

ROSS, ELIZABETH

SEHON CHAPEL.

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273

## "SEHON CHAPEL"

From 1856 until 1888, in which latter year it was demolished, there stood on a high point overlooking the Park Hill locality on the south, the second brick church built in the Cherokee Nation, if not in Indian Territory. This building was the Sehon Chapel, the building of which was done at the expense of Principal Chief, John Ross, and George M. Murrell, both of whom lived in the Park Hill section. During several years the homes of the Principal Chief and of George M. Murrell, whose wife was a niece of John Ross, were visited at intervals by the Reverend E. W. Sehon, a prominent minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who was sent out to Indian Territory to look after the interests of his denomination in the Indian country, the Cherokee Nation in particular. The Cherokee National Female Seminary had been completed in 1850 and school work had been in progress a few years when the decision to build the large Methodist Church was made, to the end that the students of the Seminary might have opportunity of attending religious services, as well as for accommodation of people of the Park Hill and other

communities. Completion of the building was made in 1856. It was named Sehon Chapel in honor of the popular minister, whose home was at Nashville, Tennessee. A fine bell, bearing the inscription, "Sehon Chapel, 1856," was installed in the belfry, and a somewhat ornate pulpit and excellent seats were provided. In order that the Negro slaves might hear the preaching and singing a broad gallery was built across the south end of the Chapel, reached by a stairway from the ground floor.

The first minister to occupy the pulpit of Sehon Chapel was the Reverend Leonidas Dobson, who came from Little Rock, Arkansas, and in the course of several years was married to Anna Brian Ross, youngest daughter of Principal Chief John Ross and his second wife, Mary Stapler of the state of Delaware. The Reverend Leonidas Dobson, in after years, became a minister of the Presbyterian denomination, and was noted for his oratorical ability.

About the time Sehon Chapel was completed the Female Seminary was compelled to suspend school work on account of lack of national funds, then the Civil war broke out and the Cherokee Nation was disrupted for many years. When peace came conditions in the Indian Nation were very

greatly changed, and few members of the Methodist Church were to be found in the Park Hill section. The pulpit of Sehon Chapel was irregularly occupied, and when in 1888, the congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at Tahlequah desired to build a church in that town Sehon Chapel was razed and the bricks hauled to Tahlequah and what is now called the old Methodist Church erected from the material once used in constructing Sehon Chapel.

Among once well-known Methodist ministers who once preached from the Sehon Chapel pulpit were the Reverend Young Ewing, whose home was at Evansville, Arkansas; Reverend Joseph F. Thompson, and Reverend J. S. Chapman. Another widely known minister of today who sometimes preached in the historic Chapel at Park Hill several years before it was demolished, is the Reverend M. L. Butler of Okmulgee (1937).

In October, 1884, the funeral sermon of Judge Riley Keys, notable Cherokee citizen, was preached in Sehon Chapel by the Reverend Young Ewing. Judge Keys had died in June of that year, and services had been conducted beside his grave by the Reverend T. M. Rights of the Moravian Church. At the time a Methodist minister was not available.