hastings, Lucy Lonery Hoyt, Amanda McCoy, Nannie Patrick, Nannie Rider, Sallie Rider, Martha

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Wilson, Charlotte Candy and Martha Candy.

Graduates of Female Seminary in 1856 were: Mary Ellen Adair, Eliza Missouri Bushyhead, Elizabeth Ann Duncan, Victoria Susan Hicks, Nannie Holmes, Martha McVair, Margaret Lavinia Rogers, Alabama Elizabeth Schrimsher, Martha Nan Thompson, Mary Belilah Vann, Sallie Josephine Vaught, Martha Wittin, and Anna Wilson.

Graduates of the Male Seminary in 1856 were: Dr. Walter Thomson Adair, William Robert Charles, William Fields, Joel Bryan Hayes, Benjamin W. Trott, Jenkins Whitesides Maxfield, Monroe Calvin Reynolds, Daniel Bushyhead, James R. Gourd, Daniel Ross Hicks, Samuel Lin Riley, Charles Campbell Holt, Jonathan Hiley, Joshua Ross, Robert Taylor and David Luculler Vann.

Graduates of the Male Seminary in 1858 were: Reverend Joseph Franklin Thompson, David R. Vann, Bliford West Alberty, Isaac Brown Hitchcock, Dewitte Clinton Lipe, George Washington Benge, Allison Woodville Timberlake, Charles R. Hicks, John Lafayette Adair, Dennis Wolf Bushyhead, John Ticonooly Adair, Augustus Vann Edmonson, George Drew, George Washington Nave, _____ Fox, William

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W. Campbell; George Washington Gunter, William Henry Davis, Jeremiah Everette McGowan, Moses C. Frye, Benjamin Lister Carter.

The Seminaries were not reopened until in the early seventies and it was not until 1879 that a class was ready for graduation again. When the Cherokees returned to their old location after the close of the war they found the country in a pitiable condition. Their dwellings for the most part had been destroyed or burned, stock driven off by the invading army from Kansas and the fields overgrown with weeds and underbrush. However, even in their poverty they did not forget the most important thing in their nation - that of schools, and they set about to reorganize the two seminaries. Again they appealed to

Lt. Holyoke to send their teachers. Among those who responded in 1875 to the call was Miss Florence Wilson, a young graduate from that institution. She served as principal teacher until 1901, when she retired. Another who came in 1873 was Miss Addie Moyse, who remained for some two years.

The first graduating class of the Female Seminary

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after it was reopened was January 27, 1879, and was composed of Isabelle Cobb, a medical doctor now living in Tennessee, and Vann Steele, deceased.

On June 27, 1879, the following were graduated from the Female Seminary: Anna Coza Archer, Fannie Blythe, and Elizabeth Dougherty.

The Male Seminary had no graduates until 1882 and they were Harvey Wain Shelton and George David Williams.

The graduates of 1884 were: William Wirt Hastings, Jefferson Thompson Parks, and William Dressley Thompson.

In 1887, on April 10, the Female Seminary building was totally destroyed by fire. Plans for the erection of a new building to be located in the north section of Tahlequah were begun and a new substantial three story brick building was started November 5, 1887, and completed April 18, 1889, being dedicated May 5, 1889.

The Cherokees were justly proud of their educational institutions, as well as other things belonging to the nation and were a happy, prosperous people, but the insatiable greed of the white people prevailed and sections of land were opened to white settlement and finally the

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Indian Territory proper, with Oklahoma Territory, was admitted to Statehood in 1907. It had been the proud boast of the Cherokees that they were able to maintain their educational system "which was their own" without advice or interference from the United States Government through the Indian Department at Washington. The work of the Female Seminary went on in their new home until statehood, when the property was sold to the state of Oklahoma. It had always been in the minds of the leaders of the nation to train and educate their young generation so when those in positions of trust retired there would be others to fill the places. Among those who were attendants at the Male Seminary who in later years have proven themselves capable of leadership are Judge C. H. P. Brewer, the late William Wirt Hastings and many others who have filled high positions in the government of the new states as well as the nation. With the closing of the tribal affairs of the Cherokees and the abolishment of their school system, was brought to a close the existence of a government of the happiest, most contented and prosperous people ever in existence.