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Elizabeth Ross, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
October 1, 1937

Article: Masonic Ceremonies.

The information below was gathered from old newspaper accounts of Masonic Ceremonies and is also personal recollections of the Field Worker.

The cornerstone of the Cherokee National Female Seminary, now the administration building of the Northeastern State Teachers College at Tahlequah was laid with masonic ceremonies on the 7th day of May, 1889. The original Seminary, situated in the Park Hill locality, four miles south of Tahlequah, had been destroyed by fire on Sunday afternoon, April 10, 1887. Business men of Tahlequah purchased and donated a new site and the National Council passed an act establishing the second seminary at Tahlequah.

A large number of people from throughout the Cherokee Nation were in attendance at the laying of the cornerstone. Among them were several persons who had witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of the old Seminary at Park Hill by Principal Chief John Ross on June 21, 1847.

The members of Cherokee Lodge A.F. & A.M., together with visiting brethren from other lodges, marched from the old

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Masonic Lodge, the building having been erected in 1853, up the principal street to the site of the new building, being preceded by Robert M. French, the Grand Master of Indian Territory, on horseback. Heading the long line of masons in full regalia were Principal Chief, Joel B. Mayes, and William H. Davis, President of the Cherokee National Board of Education. The Masons were followed by numerous vehicles and people on foot.

Following the laying of the cornerstone in the presence of a great assemblage, the principal address of the day was delivered by former Principal Chief, William P. Ross, of Fort Gibson. Himself a member of the Masonic order, William P. Ross had in the early fifties of that (19th) century, served as Worshipful Master of the original Cherokee Lodge, later becoming connected with the Lodge at Fort Gibson.

The laying of the Female Seminary cornerstone was one of the few occasions upon which Cherokee Lodge, No. 10 participated in such a ceremony, for few buildings were erected during many years when Masonic ceremonies were in order. When the cornerstones of the Cherokee National Male and Female Seminaries were laid on the same day (June 21)

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in 1847. There was no Masonic Lodge in existence in the entire Indian Territory and it was not until 1848 that the original Cherokee Lodge, first in the present state of Oklahoma was organized and instituted at Tahlequah. Had this Lodge been existent in 1847, there is no doubt the cornerstones of the Seminaries would have been laid with the ceremonies of the order. As it was the Principal Chief was in charge of the exercises held in connection with the laying of the stones.

May 7, 1851, the National Seminaries were opened for the reception of students and this date was appropriately selected for the laying of the cornerstone of the new building to be erected at Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation.

The day was cloudless, as had been the day in 1847 when the first laying of cornerstones in the Cherokee Nation had been placed in position, as some of the older people recalled.