

GOWER, GOMER

NEW HOPE FEMALE SEMINARY.

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NEW HOPE FEMALE ACADEMY.

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Gomer Gower,  
Field Worker  
September 22, 1937.

"NEW HOPE FEMALE ACADEMY"  
1846-1896  
SCULLYVILLE, CHOCTAW NATION.

It appears to be well authenticated that this Indian school for girls was one of a comprehensive system of schools which were started by an act of the Choctaw General Council in 1842, in pursuance of which act, Fort Coffee Academy, a school for boys, was opened at Fort Coffee, five miles north of Scullyville, in 1844.

The act which authorized the establishment of this, and several other institutions of learning, also provided for the establishment of a female branch of the Academy "to be located in the same vicinity, by a committee to be appointed for that purpose by the General Council."

This committee, after due consideration, selected as a site for the academy a point about three-fourths of a mile northeast of Scullyville, and about five miles south of Fort Coffee Academy.

The selection of this site for the female branch of the school reflects credit upon the members of that com-

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mittee. The location was approximately midway between the Poteau and Arkansas Rivers, which, at this point, are seven miles apart, on the highest ground found between the two streams and removed as far as possible from the miasmal atmosphere of the river bottoms.

Then, too, it was located quite near a spring which afforded an inexhaustible supply of pure water. The popularity of this water is attested by the fact that it was used by the citizens of Fort Smith and other towns and cities in preference to all other available water. This spring came to be known as Hood's Spring. Mr. Hood delivered this water to residents of all nearby towns in five gallon bottles for which he made a charge of 50 cents and did a thriving business over a period of years. Upon analysis the water was found to be ninety-nine per cent pure. Fort Coffee Academy was not so fortunate in this respect since the well water in that vicinity is brackish and unpleasant to the taste.

The distance between the two academies, five miles, was near enough to permit an occasional exchange of visits

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of the school bodies and at the same time was at a sufficient distance to prevent the promiscuous mixing of the sexes except when properly chaperoned. It is said that at the time both schools were maintained, meetings of the pupils at a point midway between would be arranged where games and other pleasant pastimes would be enjoyed. These exchanges of visits and meetings provided an excellent opportunity to teach both boys and girls the social amenities.

The location of both these schools in the extreme northeast corner of the Choctaw Nation, far from its geographical center, may seem improper to us of this day. Yet, when it is considered that this is the point of entrance into the new Indian Territory of the immigrating Choctaws and especially those of the lower towns who had agreed before they left Mississippi that they would settle in the northern part of their country, along the Arkansas, and at that early period they had not drifted very far inland, it appears that it could easily have been the approximate center of population of what was then Moshulatubbee District.

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After the location for the school was agreed upon, suitable buildings were erected and everything made ready for the opening of the school for the term 1846-1847, and placed under the direction and management of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. W. L. McAlester served as superintendent of both schools until 1850, when they became the charge of John Harrell who was succeeded by T. W. Mitchell. Prior to and at the outbreak of the war between the states, Reverend James McKinney was in charge of New Hope until its close in 1861, due to the disturbed situation. After its close it was occupied by General Blount as a barrack. In 1870 the school was reopened and enjoyed a wide patronage until its destruction by fire in 1896. During this period the management and direction of the school had reverted to the General Council which appointed the superintendents when changes were made. However, assistance from the Missionary Society was tendered and accepted to the extent that it was regarded as a Methodist institution to the end.

The superintendents of the school, from 1870 and on,

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though not given in their order of service perhaps, were Bryce, Grey, A. R. Shappard, Doctor Griffith, Thos. Ainsworth and Robert Ward. Mrs. A. M. Fuller is affectionately remembered by patrons of the school for her motherly attitude toward the students while in her charge.

At the time of the institution of the school, the General Council appropriated \$6,000.00 per annum for the support of the two schools. However, since the Fort Coffee Academy was abandoned during the 1850's, it is probable that this amount of appropriation was reduced to some extent at the time, 1870, the New Hope Academy was reinstated.

Clothing, food and shelter were provided the students during school periods. The clothing was of uniform quality and make. This wise regulation prevented a feeling of inferiority to enter the minds of those whose parents could not afford to provide clothing which equaled in fashion that of other girls whose parents were more well-to-do. Medical attention for the students was provided by some of the resident physicians in the nearby town of Scullyville. Many ex-students at this school have been interviewed.

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Without exception they look back over the years which have elapsed since their student days at this seat of learning and all had something good to say of the school that is no more. The old school site is now occupied by a neat bungalow and filling station, both of which face Highway 271.