

ROSS, ELIZABETH

OLDEST MASONIC HALL.

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Elizabeth Ross,
Field Worker.

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Oldest Masonic Hall.

Until within recent years, there stood on a rear street at Tahlequah the first and oldest Masonic hall in old Indian Territory, and the state of Oklahoma.

In the year 1852, the Cherokee National Council granted to the Cherokee lodge of Masons, and the Division of the Sons of Temperance, "now in existence at this place", (Tahlequah) two lots, on condition that the construction of a hall begin within two years from the date of the Act of the Council.

The hall was completed in 1853, and was then occupied by the Masonic Lodge, (which had been chartered in 1847), until the completion of a new and larger hall, which was dedicated in 1890.

Besides the Masonic Lodge, the Knights of Pythias Lodge of Tahlequah held its meetings in the old building for some time; as also did the Odd Fellows Lodge. But in course of time, the building often stood vacant, gradually decaying.

The desirability of enclosing the old hall within the walls of a fireproof and larger building and preserving it as a historical relic was sometimes mentioned, but no action was taken and eventually the weather-beaten structure was demolished.

During the period after its abandonment, the upper and lower rooms of the old hall were variously utilized.

Public dances were held on the second floor at intervals, while on the lower floor, services were held by religious denominations.

Then in 1889, a printing office was established in the large lower room. The "Indian Arrow", which had originally been published at Ft. Gibson in 1888, now became a Tahlequah publication. Upon the walls remained several mottoes placed there by teachers in the Sunday School of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which had recently completed a brick church. The newspapers was printed in the hall until a short time before the close of 1890, when the presses and material were moved to a new office uptown.

A man was shot while preaching services were being held in a lower room, on a night in 1872. The Reverend T. M. Rights, a Moravian minister, was delivering his first sermon in Tahlequah, when a shot fired from the outside, struck Richard Fields, (usually called Dick Halfbreed) in the eye and he tumbled to the floor, apparently fatally injured. However, Fields recovered and lived more than a quarter century after. An agent of a secret organization of the Indians was long after ascertained to have fired the shot at the direction of the "Secret Council", as it was called.

Fields lost his eye, left Tahlequah and remained away for some time. (I saw him at Stilwell, in church, in the year 1897, a portly, fine-appearing man).

The oldest Masonic hall was built of heavy pine lumber, sawed from yellow pine trees, fitted over a framework of hard wood. This frame was secured at the joints with wooden pins, no iron nails being used. The original roof was probably of white oak boards, but in course of time, shingles of pine were used when a new roof became necessary.

A small iron bell of discordant tone long hung in a low frame upon the top of the hall, and was used when the Masonic Lodge was to meet. Concerning this bell it was said that it once was used at the Dwight Mission, (Marble City, Oklahoma) in the early days and that one of the pioneer missionaries presented it to the Tahlequah Masons, but no definite particulars have been obtainable.

Authority: Act of National Council ; 1852; Reverend
T. M. Rights, (deceased); W. W. (Wallace)
Ross, (deceased) once resident of Tahlequah,
Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.