

INDEX CARDS

Schools--Choctaw Nation
Capitols--Choctaw
County Government--Choctaw
Chahta, Tamaha
Armstrong Academy
Hunter, Thomas W.
Parker, Gabe E.

Pete W. Cole
Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
May 17, 1937

Brief Sketch of Old Armstrong Academy, A government school for Indian boys, destroyed by fire in 1921.

From a personal interview with the subject.

One of the promises that the Government had to deal with, after the treaty was made with the Choctaw Indians, was to teach him how to read and write, teach him the ways of civilization, and some trade or profession so he could live the ways of an enlightened nation.

"Send the Choctaws to school", seemed the "Slogan" and Armstrong Academy, an Indian school for boys, played an important part as capitol of Choctaw Nation at one time until about 1883, when taken over to Tuskahoma, after the completion of the building when Jackson McCurtain was Governor of the Choctaws.

It appears that before the erection of the proposed Indian School building, an appropriation was made by the Nation, which raised sufficient funds for the work to begin. The entire building was not built at that time. School was

in progress until the Civil War when it had to be discontinued and for several years there was no school.

In the year 1863, the Choctaw capitol was moved from Doakesville near Ft. Towson, Oklahoma, what is now Choctaw County, to Chahta Tamaha (Choctaw Town) as it was known then. Here a brick building was constructed and a short time later the county seat of Blue (Okchamalli) County was moved to this place and a large log building was put up in which they held their meetings.

This school was founded and organized in the early days. It was in 1844, when the Choctaws took steps to locate a suitable place and selected this spot which is about four miles north and east of Bokchita, Oklahoma, (Big Creek) a Choctaw name, a small town on the Frisco Railroad in Bryan County.

My mother having died in 1902, and my father in 1903; in 1904, my uncle, Morgan Cole, who was my guardian, brought me to this

3

school and there I first learned my alphabet.

Having never left home in my youth to to any distance, I had a lonesome time and experienced life that I had never seen before when I came to this school. It happened that I arrived two or three days before the opening of school and of course there were no students. I was doing fine and getting along nicely with the teachers and employees during my two days stay and my first acquaintance was William J. Farver, a one-half Choctaw Indian (now employed in Federal Building, Muskogee, Oklahoma), who was a postmaster and a store clerk of the school. Not acquainted with him, I took him to be a white man but to my surprise he could talk the Choctaw language as perfect as I can.

On the day for the students to arrive, they came and in two or three days the school was filled to capacity. There were about 120 boys which was all that could be accommodated, and the rest had to return home. School began. The first thing on the docket among the students

4

was the initiation of new or green students as it was called--something similar to the D.D.M. of some colleges though not severe. It was strictly against the school to fight and there was an Officer of the Day always on duty to keep everything in harmony, but at this particular time he was not to be found. I remember a small boy, about one-eighth white, came to me with a faked news that I was wanted by a professor out near somewhere. I went. We went near to the cemetery which was west of school about one-quarter of a mile, but upon our arrival I did not see the Professor. The Judge or the chairman and members already in session asked me my name, age, my home, and several other questions. I answered all questions in my own native tongue, and was instantly told that I was not allowed to talk in my own tongue but must talk in English, and that I had committed a break in a rule of school as well as laws of the kangaroo court. I was also charged with "breaking in, in school without permission" "Talking Choctaw," etc., and the chairman asked,

5

"What is the desire of the members?" Some shouted "Send him back home." While others cried, "Make him wrestle, fight, or give him a permanent job as water carrier or to empty slop for the teachers and matron".

Here I stood wondering what it was all about, or what the final result would be, until one boy about my size walked up and challenged me for a wrestle. We wrestled and when I got the best of him up jumped another boy larger than I. And so it continued until you were handled by someone or if you were somewhat high-tempered and showed fight, of course, you had your hands full. If you out-best your opponent in the fight, same process follows as in wrestling, until you are whipped and calmed down. Everything was over and you became a full-pledged member and you were not to be bothered any more.

When I first arrived at this school, I did not know the surrounding country and on Saturdays and Sundays, I would go out to the

woods and acquaint myself; and found that this was a wooded country with plenty of pecan trees, squirrels and rabbits. There were several springs. There was also a little stream flowing through near the school. I was told that there was enough water flowed through here that used to turn wheels for a grist mill at this place.

I do not recall the exact dates of the different superintendents and teachers, but I do know that after an appropriation was made for the repair of the buildings, and contract for the opening of school was entered, an old Southern Presbyterian Missionary, Rev. W. B. Loyd, was in charge until 1889 when C. J. Ralston, another missionary of the same denomination, succeeded him. This was in the time of the administration of Chief Wilson Jones. It was his plan and idea that Jones Academy and Wheelock were organized and they are still in operation.

A short time later, a prominent young man, Thomas W. Hunter, a Choctaw Indian, just out

of some eastern college, took charge of this school, and Sam L. Morley, a white man, was his assistant, and later succeeded him. Mr. Hunter is well known among his tribe and a leader among the Choctaw Indians. He resides at Hugo, Oklahoma, where for several years he has been a County Judge of Choctaw County.

After Mr. Morley succeeded Mr. Hunter, Gabe E. Parker was his assistant as well as the Principal of the school, and I have been told that the system of discipline that he maintained was strict and must be obeyed accordingly.

About the year 1903, Mr. Parker, one-eighth Choctaw, succeeded Mr. Sam L. Morley, and became Superintendent. Mr. F. E. Gunn was his assistant when I first came to this school. Mr. Gunn also followed the system of the latter two about military discipline, he being experienced in the regular army. Now and then the larger boys who would face him for some misdemeanor or mischief, which was against the rule,

8

would tangle up with the Professor for refusing to take his punishment.

After two terms Mr. C. E. Fair, now of Sulphur, Oklahoma, was our principal for three terms, another wielder of the rod, although we could stand him as he was not very severe or forceful in delivering the green hickory sapling.

During the terms of Sam L. Morley and Gabe E. Parker more attention was given to school athletics. The football and baseball teams were among the best in the state. When Mr. C. E. Fair resigned, Peru Farver, a one-half Choctaw, a graduate of this school, became Superintendent, and Charles Kaneubbee, another graduate of Armstrong and Murray A. & M. College, Tishomingo, Oklahoma, was his assistant. Likewise he maintained the military discipline and was the last man and sole wielder of sapling.

Mr. Peru Farver and Charles Kaneubbee were the last two faculty members of Armstrong Academy that served with the World War during the trouble with the "Huns". There were also several of the

students of this school enlisted in the army, when Uncle Sam called for volunteers. The Government was greatly repaid for what it had done for the Indians, as while attending school and under the instruction of military discipline, these boys were trained in "How to be a Soldier" and when volunteered for service, after a short training at the camps, they were ready for the front "Over There" and went to do their "bit", and "Give until it hurt."

I cannot refrain from repeating the same word, when by some reason this school caught fire from a defective flue while students were eating supper in 1921. I was on the train and when it arrived at Bokchito, a few of the Armstrong Academy students boarded the train and said the Armstrong Academy went up in flames about 6:30 in the evening.

The first school that I attended was at this place. It was home to me and today I can still see "That same old school, the superintendent, teachers, matrons and students

10

as in 1904, but today nothing remains but the ruin of the once so-called Chahta Tamaha, and it would be impossible for one to locate the place but I can walk right to the spot. The same location where I first learned how to write my name, though the place has now returned back to what it was in 1844.

Ed. Note: This article has not been edited. The writer, a field worker for this project, an Indian of Choctaw blood, has a style of his own and any change to "proper" English would ruin the narrative.]