

ROSS, ELIZABETH

CAPITOL SQUARE

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Investigator - Elizabeth Ross
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The tract of land in the center of which stands the Cherokee County Court House was long known as the Capitol Square. It comprises about four acres. The shallow valley between elevated ground east and west is said to have been called Wolfe's Valley in the early days, from the fact that a pioneer settler of that surname lived on an eminence east of the present square.

At the time the authorities of the Cherokee Nation decided upon the location of the capitol, in the year 1839, the tract which became known as the Capitol Square was dotted with forest trees, some of them of considerable height and size, interspersed with smaller trees. Men who were aged, more than fifty years ago, sometimes referred to the old trees. Thus, in 1884, James D. Wofford, 76 years old, emerging from the entrance to the brick capitol, remarked to a friend he met that he had noticed that

some of the old trees were yet standing, having reference to such trees as were in vigorous condition in 1844, when Wofford was employed as translator in the office of the "Cherokee Advocate."

In the Summer season the trees cast dense shade over the grassy expanse of the square, and visitors to Tahlequah often sat in the shade. There were a number of black locust trees and in the Spring-time the air was redolent from their white blossoms. In order to prevent the intrusion of cattle and other domestic animals the capitol square was fenced during many years. Black locust posts were set about the square and to the posts heavy planks of yellow pine were nailed. Usually entrance to the square was through gates, though at one period stiles were utilized.

The fence about the square was used as a hitching place by those who came to Tahlequah on horseback or in vehicles. At times when events of importance called many persons to the town the number of horses hitched to the capitol fence was large.

Restive horses gnawed at or pawed the planking and eventually a line of posts was set a short distance from the fence and to these posts was attached a heavy iron chain. The chain extended the length of three sides of the square, and here horses were hitched for several years, but the horses were at length banished from the principal street and were hitched no more to the iron chain.

At this time (1937) the side of the streets lying nearest the "square" are utilized as parking space for the automobiles of farmers who come to town, and others. Many tourists pass this way and often stop for awhile.

As the years passed away the original trees ~~gradually disappeared.~~ Some succumbed to age and decay and others were damaged by wind storms and removed. Others yet in fair condition were removed when new trees, maples and elms, were set out in symmetrical order some years after the coming of Oklahoma statehood. The new trees, the first of which were set out in 1921, and others somewhat later, have made excellent growth and produce abundant shade in the Spring and

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Summer seasons. The original trees were principally oak, with some hickory and black walnut, as also the black locust trees.

When payments of money were occasionally made to Cherokee citizens the square was filled with tents and stands where refreshments and food were sold, or articles of jewelry and merchandise were to be found, and there were also tents in which small shows were held, and photographer's tents were also among the number.

Before the completion of the first capitol buildings which were of wood, several important meetings of councilmen were held on the grounds.

Note: The Field Worker and her brother, S. W. Ross, who helped in assembling the notes above, were born and reared in the vicinity of Park Hill and Tahlequah and the lore of the community was a part of their earliest education and recollection. Much of the material in the manuscripts of Elizabeth Ross includes the tales told in her family and for which she can give no definite authority - Ed.