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THE CHOCTAW "HARVARD," 1842 - 1900

A THESIS

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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SPENCER ACADEMY:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Whoso neglects learning is dead for the future.

Euripides

The struggle to improve and achieve recognition of one's peers has been a recurring theme in the American Epoch. Witness the efforts of the Irish Catholic, the backwoods Scotsman, the poor of the slums and the southern Negro. So too has been the pursuit of certain Indian tribes. The "praying Indians" of new England and the Five Civilized Tribes' elimination of ancient ways illustrate aboriginal efforts to gain the approbation of the white man.

The desire to imitate the intruder was singular among the Southern Indians. Recognizing apparent superiority, the Five Civilized Tribes sought to copy the new ways of their subjugators. To study the whites' "more perfect way," the Five Tribes established places of learning for their young people.

The educational institutions created by the Southern Indians were clearly Indian efforts to seek excellence in a new society. The Choctaws

through Spencer Academy provide a case history of one such attempt in this regard.

In their ancestral home, the Choctaws exhibited an interest in educational pursuits. Eighteenth century missionaries promulgated the value of the white man's ways. By treaties made with the United States, the Choctaw Nation customarily set aside annuities for education of its youth. In 1825, the Secretary of War allotted treaty funds for educational purposes at Johnson Academy in Scott County, Kentucky. By 1841, this frontier institution annually received from two to three hundred Indian boys, mostly Choctaw.[1] Choctaw support of the Academy demonstrated this tribe's abiding interest in civilization.

Indian removal during the 1830's delayed but did not deter the institutionalized education of young Choctaws. Their westward trek completed, the Choctaws continued to send promising young men to Johnson Academy. In July, 1841, however, Major William Armstrong, the Choctaw Agent, wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that the chiefs no longer had confidence in the Kentucky school. To them, proper facilities nearer home could better educate their sons. The Nation intended to establish an academic institution which would also teach mechanical and agricultural arts.[2] As a tool of civilization, the school would assist the Choctaws in their advance on "the white man's road."

The Choctaws had an abiding faith in their undertaking. They knew that if the Nation was to survive, the white man's way must become

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[1]Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VI (Dec. 1928), 453.

[2]Ibid.

their way. To them, success in the venture rested upon the worth and value of Spencer Academy, the Choctaw "Harvard."

CHAPTER II

GENESIS AND GROWTH, 1842 - 1861

There is no consolation from above.

James Ramsey

The Choctaw Council in November, 1842, adopted a law which established Spencer Academy. The school continued in operation without interruption until the Civil War. During these seventeen years, Spencer was efficiently administered by representatives of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, an agency of the Presbyterian General Assembly. Many tribesmen in the beginning were skeptical of the wilderness Harvard, but opposition had vanished by 1861, which illustrated the success of the institution.

The Educational Act adopted by the Choctaw Council in 1842 provided for a male boarding school at a site ten miles north of Doaksville, the capital of the Nation. Two thousand dollars from the United States Indian Civilization Fund and $6,000 from annuities received by the tribe supported the institution. For a permanent subsidy of $6,320, the Choctaws in 1825 had ceded back to the United States all lands east of the present Oklahoma-Arkansas boundary. The use of this allowance for Spencer was "the first instance of an Indian tribe changing the payment

of their annuity from the tribe for educational purposes," wrote Agent Armstrong.[1] Including the salary of the principal teacher, loaned to the school by the United States, $8,833 was annually available for the boarding and teaching of students at Spencer.[2]

Named for Secretary of War John C. Spencer, this institution was governed by a Board of Trustees, the members selected by the General Council. The Choctaw Agent, William Armstrong, served as a Trustee and United States' representative to the Board. Delegated authority by the Trustees, Major Armstrong made initial preparations for the Academy's first term. The General Council had stipulated that the Superintendent must be a pious man, a preacher, and a Presbyterian. In late December, 1842, Armstrong recommended the appointment of Cephas Washburn as Superintendent and William Wilson as principal teacher. To furnish the school, Armstrong traveled to Boston to purchase fixtures, clothing, bedding, books and beds.[3]

Washburn, a missionary to the Cherokees and recently associated with Dwight Mission, declined to accept the Superintendency of Spencer. Consequently, Major Armstrong asked leaders at the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to suggest a properly qualified Superintendent.[4]

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[1] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1843, 368.

[2] Edmund McKinney to Walter Lowrie, Spencer Academy, 20 June 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Joseph Folsom, ed., Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation (New York, 1896), 79.

[3] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1843, 369; McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 18 July 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[4] William Armstrong to W. Lowrie, Washington, 8 Sept. 1843, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

The Board of Foreign Missions, with headquarters in New York City, was an agency of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. It was organized in 1837 to place the Presbyterian Church directly in mission activity and not to compete with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which already received the support of some Presbyterian churches, as well as Congregational and Reformed. The American Board was formed in 1810 and had missionaries among the Choctaws as early as 1818. In contacting the Foreign Board of Missions, however, the Choctaws were seeking assistance from a strictly Presbyterian organization.[5]

Since Spencer was to open in November, 1843, Armstrong urged the Mission Board to recommend a Superintendent immediately. In response to the plea for a qualified man, the Board suggested Edmund McKinney, already in the Indian Territory. Recently commissioned to the Seminoles, Reverend Mr. McKinney was a native of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. He was a minister and a qualified teacher. At the Creek Mission since July 4, 1843, McKinney received notice of his appointment to the Superintendency on November 11th. Immediately, he set out with his wife and two sons for the Choctaw Nation, arriving at Spencer on December 8, 1843.[6]

McKinney was met by turmoil. The goods purchased by Major Armstrong were still on a Red River dock. With only meager facilities the Trustees had scheduled the first term for January 1, 1844, but the

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[5]Alfred Nevin, ed., Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (Philadelphia, 1884), 245; J. T. Adams, ed., Dictionary of American History, Vol. III (New York, 1942), 417.

[6]McKinney to W. Lowrie, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, 22 April 1843; Creek Mission, 22 July 1843, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844, 386.

new Superintendent succeeded in delaying it for thirty days. McKinney used the interval to construct additional facilities and make further preparations for Spencer's first class of sixty boys.[7]

Appointed by the Board of Trustees, McKinney was involved in power struggles among the Board members. Major Armstrong, as a Trustee and United States Agent, sought to establish Spencer policy. Frequently, his designs were counter to those of the President of the Trustees, Colonel Peter P. Pitchlynn, a tribal leader. McKinney was usually between opposing forces as in the Jacob Folsom controversy. Folsom, a nephew of Colonel Pitchlynn, was the caretaker of the Academy during its construction. Major Armstrong directed McKinney to discharge him once academic operations began. To Folsom, the release was retaliation for his part in Colonel Pitchlynn's reprimand of McKinney over construction matters. McKinney became the focus of Folsom's wrath.[8]

The Superintendent shared administrative authority with the principal teacher. William Wilson served with a commission from the Federal Government and at the pleasure of Major Armstrong. Thus McKinney was required to consult on school policy with Wilson who in turn was subject to the Agent's decision. Furthermore, the principal teacher, as an employee of the United States on loan to the institution, drew a larger salary than McKinney. As McKinney's appointment occurred from necessity, he thought of himself as the "principal servant."[9]

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[7] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844, 389; McKinney to Lowrie, Spencer, 20 June 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; McKinney to Peter P. Pitchlynn, Spencer, 25 Sept. 1844, Pitchlynn Papers, Gilcrease Institute.

[8] McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 18 July 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[9] William H. Goode, Outposts of Zion (Cincinnati, 1863), 184.

One of McKinney's problems was supplying the boarding school at inflated prices from a meager treasury. He purchased most supplies through Berthelet, Heald and Company of Doaksville, Choctaw Nation. This firm also paid the outstanding accounts of Spencer and settled each quarter with the Agent, who allocated the institution's funds. Without direct financial control, McKinney was powerless to adjust an increasing indebtedness.[10]

Inability to cope with the internal organization of Spencer, and troubled relationships with the principal teacher caused McKinney to submit his resignation, effective October 1, 1845.[11] He did not leave without a measure to success, for to his credit was commencement of the institution's first term and in June, 1844, the construction of a third dormitory. He deserved commendation for organization of the school and the daily schedule of the students. His effort to transfer the Academy from the control of the Nation to that of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, however, was his greatest contribution.

Aware of dissatisfaction with local administration, McKinney suggested that the Foreign Mission Board assume control of Spencer. Lest the New York agency procrastinate, he urged prompt action to prevent the Baptists or Methodists from taking over the Academy. Should this happen, said McKinney, "Presbyterianism will be rooted out of the Nation and ignorant fanaticism will reign."[12] His resignation facilitated the

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[10] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844, 390.

[11] McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 22 April 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[12] McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 Sept. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Presbyterian Board's assumption of the Academy's administration. Thus, before completing two years of service, Edmund McKinney left the Choctaw Nation. He later worked among the Iowa and Sac Indians in the service of the Foreign Board.[13]

The Choctaws were wary of their ability to manage the affairs of Spencer Academy. The very nature of the institution's government portended failure. Consequently, overtures were made to missionary organizations to assume control.[14] Yet the two-year experience of sharing in the management of Spencer had value. The Reverend P. P. Brown, a Baptist traveler, observed in 1847 that native administration was "of much profit to the Nation and satisfaction to those connected with the other schools as the people are now satisfied they cannot do it."[15]

Three mission groups were considered by the Choctaw Council to assume control of Spencer. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, whose missionaries administered the majority of the day schools, rejected the proposal because of insufficient funds. Reverend William H. Goode, Methodist Superintendent of Fort Coffee, another Choctaw school for boys, in September, 1844, declined an invitation to discuss the subject. He wanted additional "time for the defects of their organization more fully to develop themselves."[16]

The third organization approached was the Presbyterian Board of

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[13] Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1846, 5.

[14] McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 22 April 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[15] The Indian Advocate, September, 1847, 4.

[16] Goode, Outposts of Zion, 185.

Foreign Missions. The executive secretary of the Board, Walter Lowrie, discussed the transfer of Spencer with the Office of Indian Affairs. Lowrie had served one term, 1819 to 1825, in the United States Senate and eleven years as Secretary to the Senate. He could, therefore, make an effective contact in the Capitol City.[17]

With McKinney's recommendation and Lowrie's influence, the Presbyterian Board proposed to undertake the management of Spencer. Under the Board's guidance, the Indian Harvard would have Godly administrators, mission experience, educated teachers, and an additional $2,000 per year. "With these advantages," wrote Lowrie, "and with the blessing of God, the youth of the Choctaw Nation would rise to a perfect equality with any portion of the United States."[18]

On October 7, 1845, the Choctaw Council transferred Spencer to the Presbyterian Board. In turn, the Foreign Mission Board agreed to contribute $2,000 annually and govern the institution according to the Choctaw Educational Act of November, 1842. The Reverend Cyrus Kingsbury, the Sage of Pine Ridge, was requested to advise the Mission Board.[19]

Lowrie was concerned about the possibility of conflict with the Choctaw Nation and the Board of Trustees. In December, 1845, Colonel Peter P. Pitchlynn sought to allay the fears of the Secretary. He pointed

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[17]U. S., Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961 (Washington, 1961), 1239.

[18]W. Lowrie to McKinney, Pittsburg, 4 June 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[19]Kingsbury to W. Lowrie, Pine Ridge, 16 Oct. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Folsom, Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation, 89; Copy of Agreement between the Assemblies Board and Choctaw Nation, 1846, Pitchlynn Papers MSS, Gilcrease Institute.

out that the Board of Missions was required to enroll one hundred students as stated in the 1842 Act, and the National Council's role was to select the pupils, appoint the Trustees, and fix the day of examinations.[20] Thus assured, Lowrie committed the Foreign Mission Board to assume administration of Spencer Academy.

The Board's first action was to select a Superintendent. For the position, they chose Reverend James B. Ramsey, a native of New York, graduate of Princeton, thirty-one years old, and an ordained minister. The new Superintendent set out for his post from Princeton, New Jersey, in April, 1846.[21]

In the meantime, Peter Pitchlynn urged the Foreign Board to retain the services of William Wilson, the principal teacher. Lowrie corresponded with Wilson and asked him to remain after Ramsey's arrival. He also requested information concerning Spencer's buildings, employees, library and school, and farm. Wilson supplied the information, but declined to remain at the Academy. He anticipated a reduced salary and loss of his favored position.[22]

On June 1, 1846, Reverend James Ramsey accepted control of Spencer Academy in behalf of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Numerous difficulties immediately were presented, not the least of which was a desperate financial condition. No accurate accounts had been kept

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[20]Pitchlynn to W. Lowrie, Washington, 13 Dec. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[21]Nevin, Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church, 737; Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1846, 5 & 6.

[22]Pitchlynn to W. Lowrie, Washington, 13 Dec. 1845; William Wilson to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 25 Dec. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

at the the institution during McKinney's administration. From Berthelet, Heald and Company and the Indian Agent, Ramsey learned that on June 1, 1846, the Academy was overdrawn $7,000. Thus he postponed opening the school until all debts were paid and a full appropriation on hand.[23] On closer investigation Ramsey found that the actual debt was only $3,000, and the Choctaw Council, anxious to have the school in operation, assumed the debt.[24] Ramsey then announced that Spencer would open on the first Thursday of November.[25]

Ramsey was sorely tried by the lack of personnel, particularly a principal teacher and steward. He declared that a special type of individual was required for service of this sort. "We want a man," wrote Ramsey, "who feels disposed to devote his life, if need be, to the work."[26] In response, Oliver P. Stark, twenty-three years old and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, was commissioned principal teacher.[27]

When the new term began in November, 1846, the staff was still deficient, and an epidemic described as inflammation of the lungs forced the school to close after a few weeks. Ramsey believed the sickness was

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[23]James Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Sept. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[24]Ramsey to Spencer Trustees and the General Council, Spencer, 6 Oct. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[25]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 8 Oct. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[26]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[27]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 Nov. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; E. W. Scott, ed., Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1861 - 1941 (Austin, 1942), 681.

God's retribution for the students' spiritual neglect, but he used the time to good advantage.[28] Stark was sent East to recruit additional help and returned in February with the McClure family and Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Gardiner. The McClures were appointed stewards and Mr. Gardiner assistant teacher.[29]

Ramsey's annual report provided a description of early Spencer Academy and its environment. The Superintendent's home was directly in the center of the Academy's grounds which extended over two and one-quarter square miles. Rising in clear springs, a crystal stream provided an abundance of water. Most of the land consisted of thin, rocky soil, which supported a cover of scrub oak. Crops in the area were generally poor and pasture almost nonexistent. Only a small portion of the campus was cleared of the gnarled scrub oak forest.[30]

Set in a quadrangle, most of the Academy buildings were constructed of rough hewn logs. The three dormitories were named Pitchlynn, Jones, and Armstrong Halls for the Trustees. These buildings were two-storied, measured sixteen by sixty-four feet, were constructed of roughly sawed boards and painted white, and had an upper and lower porch. On each floor were four rooms sixteen feet square, each of which had three windows and an outside door. The log buildings were roofed with home-made shingles, and the walls were plastered and whitewashed. Situated on a gentle knoll, and encircled by tranquil highlands, the Academy was

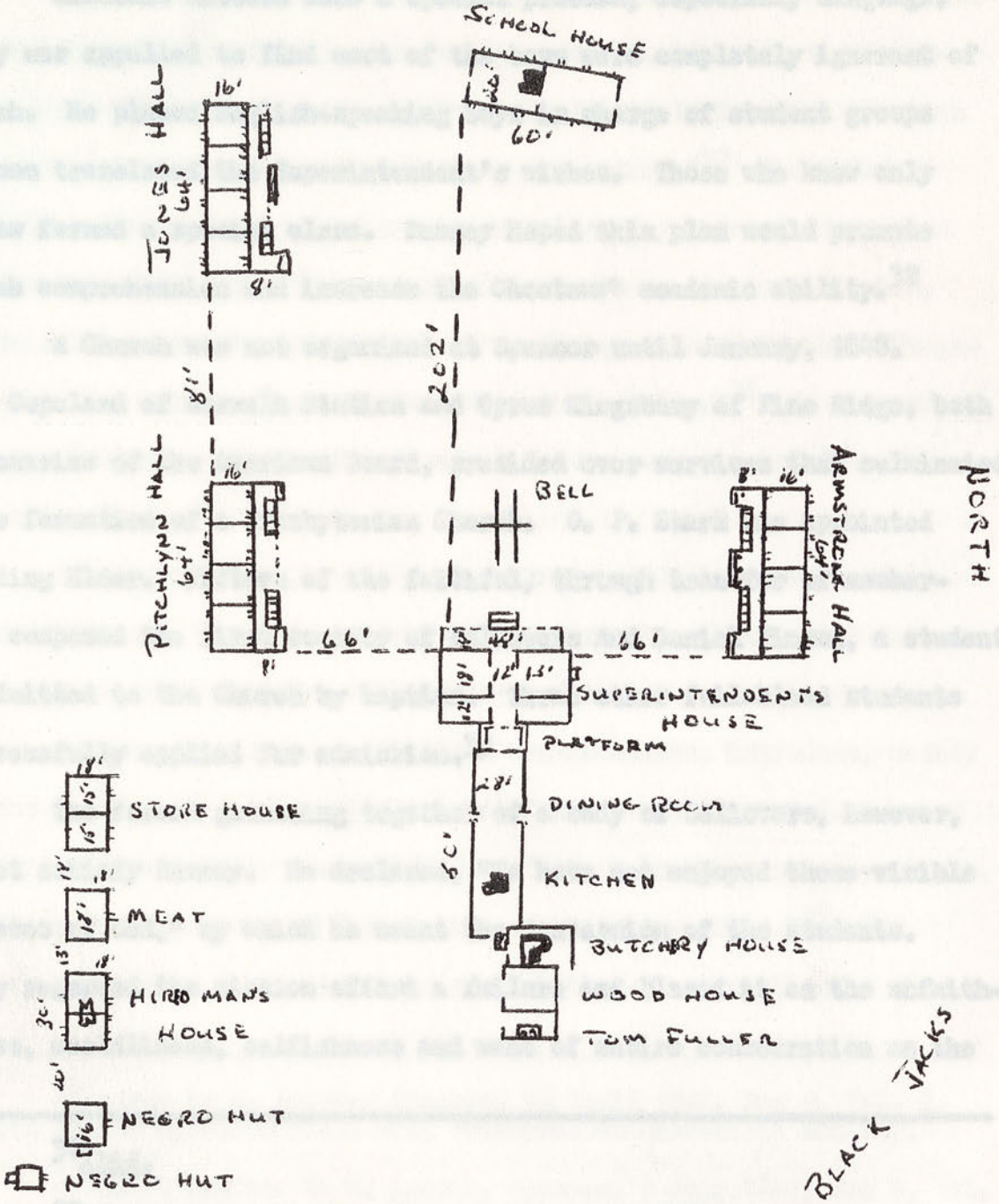
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[28]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 2 Dec. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[29]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 3 March 1847, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[30]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 13 Aug. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

DIAGRAM OF BUILDINGS AT SPENCER ACADEMY, CHOCTAW NATION, 1846



Traced from Ramsey's report to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 13 Aug. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

not without charm. In this peaceful land, Ramsey declared that he and his staff felt strangely free of the burden of the Christian Cross.[31]

Academic matters were a special problem, especially language. Ramsey was appalled to find most of the boys were completely ignorant of English. He placed English-speaking boys in charge of student groups who then translated the Superintendent's wishes. Those who knew only Choctaw formed a special class. Ramsey hoped this plan would promote English comprehension and increase the Choctaws' academic ability.[32]

A Church was not organized at Spencer until January, 1848. G. C. Copeland of Norwalk Station and Cyrus Kingsbury of Pine Ridge, both missionaries of the American Board, presided over services that culminated in the formation of a Presbyterian Church. O. P. Stark was appointed Presiding Elder. Fifteen of the faithful, through transfer of membership, composed the first society of believers and Daniel Pinson, a student, was admitted to the Church by baptism. Three other full-blood students unsuccessfully applied for admission.[33]

The formal gathering together of a body of believers, however, did not satisfy Ramsey. He declared, "We have not enjoyed those visible evidences of God," by which he meant the conversion of the students. Ramsey regarded the mission effort a failure and blamed it on the unfaithfulness, worldliness, selfishness and want of entire consecration on the

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 June 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[33] Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1848, 7; Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 14 Jan. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; J. B. Garritt, Historical Sketches of the Missions under the care of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 3rd ed., rev. (Phila., 1886), 28.

part of missionaries at Spencer. He placed special blame on Joseph McClure and his wife.[34]

The McClures, commissioned as stewards at Spencer, directed the boarding department. This yeoman family objected, however, to preparing food for all but students. McClure complained to Lowrie: "I think this fine gentry can at least cook their own extras."[35] The McClures were bitter toward Ramsey, and on one occasion they refused to prepare food for Mrs. Gardiner who was confined to her bed. On another, Mrs. McClure called Ramsey's neice a "bitch" and suggested to "Father" Kingsbury that the missionaries made "a god of their belly."[36] In September, 1847, the McClures, who first refused to leave, were dismissed by the Mission House.

An uneasy truce prevailed at Spencer until the arrival of Dr. Charles Fishback. A native of Louisville, Kentucky, he was sent to supply medical attention for the Academy and immediate neighborhood. Although a medical missionary, Fishback was impulsive, imprudent, easily offended, and zealous. He quickly labeled his associates at Spencer as "either constitutionally disqualified, deficient in practical experience, or wanting in their love of Christ, and of perishing souls."[37] The teachers reconciled their differences and united in opposition to the

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[34]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 16 April 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[35]Joseph McClure to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 9 July 1847, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[36]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 30 July 1847, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[37]Charles Fishback to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 Dec. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

doctor. "Mortification has completely set in," wrote Ramsey, "and had I the power I would this day dismiss the whole lot of them."[38]

Ramsey sought to restore peace by dismissing O. P. Stark whom he regarded as a source of trouble. Stark was involved with the McClures, and frequently disputed heatedly with the Superintendent, his associate teachers, and Fishback.[39] In March, Gardiner resigned as assistant teacher and advised the students that Fishback was the cause of his and Stark's departure.[40]

The adversities and trials of the institution took their toll on the Superintendent. Infected by the disease that closed the school in 1846, Ramsey's throat was constantly sore and his chest continually heavy. He made a trip East in 1848 seeking medical relief for what he considered as tubercular consumption.[41] In March, 1849, with staff disunity at its peak, he submitted his resignation to the Mission House, declaring that by his poor health God was illustrating that he was not worthy or capable of filling the mission post.[42]

Ramsey was displeased with his three-year stewardship at Spencer. Among other faults, there was little improvement in the students' ability to understand and speak English. Consequently, he came to doubt the

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[38]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 19 Feb. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[39]O. P. Stark to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 2 March 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[40]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 16 March 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[41]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 23 June 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[42]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 March 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

superiority of large mission schools and wrote that "every day's experience confirms my views of their inferiority."[43] His primary department had received the approbation of the Trustees, but the Academy's financial problem persisted. In the period from July to December, 1848, actual cost exceeded the estimate by $1,500.[44] During Ramsey's tenure, construction began on a fourth dormitory, but for all his prayers and preaching only fourteen boys were members of the Spencer Church. Furthermore, Ramsey's administration was publicly questioned and a Trustee, Captain Robert M. Jones, a wealthy Choctaw planter, visited the school simply "to examine into the state of things."[45]

In June, 1849, Ramsey received the welcome news that his replacement was enroute, but before his family could depart his infant son died of whooping cough. The new Superintendent, Alexander Reid, arrived on July 11, 1849. Two days later Mrs. Ramsey died. After he buried his wife, Ramsey wrote the Board:

> Sickness and death---the overwhelming waters of affliction ---prevent me---almost now utterly disqualify me from doing anything---My dearest earthly joys are suddenly torn away--- and <u>there is no consolations from above</u>. I have no interest there. My misery is at times almost insupportable---[46]

Ramsey claimed his afflictions came from God, and blamed all on what he called the strange fire he had been offering for the past ten

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[43] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 5 Feb. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[44] Expenses and Estimates, Spencer, 1 July to 31 Dec. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[45] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 2 April 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[46] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 24 July 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

years.[47] Considering himself a hypocrite and refusing to pray, Fishback unsympathetically diagnosed Ramsey as "insane on the subject."[48]

In early September, 1849, Ramsey left Spencer for New York City. Later he was an effective pastor of churches in Lexington and Lynchburg, Virginia.[49] As he left the Choctaw Nation, however, he was emaciated in soul and body. He had given up his wife and son to a land that had been unfriendly and unproductive.

The Board of Foreign Missions selected Alexander Reid as Spencer's new Superintendent. It had also considered William S. Robertson for the post, but commissioned him to the Creeks at Tullahassee Mission instead.[50] The new administrator was born in Kirkmichael, Scotland, in 1818, and immigrated to the United States in 1831. A tailor by trade, he graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1849, and entered the service of the Foreign Board.[51]

Reid attributed Spencer's plight to substandard religious and secular teaching and many unfortunate appointments.[52] Difficulties, however, were more numerous than expected. The adverse departmental conditions were known throughout the Choctaw Nation. Stark and Gardiner

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[47]Alexander Reid to Lowrie, Spencer, 24 July 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[48]Fishback to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 14 Aug. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[49]Nevin, Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church, 737.

[50]Althea Bass, The Story of Tullahassee (Oklahoma City, 1960), 14.

[51]Necrological Reports and Annual Proceedings of the Alumni Association of Princeton Theological Seminary, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1899), 88; Scott, Ministerial Directory, 601.

[52]W. Lowrie to Reid, New York, 11 May 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

attempted to discredit the Academy and Dr. Fishback insisted upon magnifying minor inequities. To Reid, the circumstances were "wretched."[53]

The new Superintendent was a man of action. He wanted a staff that would stand behind him and urged appointment of A. J. Graham and Hamilton Balentine, both Princeton graduates. His workers included C. R. Gregory, who came West with him, and Susan Dutscher, already at the Academy. Reid said both were devoted and would provide a staff of one heart and mind.[54] To acquaint himself with the assignment Reid visited other mission schools and met with Spencer's Board of Trustees.[55]

A majority of the Trustees, Reid found, favored a division of the Academy into smaller schools. The August examinations reinforced the Board's opinion. "Our examination was a very poor affair," the Superintendent reported, "everything but creditable to the institution."[56] Reid agreed that Spencer had not come up to expectations. But the calamities from which the Academy suffered no longer existed. "Prove us for one year longer," he requested of the Choctaws, "---we ask for no more at the present, only let us alone."[57] The Trustees ultimately acquiesced, and

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[53]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 24 July 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[56]Ibid.; Spencer Board of Trustees to Alexander Reid, Doaksville, 6 Aug. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Choctaw Telegraph, 18 Oct. 1849, 2; Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. 1849, 1105.

[57]Alexander Reid to the Board of Trustees of Spencer Academy, Spencer, 28 Sept. 1849, printed in the Choctaw Telegraph, 25 Oct. 1849, 3.

Reid jubilantly reported that opposition to Spencer was broken.[58]

Spencer Academy and Alexander Reid were on trial throughout the school term, 1849-50. In January, he reported "we are succeeding beyond our expectations."[59] In June, he reported again: "I am very happy in my work."[60] On July 12, 1850, the examinations were held with a host of Choctaws present as the Jury. "I feel more like singing than writing," exultated Reid. "The progress of the boys was manifest. A great crowd attended and all went away delighted with Spencer."[61] Secure in Choctaw favor, Reid was justly proud.

The Board of Foreign Missions appointed their missionaries for three years. Frequently, however, those commissioned did not serve the designated period. Spencer missionaries, unfortunately, were no different. Casper Gregory and A. J. Graham returned home after one year. Susan Dutcher married James Ramsey's nephew in December, 1850, and planned to leave the Academy, but died suddenly near Pine Ridge. Hamilton Balentine arrived at Spencer in 1850 and left in 1852 for Wapanucka. J. G. Turner came in January, 1851, but in thirteen months could no longer endure teaching. Reverend John Edwards stayed two years and then transferred to Wheelock. All were dedicated Christians, but not all preferred

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[58]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 Oct. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[59]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 5 Jan. 1850, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[60]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 21 June 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[61]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 13 July 1850, Box 12, Vol 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Spencer or could stand its rigors.[62]

Some missionaries stayed for the length of their commission and longer. Joseph Betz, who built Wilson Hall, served as carpenter from 1846 to 1855. Faithful Miss Elizabeth Morrison, neice of James Ramsey, served all but two of the years between 1846 to 1859, as well as after the Civil War. Robert Burtt taught from 1853 to 1857. George Ainslie remained at Spencer four years and H. A. Wentz, an eccentric bachelor always on the threshold of marriage, served the Academy from 1857 to 1860. Nathaniel Wiggins and his family acted as stewards for four years also. Finally, Robert Young, who first impressed Reid as having a weak mind, still weaker body, and too far from his mother, faithfully taught from 1856 to 1861.[63]

Unskilled labor at Spencer was secured locally. Indians would do few menial tasks, and thus the Superintendents used slaves. The Negro hands were hired by the Academy from wealthy Indian owners. When Reid arrived in 1849, nine or ten black men were employed. He disliked the use of slaves, however, and three years later reduced the number to four wash women.[64] From 1853 to 1855, however, the number employed increased from six to ten women, and additional men to chop wood. The use of slaves

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[62]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 17 Aug. 1850; 6 Feb. 1851; 14 Feb. 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Home and Foreign Record, November, 1850, 162; Scott, Ministerial Directory, 33; Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1851, 3; 1852, 5; 1854, 7.

[63]Garritt, Historical Sketches, 34; Reid to J. L. Wilson, Spencer, 30 Aug. 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[64]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 28 Jan. 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

varied with Reid's ability to obtain white help.[65]

The Negro slaves at Spencer contributed to American folk music. Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva Willis bared their souls in songs which the students and missionaries committed to memory. Alexander Reid heard the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University at Newark, New Jersey in 1871. Their repertoire of native Negro songs insufficient, he taught them the Spencer songs. Later sung before Queen Victoria, among those originated at the Academy were "Steal Away to Jesus," "The Angels are Coming," "I'm a Rolling, I'm a Rolling," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."[66]

Ordained ministers who were appointed as teachers were generally dissatisfied at Spencer. They considered teaching beneath their training and calling. Casper Gregory, who came with Reid, accepted a pastorate in Pennsylvania after one year. Hamilton Balentine was more inclined to teach, but yearned for a ministerial post. Reverend John Edwards could not wait to take over Wheelock Mission and George Ainslie chaffed under the yoke of teaching. Sheldon Jackson thought any common layman could teach at Spencer and H. A. Wentz implored the Mission Board to assign him a pastorate.[67] Reid had definite opinions on the matter. "You can't

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[65]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 1 Oct. 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[66]Reid to John Edwards, Doaksville, 15 Jan. 1884, in the Presbyterian, 10 Sept. 1890, but republished in J. B. Thoburn and Muriel Wright, Oklahoma: A History of the State and its People, Vol. 2 (New York, 1929), Appendix, 826; Muriel Wright, "Early River Navigation in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (March 1930), 82.

[67]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 17 Aug. 1850; 28 Jan. 1852; Edwards to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 26 Dec. 1851, Box 12 Vol. 1; Sheldon Jackson to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 6 Jan. 1859, Box 10, Vol. 2; H. A. Wentz to Wilson, Spencer, 28 Jan. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

find compentent ministers to teach. They don't have the grace."[68] For professional educators, however, it was another matter. Robert Young, Orlando Lee and Robert Burtt were very satisfactory instructors in the Indian Academy, and gained the respect of their Superintendent.[69]

Just as Reid scorned ordained ministers, he doubted the value of female missionaries. Susan Dutcher, for whom he had high respect, was replaced by Miss Freelove K. Thompson. Reid thought her "superior and accomplished," but questioned that she would succeed as a missionary. "She should have been sent to China," he wrote.[70] By January, 1852, he was absolutely convinced that women teachers would not do.[71] Mrs. Betz and Mrs. Evans were feeble and ill, and the latter cried by the hour. As a result, one-half of their husbands' time was devoted to the family.[72] Reid wanted no more married men. "The bare thought of a man and his wife coming to Spencer puts me in a fever," he wrote.[73]

The Superintendent's own experiences prejudiced him against women. Single when he came to Spencer, Reid soon realized that it was "not

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[68]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 April 1851, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[69]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 14 Jan. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[70]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 April 1851, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[71]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 28 Jan. 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[72]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 17 Aug. 1853; 29 Dec. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[73]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 18 Dec. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

good for man to live alone."[74] On September 30, 1850, he married Elizabeth Graham, who immediately entered into the mission labors. Physically weak, Academy burdens bore heavily upon the young Mrs. Reid, and her husband continually implored the Mission House to furnish her with an assistant.[75] After the birth of their first child on January 19, 1854, her health rapidly deteriorated.[76] Reid reported in May, 1854, that Mrs. Reid would "shortly enter into her rest."[77] On June 6, 1854, she died. Their's had been a happy life together, but Mrs. Reid had suffered constant illness from the burdens of the post. Reid concluded that Spencer labors had crucified his wife and that other women would have to pay the same price. One year later his attitude softened, however, and on November 3, 1855, he married Miss Thompson. He was indeed thankful that she was not sent to China.[78]

In regard to nepotism, the Board of Foreign Missions had no regulation. The Board's Superintendent at Spencer Academy made the most of its silence. His brother John acted as Assistant Superintendent, but received little more compensation than board and room. Isabelle and John Reid, Jr., and Charles and Janet Fenquharson, neices and nephews, worked

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[74]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 July 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[75]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 30 Aug. 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[76]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[77]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 18 May 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[78]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 Nov. 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

in the kitchen and on the farm.[79] Reid showed no favoritism by family appointments. His relatives were dependable employees and that he was unable to retain them permanently was Spencer's loss.

Superintendent Reid was an astute administrator. In two and one-half years he reduced the staff from thirty-seven to twenty-four and decreased the sum paid in salaries $500 annually. The savings was partially effected by a reduction in his own salary from $600 to $200 per year. His diminished wage was even less than the carpenter's. Greater care was taken also in the preparation of food resulting in one and one-half bushels less of daily corn consumption.[80] Despite many physical improvements, from May, 1849 to May, 1856, expenses were $71,069 while income was $73,750. During Reid's administration expenses never exceeded income.[81]

Reid was jubilant about the success of the school. "We are succeeding beyond our expectations," he wrote.[82] The Board of Foreign Missions agreed to admit one hundred boys to Spencer. Seldom were that few enrolled. In 1851, there were one hundred thirty-five students, and in the following term, one hundred forty-one. For the 1853-54 session, Reid hoped to take one hundred fifty boys, and looked to the day he would have two hundred. The Superintendent personally admitted all students

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[79]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 28 Jan 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 26 May 1858, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[82]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 5 Jan. 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

above one hundred.[83] So great was the desire of the full-blood to educate his children that hard feelings inevitable occurred when a particular boy was not enrolled. Convinced that five hundred boys if permitted would enroll in ten days, Reid had to limit the student body to reduce ill will.[84]

Of the many students that entered the Choctaw Harvard few remained more than three years. Thirty-four boys ran away in the 1852-53 term. Unfortunately, the students who left were the older and more advanced. Frequent changes of instructors provoked the departures. Each new teacher lost part of his class before he gained its respect. George Ainslie's group of older students literally rebelled his first year at Spencer. Of thirty-five boys, only five returned for the following session. Another teacher, J. H. Nourse, stayed only one term, during which some of his youngsters ran away as many as six times.[85]

With the older, more advanced students leaving, Spencer became a large primary school. Peter P. Pitchlynn first made the observation, but Alexander Reid agreed. Two thirds of the boys were under twelve years of age in 1854. One-half had enrolled less than two sessions before, and only four had remained longer than five years.[86] "If Pitchlynn and

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[83]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 15 Dec. 1851; 20 Oct. 1852; 17 March 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[84]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 30 July 1853; 26 Oct. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[85]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 June 1853; 20 March 1853; 13 Dec. 1853; 17 March 1853; 4 March 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[86]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 18 Jan. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

the Trustees won't keep the students in school ten to fifteen years," explained the Superintendent, "you cannot have a higher level of education."[87] Parents and students were reluctant to submit to the discipline necessary for a successful school. If the youngsters stayed for four or five years, however, Reid declared that "they would be pretty good scholars."[88]

Reid had duties other than managing the school. The summer of 1851 he spent preaching, eating, and living with the Choctaws. He spoke fifty times, rode 1,200 to 1,500 miles and saw 3,000 to 4,000 people. Throughout the Nation he met "Spencer boys," and for the first time understood the greatness of the work in which he and his associates were engaged.[89] He reorganized the Spencer Church in April, 1854. Twelve were admitted to membership and George Ainslie elected presiding elder.[90]

In the Summer of the same year a religious revival manifested in the vicinity of the Academy. Between 300 and 700 Indians were present at different sacramental meetings between 1854 and 1855.[91] By the last of September, 1854, eighty-two were members of the Spencer church.[92]

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[87] Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[88] Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 2 Feb. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[89] Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 19 Sept. 1851, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[90] Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[91] Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1854; 2 May 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[92] Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 27 Sept. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

At nearby congregations, hundreds of children were baptized and many adults received into the followship.[93] J. C. Silliman was sent in late 1855 to pastor the churches, but ill health forced him to leave within the year.[94] The Board hesitated to send another pastor, but Reid regarded the churches so important that he threatened to resign unless an additional minister was sent.[95]

As the unofficial dean of the Foreign Board's Choctaw missionaries Reid aided in the administration of other mission points. In this capacity he was involved in the Reverend Mr. Eells controversy at Goodwater Mission. Eells was a Southerner commissioned to superintend the Chickasaw Female Academy. Most of his associates, as a consequence, were women. Eells, whose wife was pregnant, was if not immoral, at least indiscreet. He reportedly used every occasion to physically touch his teachers. Reports said he draped his arms over the breasts of Miss Mathers, and moved Miss Holingsworth into an adjacent bedroom. He put his arms about the latter and kissed her on the steps of the Seminary. Reid did not blame Eells for this action because Miss Holingsworth was "a very loveable little body---age about 20."[96] Reid did object to the Goodwater Superintendent visiting the young teacher's sickroom at night dressed only in a shirt. In addition to this impropriety, Eells massaged her feet

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[93]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1854; 24 July 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[94]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 2 June 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[95]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 23 Feb. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[96]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 22 Sept. 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

and legs, used a poultice on her "bowels," and employed a cather and syringe. To Reid, the whole matter was highly indecent and he recommended Bells removal.[97]

After seven years, the cares of Spencer forced Reid to submit his resignation. He asked not to leave the Choctaws, but instead to learn their language and live among them. "My spirit," he wrote, "is so broke down that I cannot endure my position any longer."[98] In response to Reid's request, the Mission Board appointed Gaylord More, a New York minister, as Spencer's new Superintendent. More arrived at the Academy on November 1, 1856. To ease More's adjustment to the institution, Reid delayed his departure.[99]

Superintendent More remained at Spencer for only one year. After a month he advised the Board he would leave at the close of the session. The burdens of his wife prompted his resignation. He declared that had he known of her duties he never would have come to the Indians.[100] More also lost the respect of his staff. Robert Young threatened to resign if the new Superintendent remained.[101] The Mission House sounded out James Ross Ramsey (no relation to the earlier Superintendent, James

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[97]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 6 Sept. 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1; 4 March 1856; 7 March 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[98]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 March 1856; 11 Aug. 1856; Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[99]Gaylord More to Wilson, Spencer, 5 Nov. 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2. American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[100]More to Wilson, Spencer, 4 Dec. 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[101]Robert Young to Wilson, Spencer, 1 July 1857, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

B. Ramsey) as a replacement for More. Ramsey declined, however, to leave his post in the Seminole Nation.[102] In desperation, the Foreign Board implored Alexander Reid to return to the Academy. The Sage of Spencer, in New Jersey because of his wife's health, accepted the call because the Choctaws were dissatisfied with Spencer's late management.[103]

In the meantime, James Frothingham served as Acting Superintendent. When Reid arrived in late December, "his coming was very much like that of 'Napoleon to his eagles.'"[104] Reid acted to restore the confidence of the Choctaws in their National Academy. When, at the end of the term, he returned to his wife, the Nation once again considered Spencer as its principal tool of civilization.

What had been won, however, was lost in one more term. Frothingham resumed the Superintendency for the 1858-59 session. The year was highly unsuccessful. Because of his health, Sheldon Jackson, later a successful Alaskan missionary, dismissed the upper class. A measles epidemic developed and the institution suffered a general loss of respect.[105] George Ainslie, however, indicated that it was no wonder the Indians complained. "The whole place lies open, unprotected by a fence. Cattle and hogs rome the campus."[106] In view of the conditions at Spencer,

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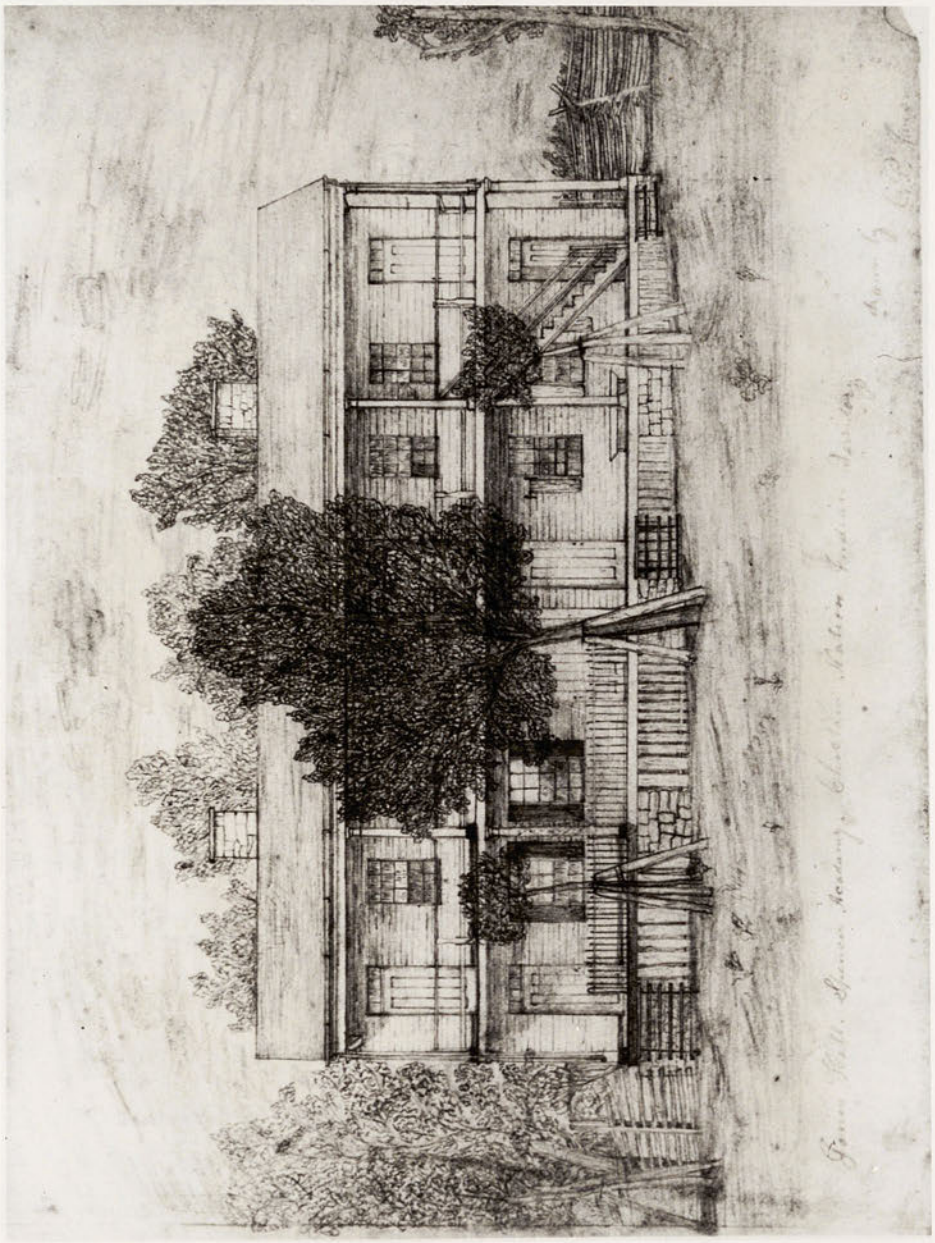
[102]J. R. Ramsey to Wilson, Oak Ridge, 28 July 1857, Box 6, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[103]Reid to Wilson, Princeton, 22 July 1859, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[104]H. A. Wentz to Wilson, Spencer, 2 Jan. 1858, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[105]Robert L. Stewart, Sheldon Jackson (New York, 1908), 47.

[106]Ainslie to Wilson, Goodwater, 4 Aug. 1859, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.



Jones Hall, Old Spencer Academy, 1861

Alexander Reid consented to return once again.

The indispensable Superintendent, for the second time without his wife, returned to the Choctaws in August, 1859.[107] His return inspired the good will of the masses once again. "The full-bloods are my warm friends," wrote Reid six months later. Furthermore, Spencer was in "as good or better shape than ever," and "the mission family move along very harmoniously."[108] Unfortunately, he was unable to say the same for his beloved Choctaws.

The late 1850's and early 1860's were perilous for the Indians. Famine stalked the land through 1860 and early 1861. The Mission Board offered relief, but Reid declined the assistance. He said aid would obscure to the Indian that his suffering came from his own indolence, and he quietly assisted the Choctaws by giving them work and food as payment.[109] The slavery issue also created disunity. The National Council in early 1854 passed a law requiring all abolitionists to leave the Nation.[110] Either honestly or prudently, the missionaries thereafter remained silent on the inflammatory issue. Ardently anti-slave, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions dismissed its workers in the Choctaw Nation who refused to espouse the Northern cause. Through Reid's efforts these dedicated men were commissioned by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions who sought a neutral position

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[107]Reid to S. O. Lee, Princeton, 11 Aug. 1859, Lee Family Collection MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[108]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 14 Jan. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[109]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 10 Dec. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[110]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 6 Jan. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence, Presbyterian Historical Society.

on the slavery issue.[111]

The leading Choctaws considered most missionaries abolitionists. The American Board's action only reinforced their conclusion. When H. A. Wentz, a former missionary teacher at Spencer, was caught selling firearms on May 20, 1862, few doubted the subversiveness of mission activity. The next day Spencer was visited by an armed mob in search of additional weapons.[112] In danger of a return visit and with the Choctaws casting their lot with the South, Spencer could not continue. By May 24th, most of the missionaries left the Academy. After September 5th, only Alexander Reid and his family remained to hear the echo of happy voices of a bygone day.[113] Said Reid: "I intend to remain here as long as I am allowed to do so undisturbed."[114]

As the Spencer refugees made their way through the Confederate States to the North, an era at the Choctaw Harvard ended.[115] The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions assumed direction of Spencer in 1846. The first three years guided by James B. Ramsey ended in heartache and frustration. Under the direction of Alexander Reid, however, the Academy

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[111]Choctaw Mission to S. B. Treat, Pine Ridge, 13 Nov. 1855, Box 10, Vol. 2; Choctaw Mission to W. Lowrie, Pine Ridge, 2 Dec. 1859, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[112]Ainslie to John Lowrie, Haganans Mills, New York, 15 July 1861, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[113]Ibid.; Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1862, 14.

[114]Reid to J. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 June 1861, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[115]Typescript account by Mrs. S. O. Lee, Lee Family Collection MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

gained the respect of its Indian patrons. Reid's momentary retirement only illustrated his ability and influence. After the first seventeen years, the success of the school was evident in the accomplishments of the Spencer "boys." The advent of war clouds, however, suspended Spencer Academy as the Choctaw's principal source of civilization.

CHAPTER III

THE WAR AND AFTER, 1861 - 1882

This people is my people.

Alexander Reid.

The divisive forces at work in Indian Territory were faint echos of the strife in the United States. The notion that the sections were different and the struggle over slavery divided the United States along North-South lines. The conflict affected not only government but religious organizations as well. Southern churches, for example, withdrew from the Presbyterian General Assembly, and after the formation of the Confederacy, established the Presbyterian Church, Confederate States of America. The new southern organization desired to duplicate the many services of the General Assembly, one of which was foreign mission activity. Consequently, an Executive Board was formed and Dr. J. L. Wilson, who had resigned a similar post with the northern churches, was appointed Secretary.[1]

After the Choctaws cast their lot with the South on July 13, 1861,[2]

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[1]Alfred Nevin, ed., Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (Philadelphia, 1884), 1017; Reid to J. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 June 1861, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[2]Angie Debo, The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic (Norman, 1961), 82.

Wilson hastened to the Indian Territory to solidify the southern Church's position.[3] He found that the school property had been repossessed by the Choctaw Council.[4] Reid, Kingsbury, Byington, and others, considered as Confederate supporters and "secessionists" by the departed missionaries, had stayed at their posts, however.[5] At Wilson's urging, the remaining Choctaw missionaries accepted the oversight of the new Executive Board of Foreign Missions. After his visit, Wilson specifically reported that Alexander Reid should have the confidence of southern Christians.[6]

During the strife that followed secession, Spencer Academy did not function as an educational institution. Remaining at the school, Reid continued his religious ministrations to the surrounding community. The dormitories were put to military use. Confederate troops probably did not arrive until the Spring, 1862. Two companies of Major Simpson Folsom's Choctaw battalion were ordered to the vicinity of Doaksville on June 30, 1862.[7] These were apparently the first soldiers stationed in the area. It is doubtful, however, that they camped on the Spencer grounds. According to Reid, the Academy was first occupied by white soldiers. A detachment of Texans, therefore, probably carried the

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[3] Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1861, appendix, 44; The Missionary, April 1868, 26.

[4] Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1862, 14.

[5] S. O. Lee to William P. Cole, Huntington, New York, 15 March 1862, in Annie H. Abel, The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist (Cleveland, 1915), 75.

[6] Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1861, appendix, 44.

[7] The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), First Series, XII, 953.

Civil War to the Choctaw Harvard.[8]

In 1863, a hospital for Confederate troops was established at the Academy, and while the identy of the patients was not recorded, it operated for eighteen months accepting casualties from minor military skirmishes.[9] The dormitories made ideal wards and operating rooms, but not all who were treated survived their stay. A resident later recalled that skeletons and bones remained after the doctors and patients abandoned the Spencer buildings. Many soldiers who entered the Civil War hospitals did not live to recall the experience. The crude, military facility at Spencer was certainly no more efficient, and skeletons may very well have remained as a memorial to the pain and agony of that struggle in the Choctaw Nation.[10]

General Douglas H. Cooper arrived at Spencer on December 14, 1863 with the Wells Battalion. Commanding General William Steele, from his headquarters at Doaksville, directed Cooper to establish himself at the Academy without interfering with the general hospital. He suggested that the men camp at some contiguous point where timber was available for huts.[11] After a winter's encampment, Cooper left Spencer. Later appointed Commanding General of the Indian Territory, Confederate States of America, he made his headquarters at Fort Washita, several miles

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[8]Mrs. S. O. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Omaha Mission, 20 May 1867, Box C-35, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Margaret Oakes Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 38, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[11]War of Rebellion, Series I, XXII, Part II, 1099.

west of the school on the prairie.[12]

The waning Confederate fortunes in the Indian Territory brought a flood of refugees to the Choctaw Nation. From the Autumn of 1863 to the end of the war thousands suffered privations in camps along the Kiamichi, Boggy, and Blue Rivers.[13] Not far from the Kiamichi, Spencer succored hundreds of these destitute civilians. Shelter and food were available in abundance. Kindness and clothing were also on hand. To many, the Academy was an oasis in a desert of strife and destruction.[14]

During military occupation, Alexander Reid held undisputed possession of the Superintendent's house, dining room and kitchen. General Cooper gave strict orders not to disturb him and his family. To Reid, this was a "great favor from the Lord." The possessions of the departed missionaries were left unmolested. Reid never had so much as a chicken taken from him. Furthermore, he never lacked sugar, tea, salt, coffee, or flour for the duration of the war.[15]

Situated in the Superintendent's house, life for the Reid family was not uncomplicated. In October, 1861, after his fellow missionaries at Spencer abandoned their posts, Reid's third child, a daughter, was born.[16]

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[12]Annie H. Abel, The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War (Cleveland, 1919), 303.

[13]Debo, Choctaw Republic, 82; Angie Debo, "Southern Refugees of the Cherokee Nation," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXXV (April, 1932), 256.

[14]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Omaha Mission, 20 May 1867, Box C-35, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library; Reid to Ainslie, Spencer, 27 March 1866, Sue McBeth Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[15]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Omaha Mission, 20 May 1867, Box C-35, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[16]Reid to Ainslie, Spencer, 27 March 1866, Sue McBeth Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

Mrs. Reid was feeble in health, and the childbirth did not improve her condition. As Spencer deteriorated with military occupation, Mrs. Reid also declined. Of her it was said: "She is so still but so pleasant and so kind."[17] In this condition she passed away on July 10, 1864. Thus within ten years, Reid buried a second wife in the Spencer cemetery.

Mrs. Reid's death caused radical changes in the Superintendent's home. A Negro woman was employed to cook and wash and Reid cared for the children.[19] While the Confederate Army was close by he protected them from what he considered evil influences. "I kept my children very closely shut up as much so as if they had been in a convent," he wrote.[20] Secretary Wilson offered to take the baby into his own family and find homes for the boys among his friends. The Superintendent declined the offer. His southern sympathies were not strong enough to send the children to South Carolina. Instead he preferred they receive their education in the home of their "sainted mothers."[21]

Despite sickness in his own home, Reid continued to minister to the Spencer community. He maintained services at two places and sometimes

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[17]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 3 Oct. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[18]Necrological Reports and Annual Proceedings of the Alumni Association of Princeton Theological Seminary, Vol. II (Princeton, 1899), 89.

[19]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Omaha Mission, 20 May 1867, Box C-35, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[20]Reid to Ainslie, Spencer, 27 March 1866, Sue McBeth Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[21]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Omaha Mission, 20 May 1867, Box C-35, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.



Old Spencer's Cemetery, 1965

at a third.[22] His audiences were composed of women, children, and aged men. At one point only two men were present.[23] In 1862, smallpox ravaged the vicinity and over fifteen Choctaws died.[24] Working from Spencer the tireless "Fool of God" was a source of strength and comfort to his charges.

No attempt was made to reopen Spencer Academy during the War.[25] All were caught in the excitement of war and there was little interest in education. Furthermore, no funds were available. Tribal leaders regarded the suspension of teaching as serious, and feared that without schools, the new generation would have no foundation upon which to build a new Nation.[26] The value of education was illustrated by a report which declared that "most of the Choctaw companies that have gone to the War are officered by young men who have been educated at Spencer Academy."[27] In view of the future, leading Choctaw men were thus uneasy over the suspension of the schools.

Spencer was a mission point as well as an educational institution. During the war, the principal function of the Academy was spiritual. The turmoil of the conflict, however, was not conducive to religious interest.

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[22]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1863, appendix, 168.

[23]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1862, 30.

[24]Joseph Wilson, ed., Historical Almanac, 1865 (Philadelphia, 1865), 165.

[25]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1862, 30.

[26]Joseph Wilson, ed., Historical Almanac, 1864, 283.

[27]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1862, 30.

Seldom were there crowds for preaching services and many Spencer Church members neglected their religion entirely.[28] As Reid's children prevented him from traveling great distances, he was unable to arrest the religious corrosion of his people.

The Choctaws persisted in their rebellion against the United States until June 19, 1865. Chief Peter P. Pitchlynn officially surrendered the military forces of the Nation at Doaksville, ten miles south of Spencer.[29] Cyrus Kingsbury's prediction that the Choctaws would be "used up" in a national conflict was dreadfully accurate.[30] The people were destitute and the land destroyed. Some refugees who had received sanctuary among the Choctaws formed lawless bands and preyed upon the people.[31] Hopeless at first, order was restored with surprising rapidity. The war, however, brought disaster. "This was the second time in our history," said Chief Allen Wright, "that the bright future prospects for the Choctaws in the rapid march to civilization have been impeded and paralyzed."[32]

At Spencer Academy, Alexander Reid saw the need for rapid action. He was powerless, however, to reopen Spencer without Council approval. He did increase the circle of his preaching and by 1866 he had four regular appointments.[33] From October of that year to December, 1867, he

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[28]Reid to Ainslie, Spencer, 27 March 1866, Sue McBeth Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[29]Debo, Choctaw Republic, 89.

[30]Kingsbury to Wilson, Pine Ridge, 18 Jan. 1861, Box 10, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[31]Debo, Choctaw Republic, 91-3.

[32]Ibid., 93.

[33]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in U. S., 1866, appendix, 54.

received twenty-three persons into the Church.[34] In July, 1868, Reid and his two sons visited the mountain churches in the north and east, who for seven years were without missionary direction. The trip was made despite recurring chills and fever, but resulted in strengthened and encouraged Choctaw Christians.[35]

After the War, the Choctaws recognized the need for new educational facilities. In December, 1866, the National Council effectively reconstituted the neighborhood schools. In January, the Choctaw children for the first time in five years gathered again at the crude houses of primary learning. Funds, however, were not available for Spencer and it continued dormant.[36]

In February, 1869, Alexander Reid and his children left the Indian Nation.[37] Reid desired to devote his life to the Choctaws, and furthermore, he wanted death and burial in their land.[38] He left the mission, however, on account of his children.[39] With a meager educational program there, proper instruction was available only in the East. Reid took the two boys to Princeton, New Jersey and tutored them for admission into the University. Casper Gregory kindly received his young

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[34] The Missionary, January, 1868, 8.

[35] Ibid., September, 1868, 82.

[36] Debo, Choctaw Republic, 96.

[37] Reid to Sue McBeth, Princeton, 10 Feb. 1872, Sue McBeth Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[38] Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 6 Dec. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[39] Reid to McBeth, Princeton, 10 Feb. 1872, Sue McBeth Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

daughter into his home in Pennsylvania.[40]

Reid was not content in the East. He constantly yearned for Spencer and the Choctaws.[41] Once his children were educated, the Sage of Spencer returned to the Indian Territory in 1880 as a missionary commissioned by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. His headquarters were at Atoka until 1882 when, to work with the Choctaw Freedman, he removed again to Spencer Academy.[42] Six years later, this man of "extreme modesty, of singular executive ability, of sterling Scotch moral strength noted for his piety, spirituality, cheerfulness and entire contentment," died in Boston, Massachusetts.[43] Foremost, however, Alexander Reid was servant of the Choctaws.

After Reid left Spencer in February, 1869, the Academy was occupied by a Negro family. The previous autumn, however, the National Council had authorized the repair of the Choctaw Harvard. Forbis LeFlore, Superintendent of Schools, employed Calvin Ervin to rebuild the Academy. At the end of the summer, the Ervin family moved to the institution. The buildings had deteriorated, but were delightful play areas for the Ervin children. The contractor and carpenter worked steadily for two years before Spencer reflected its antebellum splendor.[44]

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[40]Reid to S. O. Lee, Princeton, n.d., Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Reid to Lee, Atoka, 29 Dec. 1880, Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Robert E. Flickinger, The Choctaw Freedman and the Story of Oak Hill Industrial Academy (Pittsburg, 1914), 22-3.

[43]Necrology of Princeton Seminary, Vol. II, 89.

[44]E. E. Christian, "Memories of my Childhood Days in the Choctaw Nation," Chronicles of Oklahoma, IX (June 1931), 153; Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1869, 410; 1870, 293.

On November 2, 1870, the National Council acted to reestablish Spencer Academy as a male boarding school. Six thousand dollars was withdrawn from the neighborhood school fund and allotted to the institution. The Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist Mission Boards were each asked about administering the school and supplying the teachers and salaries.[45]

The Choctaws sounded out both the northern and southern Presbyterian Church organizations. The northern Church designated itself during the Civil War, Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. After the War, the churches that once formed the Presbyterian Church, Confederate States of America, adopted the title, Presbyterian Church, United States, in order to distinguish it from the northern organization. The Foreign Mission agencies of both church groups agreed to oversee the Academy. Joseph Folsom attempted to have the school placed under the care of Spencer's old benefactor, the Mission Board of the northern Presbyterian Church, (U. S. A.).[46] The Council decided against him, however, and favored instead the Foreign Missions agency of the southern Church (U. S.), a natural selection in view of the Choctaw affinity for things southern.[47]

The southern Church's decision to resuscitate Spencer was hesitant. The determination was made "lest it fall into hands that would make it a curse to the Nation."[48] By agreement, the Mission Board agreed to appoint and support a Superintendent and two teachers and admit to Spencer sixty

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[45]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 2 Nov. 1870.

[46]Reid to Lee, Princeton, n.d., Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[47]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 23 Oct. 1871.

[48]Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1871, 4.

male students. As the new Superintendent the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions selected the Reverend J. H. Colton.[49]

Colton came to the Choctaw Nation from Fayetteville, North Carolina.[50] He joined the Indian Presbytery in January, 1870 and one year later occupied Pine Ridge, the station of the beloved Cyrus Kingsbury, recently deceased.[51] When his Board elected to reopen Spencer, Colton was, therefore, conveniently near. In March, 1871, he was assigned to Spencer and charged with preparing the school for its first term since 1860.[52]

In behalf of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., J. H. Colton accepted administration of Spencer Academy on May 24, 1871. He agreed to govern the institution according to the requirements of the Educational Act of 1842. The contract stipulated that sixty boys would enroll in the Academy and that the Mission Board would supply food, clothes, and instruction for ten years.[53]

The Committee found it difficult to staff Spencer. A school of sixty young Choctaws required a Superintendent and two assistants. The Committee, however, was unable to supply the additional teachers when the Academy opened for its first term in 1871. Thus instead of the projected

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[49] The Missionary, April, 1871, 51.

[50] Natalie M. Denison, "Missions and Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., Among the Choctaws---1866 - 1907," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIV (Winter 1946), 443.

[51] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1870, 6; The Missionary, March, 1871, 37-8.

[52] The Missionary, April, 1871, 51.

[53] Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 23 Oct. 1871.

sixty students, facilities were available for only thirty-two.[54] In September, the Executive Committee published the need for assistants at Spencer, but the response was disappointingly meager.[55]

The lack of teachers detracted from the success of Colton's first year at Spencer. With only half of the prescribed students, the Choctaws detected very little progress. Furthermore, the ineffective examinations demonstrated impotent instruction. The Nation Council, therefore, expected the Academy would improve during its second term.[56]

By commencement of the second session, Spencer was sufficiently staffed. Dependable Miss Elizabeth Morrison, Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Caldwell, and Mr. H. McAskil received commissions from the Executive Committee. With the additional teachers, enrollment at Spencer increased to fifty students.[57] This number, however, was far short of the hundred and more students enrolled before the Civil War.

Unfortunate deaths and accidents at the Academy occurred during Colton's second year. In December, 1872, the boys were waiting on an upper gallery for clean clothes when the supports collapsed. The youngsters tumbled to a splintery heap. Twelve of the students were very badly cut, and all were bruised and scratched. In the following spring, Spencer was visited by another catastrophe. Two of the students died from an

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[54] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1872, 6.

[55] The Missionary, September, 1871, 130.

[56] Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 1 Nov. 1872.

[57] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1873, 9.

unknown malady.[58] Misfortune continued during the new Superintendent's early years at Spencer.

Colton nurtured the spiritual life of the Spencer community. He organized Sabbath morning prayer meetings and Presbyterian catechism classes to instruct the students in Christian virtues. Colton reported in 1873 that a religious reawakening was in progress. It was the first revival of interest since 1858 when Alexander Reid baptized hundreds. Colton was not as successful as Reid, however. Only seven believers were admitted that year to the Spencer Church.[59]

In 1874, J. Leighton Wilson visited Spencer in behalf of the Executive Committee. He was impressed anew with the five two-story framed buildings and the location of the Academy. He reassured the Committee's supporters of the worthiness of Spencer as a mission point. He reported that nine-tenths of all influential men in the Nation received their education at Spencer. "I visited the school twice in former years, and I do not think it was ever in a more flourishing condition."[60] Wilson's observation, however, was pure propaganda. There was no comparison to earlier years. Only fifty students were sustained whereas in the ante-bellum period Reid enrolled three times that number.

Colton was momentarily absent from Spencer during the latter part of 1874 and early 1875. He returned to North Carolina because of his wife's health. T. T. Johnston of Columbia, South Carolina was commissioned by the Executive Committee as Colton's replacement. Johnston, however,

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[58] The Missionary, March, 1873, 59; Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1873, 9.

[59] Ibid.

[60] The Missionary, May, 1874, 99.

proved a failure. Without consulting the Committee or his missionary associates, the temporary Superintendent withdrew from the Academy. Such action did not improve Spencer's public image and Colton had to hasten back from North Carolina before chaos developed.[61]

After Colton returned to the Academy, he faced one crisis after another. The financial condition of the institution was critical. In the autumn of 1875 he requested additional appropriations from the National Council. To the Choctaws, however, the incumbent administration did not merit supplemental funds.[62] In support of his request, Colton pointed out that the recent examinations had been satisfactory. William Gardner supported the Superintendent in his appraisal. "The students were active and attentive to duties, giving unmistakable evidence that they had not spent their time in idleness," he reported.[63] The Council was not impressed, however, and did not honor the financial appeal.

The term of 1875-76 was wholly unsuccessful. The Executive Committee admitted as much in its Annual Report by stating that in comparison to previous years, "Spencer Academy is not as efficient."[64] The attendance continued to average only fifty students and funds were inadequate to supply institutional necessities. The National Council was also dissatisfied. Choctaw leaders believed that Colton arbitrarily

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[61] The Missionary, February, 1875, 49; The Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1875, 9-10.

[62] Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 11 Nov. 1875.

[63] The (Atoka) Vindicator, 24 June 1875; (Caddo) Oklahoma Star, 16 July 1875.

[64] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1876, 11.

expelled students and refused to consult the Board of Trustees. He had established a store at the Academy, also in violation of the Educational Act of 1842 and had not admitted students for the fall term. Accordingly, the Council resolved to investigate the Superintendent and ask the Executive Committee for his removal. If the request was not honored, the Choctaw Nation planned to give notice to the southern Presbyterian Church of its intention to terminate the contract of 1871.[65]

The last of October, 1876, the Spencer Board of Trustees formally requested Colton's dismissal. As the new Superintendent, they urged the appointment of L. W. Currie, a teacher at Spencer since 1875. The Presbyterian Executive Committee responded by expressing dissatisfaction with the Nation's support of Spencer. It pointed out that by with-holding funds, the National Council, not the Mission Board, kept the school from opening on September 1st. To prevent session delays in the future, the Committee demanded that the United States government pay the educational funds directly to it and not to the Council. Furthermore, Colton's resignation was accepted by the Mission Board three months earlier, but not because of the action of the Board of Trustees. Finally, the Committee would not appoint Currie or reopen the school until requested adjustments were made. The Board, however, declared that its representative, John J. Read, would visit the Academy and reopen the institution if he deemed it practicable.[66]

Edmund McCurtain, a Choctaw leader, replied to the charges and demands of the Executive Committee. He explained that the Nation allotted

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[65]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 21 Oct. 1876.

[66]The (Atoka) Vindicator, 6 Dec. 1876.

educational funds as soon as they arrived from the United States. On the occasion in question, the money was not received until October 17th. McCurtain observed that despite the delay and without an appropriation the Methodist Academy opened, but Spencer had not. As the Council depended upon the United States for the funds, it could not guarantee the arrival date. Also, the Executive Committee could not expect the Council to approve direct allocation. Finally, action regarding Colton was based upon his operation of a store without a license, not his management of Spencer.[67]

The National Council's action ended Colton's six years at Spencer. Resuscitation of a defunct institution was no easy task. That Spencer Academy reopened at all after the Civil War was to his credit. Colton, however, did not guide the Academy to a level comparable to antebellum years. He was never able to enroll more than a minimum number of students. His decision to operate a store was unfortunate. When he left the Nation, however, the disfavor of the Council was elicited by the store, and not his administration of Spencer.

The Executive Committee selected John J. Read to replace Colton and to determine if the Church should continue at Spencer Academy. Read was born in Hinds County, Mississippi in January, 1843. During the Civil War he served four years in the Confederate Army and entered the ministry at the conflict's end. After Appomattox, Read continued his education at Oakland College and Columbia Seminary. He was preaching in Houston, Texas when the Executive Committee commissioned him to assume charge of Spencer. With his wife and infant daughter, Read arrived in the Choctaw Nation

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[67] The McAlester Star-Vindicator, 13 Jan. 1877.

in December, 1876.[68]

Spencer Academy resumed instruction on January 1, 1877. The new Superintendent apparently dropped the Committee's financial demands and agreed to expel students only with the consent of the Board of Trustees. In any event the contract was continued. Read's first months at the institution acquainted him with the unique problems of Indian education. Entering students knew little English and many did not stay at the Academy long enough to receive instruction in depth. Few students "knew anything outside of their simple life in the woods," he reported.[69] The problem was not new at Spencer, only to the Superintendent.

In 1875, Dr. H. R. Johnson was sent to the Academy by the Board in response to recurring illness among the students. Johnson may have taught on occasion, but his principal concern was, of course, the health of the Spencer family.[70] One major disease confronting Johnson was pneumonia, which annually took the lives of many youngsters, including Read's small daughter.[71] Striving to improve health at Spencer, he persuaded the Council to require physical examinations of all students for diseased lungs. If the boys were afflicted, they were then suspended from the Academy.[72]

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[68]William B. Morrison, The Red Man's Trail (Richmond, c. 1932), 78-9; Denison, "Missions and Missionaries...," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIV (Winter 1946), 433.

[69]The Missionary, May, 1877, 110.

[70]Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1876, 11.

[71]Denison, "Missions and Missionaries...," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIV (Winter 1946), 433.

[72]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 11 Oct. 1877.

As the doctor worked to improve Spencer's health, Read was anxious to raise the level of education.[73] He saw no need for the Indians to seek higher education in the United States.[74] A "high school" level was possible at Spencer, but only if the students had a better educational foundation. To this end, the Superintendent requested the Trustees to appoint only those boys who demonstrated excellence in the neighborhood schools. Read's lobby was so effective that the Council established specific requirements for admission. By an Act of November, 1880, only boys between twelve and eighteen years of age who had completed the "Third Reader" were admitted to the Academy.[75]

The Superintendent was not so successful, however, in increasing student enrollment. He was never able to attract over sixty students. Apparently, however, numbers were not important to Read for he made little attempt to enlarge the student body. What did matter was the quality of instruction. Read regarded the examinations in May, 1879, as demonstrating the effectiveness of his educational program. To him, "the exams were highly satisfactory."[76] There were those who disagreed. In New Jersey, Alexander Reid considered Spencer's condition "very unsatisfactory." "Mr. Read is a good pious man, but he has not the faculty of managing a school of Indian boys."[77] Reid based his conclusions on intelligence

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[73] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1878, 12.

[74] Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1878, 89.

[75] The Missionary, August, 1879; Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 5 Nov. 1880.

[76] The Missionary, August, 1879, 189.

[77] Reid to Lee, Astoria, New York, 4 Dec. 1879, Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

received from Miss Morrison, who also reported that the teachers and the Choctaws were dissatisfied with the Superintendent.[78]

There was no question, however, that the physical facilities of Spencer continued to deteriorate during Read's administration. The decay prompted Peter P. Pitchlynn, Chairman of the Committee on Schools, to secure from the National Council in 1877 authorization to relocate Spencer.[79] The move did not occur for several years. In the meantime, Spencer continued to languish and Read made little attempt to maintain it. Instead he encouraged relocation.[80] Alexander Reid returned to the Nation in 1880, visited the Academy, and stayed only one night. "It made me sick to see how changed the dear old place was from what it used to be and I was glad to get away. The buildings are going to ruin fast and the last Council appointed a Committee with powers to select a new site and erect new buildings."[81]

Ostensibly because of deteriorating facilities, the Presbyterian Executive Committee elected not to renew its administrative contract for Spencer. The original agreement of May, 1871 was for a ten year period. The Southern Church was satisfied to let it expire. In addition to the facilities, the Committee objected to the unhealthy location of the Academy. They also detected a desire among the Choctaws to administer the institution locally. Principally, however, funds expended at Spencer

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 25 Oct. 1877.

[80] The Missionary, August, 1879, 189; Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1879, 8.

[81] Reid to Lee, Atoka, 29 Dec. 1880, Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

were usable elsewhere.[82] Published motives for withdrawal, however, did not reflect the true circumstances. Actually, the Choctaws left the Southern Church little choice.

In November, 1880, the National Council indicated its dissatisfaction with Spencer's administration. The value of ten year contracts was reaffirmed and provision made for release of objectionable teachers and Superintendents. Furthermore, the Council stated that students were at Spencer "to go to school and not to work," and that teachers must eat the same food as the scholars.[83] Undoubtedly, the criticism was aimed directly at the Executive Committee and anticipated the expiration of the contract.

If the Nation desired to administer Spencer, the Council's action did not betray the hope. Only days after the contract expired, the Academy's old benefactor, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., was asked to resume oversight of Spencer.[84] The manifest haste of the Council was no commendation of Spencer's preceding ten years or the administration of the Presbyterian Church, U. S.

The contract having expired, Read left Spencer in the summer of 1881. Assigned a post among the Chickasaws, he served that tribe with great ability until his death in 1898.[85] His departure from Spencer, however, signaled the end of another significant era. The Civil War and

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[82] Annual Report of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, 1881, 12.

[83] Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 5 Nov. 1880.

[84] Reid to Lee, Atoka, 18 May 1881, Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[85] Morrison, The Red Man's Trail, 80.

Reconstruction period, as well as the work of the southern Presbyterian Church was over. The Academy's buildings were no longer usable as the home of a thriving educational institution. Thus, when Read left the buildings and grounds north of Doaksville ceased to function as Spencer Academy.

The remaining facilities, however, assumed new responsibilities. In November, 1881, the National Council temporarily established an orphan's home on the grounds. One thousand dollars was appropriated to repair the Superintendent's house and Pitchlynn and Armstrong Halls. Construction materials were obtained by dismantling Jones and McKinney (or Wilson) Halls.[86] Reverend J. B. Robe was commissioned by the Home Board of the northern Presbyterian Church to superintend the new orphanage. Two years later and by Act of the Council, Robe removed his charges and abandoned the once proud buildings permanently in 1884.[87]

Vacant and decayed, the Nation authorized the sale of "old" Spencer to the highest bidder.[88] On September 8, 1885, the buildings and grounds were acquired by Robert Stewart Frazier.[89] Frazier and his bride occupied the Superintendent's house and on occasions permitted Indian "big meetings" to assemble in the vacant Halls. At these religious events, with the dormitories reverberating to enthusiastic preaching and

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[86]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 11 Nov. 1881.

[87]O. E. Reed, "The Robe Family---Missionaries," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVI (Autumn 1948), 301.

[88]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 29 Oct. 1884.

[89]D. W. Willis to Jefferson Gardner, Cedar County, Choctaw Nation, 8 Sept. 1885, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.



The Quadrangle of Old Spencer, 1965

singing, the atmosphere and sounds of old Spencer were once again reenacted.[90] Eighty years later, however, only an unkempt cemetery and a barely perceptible foundation marks the site of the Choctaw Harvard's most glorious years.

The Civil War disastrously interrupted the operation of Spencer Academy. The northern Presbyterian missionaries were forced to withdraw from the Choctaw Nation under the odium of abolitionism. The missionaries who remained, among them Alexander Reid, were commissioned by the Presbyterian Church, Confederate States of America. Serving as a barracks, hospital and refugee sanctuary during the conflict, Spencer reopened in 1871 under the direction of the Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. The following decade produced frustration and deterioration. When the contract expired the National Council sought assistance from the Board of Foreign Missions, Spencer's benefactor in more successful days. Finally, in 1884, the home of the Choctaw Harvard for forty years was abandoned to an inglorious and unremembered death. Spencer deserved a better end.

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[90]Narcissa Knutson Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 61, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

CHAPTER IV

HOPEFUL REBIRTH, 1882 - 1900

The work is hard, unceasing, discouraging.

Harvey Schermerhorn

After Spencer Academy was moved to a new location in 1881, the Foreign Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., assumed jurisdiction of the new facility. New Spencer was efficiently administered by agents of the "old" Board for seven years. After a year's local administration, the Academy reverted to the Home Board of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. In 1894, the Nation assumed control until the Academy, after two disastrous fires, permanently ceased to function.

Agitation to relocate Spencer Academy was manifested as early as 1877. That fall, Peter P. Pitchlynn secured authorization from the National Council to move the institution to another area.[1] Implementation depended upon the selection of a new site and construction funds. Allen Wright, Superintendent of Public Schools, chaired the committee empowered to make the selection. Several locations were considered. The Atoka Independent wanted the Academy near that thriving town. "If the

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[1]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 25 Oct. 1877.

Indians are to learn English they must be where there are people."[2] The editor modestly maintained that everything desired was at Atoka. Furthermore, the bustling city would donate one thousand dollars and supply the land.[3]

The site finally selected for the new Academy was at Nelson, twenty miles west of the old location and near present Soper, Oklahoma. Principle features of the site were proximity to the railroad, central location, and accessibility in high water seasons. Bids to construct the building were made in December, 1880, and ranged from $15,000 to $24,000.[4] The next Council session awarded the contract to the low bidder, and announced that the first session of the new Academy would begin in September, 1882.[5]

Allen Wright urged that the Nation build a fireproof facility. The Council elected, however, to erect a wooden two-story building. Facing South, the principle structure contained twenty-eight rooms, had a ninety-three foot front and two wings extending 105 feet.[6] Instead of several buildings, the new institution was housed at first in one massive edifice which contained sleeping rooms, classrooms, the kitchen, and dining room. At a later date an additionnal dormitory was constructed to the west. The original structure, however, imposing as it was, contained less space than the old location.

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[2](Atoka) Independent, 26 July 1879.

[3]Report of Allen Wright, Superintendent of Public Schools, 28 Dec. 1880, Box W-25, Allen Wright Collection, University of Oklahoma Library.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 5 Nov. 1881.

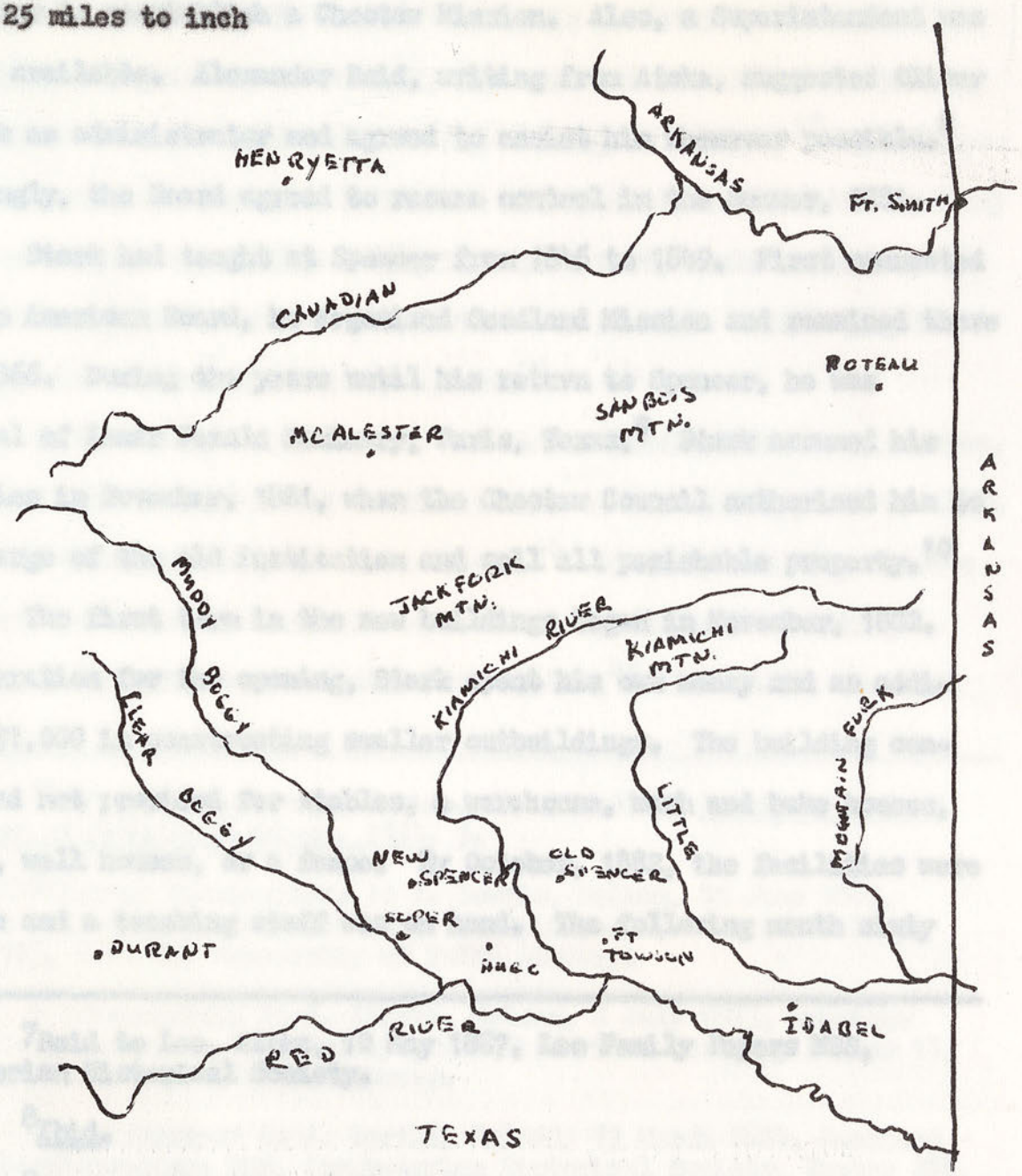
[6]Ibid.

CURRENT MAP OF SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA SHOWING LOCATION OF BOTH OLD AND NEW SPENCER ACADEMY

Scale of Miles

0 25 50

25 miles to inch



Taken from Rand McNally Road Atlas, 1963.

The new site was selected before the southern Presbyterians relinquished control of old Spencer. Thus, when approached by Allen Wright, the Foreign Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. understood that its oversight would commence in new facilities.[7] This knowledge was possibly an inducement for Spencer's earlier benefactor to reestablish a Choctaw Mission. Also, a Superintendent was already available. Alexander Reid, writing from Atoka, suggested Oliver P. Stark as administrator and agreed to assist him whenever possible.[8] Accordingly, the Board agreed to resume control in the Summer, 1881.

Stark had taught at Spencer from 1846 to 1849. First connected with the American Board, he organized Goodland Mission and remained there until 1866. During the years until his return to Spencer, he was principal of Lamar Female Seminary, Paris, Texas.[9] Stark assumed his new duties in November, 1881, when the Choctaw Council authorized him to take charge of the old institution and sell all perishable property.[10]

The first term in the new buildings began in November, 1882. In preparation for the opening, Stark spent his own money and an additional $1,000 in constructing smaller outbuildings. The building contract had not provided for stables, a warehouse, wash and bake houses, privies, well houses, or a fence. By October, 1882, the facilities were adequate and a teaching staff was on hand. The following month sixty

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[7]Reid to Lee, Atoka, 10 May 1867, Lee Family Papers MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[8]Ibid.

[9]E. C. Scott, ed., Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., 1861 - 1941 (Austin, 1942), 681.

[10]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 9 Nov. 1881.

boys enrolled in the new Spencer.[11]

The Board of Missions appointed two assistant teachers to work with the Superintendent. As in the past, conflict errupted among the staff at Spencer. At the end of the first term, Harvey R. Schermerhorn desired to leave. Mrs. Helen Stark was the difficulty. "I believe Mr. Stark to be a good man," he wrote, "but he is prematurely old--not strong either physically or mentally any more and his wife knows how to manage him. To her management I am not willing to submit."[12] The Superintendent was first inclined to release his teacher, but fearful that any report of strife, especially during his first term, would reflect upon his own ability, he requested Schermerhorn to remain. Considering it his duty, the teacher reluctantly agreed.[13]

By December, 1883, Stark's ill health confined him to his rooms. Mrs. Stark then attempted the administration of the Academy, all of which was wholly unsatisfactory to Schermerhorn.[14] So heavy was Mrs. Stark's hand that the assistant teacher requested an appointment of Acting Superintendent until Stark regained his health.[15] The feeble adminis-

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[11]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 24 Oct. 1882; Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1883, 5.

[12]Harvey Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 22 June 1883, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 105, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[13]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 2 July 1883, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 11, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[14]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 13 March 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 288, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[15]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 24 March 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 310, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

trator did not improve, however, and passed away on April 4, 1884. Sixty years later he slept in a grave marked only by growing wheat.

Upon Stark's death, Harvey R. Schermerhorn became Spencer's Superintendent. Schermerhorn was well qualified for his new position. He had worked among the Choctaws as a missionary before the Civil War and served as administrator of Riverside Seminary and Hudson Academy in New York State between 1866 and 1873.[16] As Superintendent, Schermerhorn extended courtesies to Mrs. Stark out of respect for her dead husband. She, however, strongly objected to Schermerhorn's appointment and contemptuously refused to turn over the financial account books.[17]

Mrs. Stark's lack of cooperation cast a pall over the administration of the Academy. After a trip to Paris, Texas, Mrs. Stark was accused of transferring Spencer funds to her personal account and claiming cattle that belonged to the institution.[18] Ultimately, Schermerhorn lost his patience and decided the widow was either crazy or the worst woman he ever knew.[19] At old Spencer, Alexander Reid was asked to investigate the situation, but for the first time in his life the Sage was unavailable. Ill health prevented his assistance and eventually

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[16]Schermerhorn's Account books, 1866-1873, Box O-5, Olinger Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[17]Mrs. Helen Stark to J. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 May 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 345, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[18]Edward McCurtain to J. Lowrie, Sans Bois, Indian Territory, 17 June 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 13, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[19]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 22 May 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 354, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

forced his retirement to Greeley, Colorado.[20] The Choctaw Council was unable to understand Stark's last financial report, but did accept Schermerhorn's.[21] From Colorado, Reid urged the Foreign Board to drop the matter in view of Mrs. Stark's years of faithful missionary service.[22]

Harvey Schermerhorn served Spencer effectively as Superintendent. He had the respect of his students who showed their affection by promising retaliation to any harmful Stark action.[23] The students satisfactorily demonstrated their instruction at the examinations in May, 1884. The Council rewarded the Superintendent with an additional appropriation of $500 for repair work, and increased the capacity of the institution to one hundred students.[24] By both actions, the Council illustrated its confidence and faith in Schermerhorn's administration.

The Council's commendation proved hasty and premature, however. One year later Schermerhorn was the object of its wrath. His report for the term of 1884-5 received criticism for its surplus of $2,227. According to the Council, the Superintendent should have used the funds for the comfort of Spencer students or for the erection of additional buildings. Schermerhorn had also "exercised unwarranted authority" in expelling students and by "putting in a farm for his own use." The

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[20]Reid to J. Lowrie, Old Spencer, 26 June 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 20, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[21]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 25 Oct. 1884.

[22]Reid to J. Lowrie, Greeley, 26 Dec. 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 109, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[23]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 2 June 1884, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 1, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[24]Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1884, 15.



This is a picture of Spencer Academy, established by the General Council of the Choctaw Nation, November, 1842. This location is east of Caddo, Bryan County, Oklahoma.

40 or 50 miles south east

New Spencer Academy

latter charge was the most serious, however, and the Choctaw Council revoked the contract with the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church.[25] The following day the Principal Chief was empowered to appoint a new Superintendent for the 1886-87 term.[26]

Schermerhorn was not disposed, however, to accept the Council action without protest. The Treaty of 1866 provided homesteads for the missionaries who labored among the Indians three consecutive years prior to the Civil War. The Superintendent advised the Principal Chief he had substantiated his claim for a homestead in the Kiamitia County Court. Furthermore, the surplus funds resulted from very careful economy at Spencer. As there were excesses for the last three years, "why all the excitement now," he wanted to know.[27] Finally, the surplus was not sufficient to pay the cost of new buildings. Of the action, Schermerhorn concluded: "There must be some misunderstanding or there has been done gross injustice to me."[28]

Leading men doubted the wisdom of the Council in revoking Presbyterian control of Spencer. C. E. Nelson, after whom the township of Nelson was named, thought that Schermerhorn was the most abused man in the Nation.[29] John P. Turnbull, the Superintendent of Schools, maintained that the reports against Schermerhorn were "without foundation and

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[25]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 9 Nov. 1885.

[26]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 10 Nov. 1885.

[27]Schermerhorn to E. McCurtain, Nelson, 28 Jan. 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 11 Feb. 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

altogether false."[30] By March, 1886, Governor Edmund McCurtain regretted the course he had set in motion. In a complete reversal, he asked Schermerhorn through Superintendent Turnbull to remain at the Academy for the coming year and direct the school in the Nation's behalf.[31]

Schermerhorn was not cooperative. Ostensibly because of the Superintendent's actions, the contract with the Foreign Board was revoked. The Nation had gone too far to request the Board to remain, but repented in seeking Schermerhorn to remain. The Superintendent, however, refused the atonement offer. He claimed that he was condemned without opportunity of defense and a permanent home was denied him in the Nation. Furthermore, the cares and labors of Spencer were too great. To remain at the Academy was to submit to complete Council authority, and he commented, "There is too much child's play about it with the majority, and too much chicanery with the ruling minority."[32]

Chief McCurtain had his way, however. A formal appointment, "containing enough legal terms to answer for the President of the U. S. in a document of appointment of a Minister to Her Majesty's Court," was issued to Schermerhorn. Said the Chief: "I trust that you will accept and conduct the school successfully as in the past." Schermerhorn was forced to reconsider and eventually accepted the appointment. He predicated his decision, however, upon the Council returning the Academy

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[30]J. P. Turnbull to Schermerhorn, Goodland, 27 July 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[31]Turnbull to Schermerhorn, Goodland, 26 July 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[32]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 1 April 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

to the Board of Foreign Missions.[33]

Schermerhorn continued to operate the Academy without a Mission Board connection. He offered Biblical and religious instruction in addition to the usual academic subjects. National administration, however, opened the door for political influence. Students were enrolled for personal gain of the Trustees, and Schermerhorn described them as "stupid, lazy and incompetent."[34] Choctaw parents charged that revocation of Presbyterian administration was perpetrated by "immoral" and "ungodly men."[35] In response to the outcry, the Choctaw Council repealed the Act of November 10, 1885, and authorized the Board of Trustees to seek another contract with a Mission Board.[36]

In January, 1887, rumors circulated that the Board of Trustees would reconvey New Spencer to its earlier benefactor. Schermerhorn urged that the Foreign Board reestablish the Choctaw Mission. "The work has its discouraging aspects, but I feel that we must hold this land for the Lord and the Presbyterian Church."[37] The Mission Board heeded Schermerhorn's plea and agreed to a one year contract. The Superintendent, in behalf of the Board of Foreign Missions, accepted the administration of

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[33]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 12 May 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[34]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 25 Jan. 1887, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 27, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[35]Turnbull to Schermerhorn, Goodland, 27 July 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[36]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 5 Nov. 1886.

[37]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 13 Jan. 1887, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 29, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

Spencer in April for the term of 1887-88.[38]

For the third time, Spencer Academy was in the able hands of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. Harvey Schermerhorn continued as Superintendent and Spencer was again conducted as a mission school. The contracted period, however, was not a happy year. Most of January and February were weeks of sickness. An epidemic infested the institution and eight youngsters died. The session was finally suspended in March, 1888, and the students were sent home. Schermerhorn advised the Board that he would leave the following summer. Without a Superintendent and the Foreign Board's sphere of operation changing, the New York agency advised the Choctaw Council it would not renew the contract.[39]

Permanent withdrawal of the Board of Foreign Missions ended the oversight of Spencer's most steadfast benefactor. Of its thirty-five years of active operation, the Academy was administered by the Board twenty-two years. At the cost of thousands of dollars and many lives, it sought to implement Walter Lowrie's dream of an institution comparable to any in the United States. The Board was frustrated on many occasions, but it continued to assist its Choctaw charges. The Mission Board's withdrawal from Spencer retarded the Choctaw drive toward civilization.

When Harvey Schermerhorn left Spencer, the Foreign Board finished its work in Indian Territory. He had been an excellent administrator and

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[38]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 4 April 1887, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 62, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[39]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 5 March 1888, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 134, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

through care and economy showed a financial surplus each year. He gained the approbation of the population though confronted with the same frustrations as his predecessors. Like Alexander Reid, he wanted to make the Nation his permanent home. Accordingly, after a temporary pastorate in Santa Fe, Kansas, he returned to McAlester to live until his death.[40]

In June, 1888, a new benefactor assumed the administration of Spencer. The Board of Foreign Missions was an agency of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. The Board of Home Missions was another instrument of the Assembly, but was responsible for mission work in the Territories of the United States. The Home and Foreign Mission Boards in 1885 agreed that the former should assume activity in the Indian Territory where the English language was employed. The recommendation was accepted by the General Assembly in 1886. Consequently, mission work among the Choctaws was transferred to the Home Board in 1887. When the contract of the Foreign Board for Spencer Academy expired one year later, the Home Board moved to fill the vacancy.[41]

Spencer's oversight did not pass as a matter of course to the new agency. Reverend R. W. Hill, Superintendent, Presbyterian Home Missions, Indian Territory, made such an interpretation of the Assembly's action, however. In August, 1887, he informed Superintendent Schermerhorn

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[40] R. W. Hill to Schermerhorn, Muskogee, 7 Aug. 1888, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[41] William E. Moore, ed., The Presbyterian Digest, 1886 (Philadelphia, c. 1886), 557-8; Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1888, 34; Sherman H. Doyle, Presbyterian Home Missions (New York, 1905), 83; Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions, 1887, 17.

that Spencer's administration had passed to the Home Board.[42] Unfortunately, the simple transfer did not take place, but instead a contract was negotiated with the Nation in the Summer, 1888. Under the terms of the new agreement, the Choctaws promised to appropriate annually $10,000 and to provide any necessary new buildings. The Board, on the other hand, agreed to supply a staff, necessary funds above the allotted amount, and a first class school for one hundred scholars.[43]

R. W. Hill accepted temporary oversight of Spencer in behalf of the Home Mission Board in Summer, 1888. A permanent Superintendent did not arrive until November when Alfred Docking relieved Hill who returned to his headquarters in Muskogee.[44] A professional educator, Professor Docking and eight assistants conducted Spencer during the first year of Home Board control. Unfortunately, it was a time of extended sickness among the students.[45]

Docking's report to the Choctaw Council on the Home Board's first year at Spencer received severe criticism. A special committee was appointed to investigate his financial records.[46] The committee found a discrepancy of $327 and immediately requested that the Home Board either

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[42]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 30 Aug. 1887, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 101, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

[43]Alfred Docking to Turnbull, Nelson, 13 Oct. 1890, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[44]November vouchers of Spencer Academy, November, 1888, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[45]Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1888, 34; Docking to Turnbull, Nelson, n.d., File number 19951, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[46]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 15 Nov. 1889.

have Docking report accurately or secure another Superintendent.[47] In response to the Council charges, R. W. Hill maintained that the disparity was only a paper error. The variance occurred when the account was transferred to Docking. Hill objected to the adverse notoriety and urged publication of a retraction. Subsequently, at the next session of the Council, Docking was proclaimed innocent and notice taken that Hill was Superintendent at the time of the error.[48]

Terms of the 1888 contract specified that the Nation would provide any new necessary buildings or facilities. Docking, therefore, requested funds for erection of a new dormitory and installation of a steam heating unit.[49] Though sympathetic, the Council did not provide an additional appropriation, but instead took a second look at the existing contract. The Nation paid the first ten thousand dollars and the Home Board the additional amount required for operating expenses. Under this arrangement the Council defrayed a portion of the staff salaries for the first time in the Academy's existence. Under the old contracts, especially when Schermerhorn was Superintendent, the Mission Board had supported its employees and returned money to the National Treasury. The Council, yearning for the old arrangement, cancelled existing contracts and sought a new agreement where the Home Board would pay all staff expenses.[50]

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[47]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1890.

[48]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 14 Nov. 1890; 14 Nov. 1890 (different Acts of the same day).

[49]Docking to Turnbull, Nelson, n.d., File number 19951, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[50]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1890.

In further review, the National Council reaffirmed the provision for one hundred students at Spencer. The term of enrollment, however, was changed to five years, and selection of students was transferred to County Judges, instead of the Board of Trustees. To further improve the educational system, the Superintendent was to provide a five thousand dollar bond as insurance of trustworthiness.[51]

Alfred Docking left Spencer at the conclusion of the third year. Personal reasons prompted his resignation and not the pressure of the Council. After the first year, the National body accepted his reports with thanks.[52] He probably wished for tangible results of his administration, but enduring three years at Spencer was success in itself. Selected by the Home Board, Docking's successor arrived at Spencer in September, 1891.[53]

The new Superintendent, W. A. Caldwell, was also a professional educator and administrator. He immediately recognized the need for additional facilities. The antiquated schoolroom needed replacement, though the old building would still serve as a drill room in wet weather. Also, Spencer required new bathing facilities. Regardless of condition, he recommended that all of the buildings be covered by insurance.[54] The Nation later had cause to regret that it did not accept his proposal.

Caldwell placed importance upon the Spencer farm and shop. From

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[51]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1890.

[52]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1890; 15 Oct. 1891.

[53]W. A. Caldwell to Honorable Board of Education of the Choctaw Nation, Nelson, 1 Oct. 1892, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[54]Ibid.; Caldwell to Board of Education, Nelson, n.d., File number 19969, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy, Oklahoma Historical Society.

the abundant garden, he supplemented the heavy fatty diet with vegetables. The food change resulted in less sickness and no deaths. Students were given industrial training in the shop and minor repairs were made to the Academy. Through constant economy and judicious use of the farm, the Superintendent operated within a budget of just over ten thousand dollars. Furthermore, he was able to provide for the required one hundred students. At one time, 108 boys were enrolled.[55]

In contrast to former years, little record of religious instruction was kept at New Spencer. As a mission point, however, spiritual matters were certainly emphasized. Caldwell nurtured the religious inclination of his charges into a revival in 1891. Many of the students were subsequently converted.[56] As conversion necessitated a religious organization, a Spencer Church must have been organized sometime after 1884.[57]

On July 1, 1894, the Board of Home Missions returned Spencer Academy to the Choctaw Nation.[58] The Choctaw Council had determined in its Fall Session, 1893, to take over the administration of the Academy. The Home Board was not reluctant to return the institution to the Nation. Such action relieved the Board's treasury and marked the progress of the Choctaws as a people.[59]

W. A. Caldwell, therefore, was the last Superintendent of Spencer

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions, 1891, 25.

[57] Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1884, 36.

[58] Caldwell to Board of Education, Muskogee, 8 Oct. 1894, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[59] Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions, 1894, 39.

commissioned by a mission board. He left Spencer to become President of Henry Kendell College in Muskogee, Indian Territory.[60] His resignation ended an era of Presbyterian management that dated from 1842. If the missionaries had acted as foster parents of the institution, by 1894 the true parents were sufficiently mature to manage their own Academy.

The Choctaw Board of Education, made up of the Principal Chief, Superintendent of Schools and three district Trustees, assumed direct administration of Spencer Academy and selected J. B. Jeter as Superintendent. A Choctaw citizen, Jeter had served as district trustee and Superintendent of Public Schools, before his appointment.[61]

Jeter's first two years as Superintendent were uneventful. At Spencer he continued the moral and religious training of the missionaries. The routine of the boys was changed only slightly if at all. Jeter's financial administration, with its voluminous records, received the approbation of the Council. In the second term several boys died from typhoid and pneumonia, but the health of the students generally was good during the period of National control.[62]

Local direction of Spencer Academy, however, presented unexpected difficulties. The annual cost of the Academy increased two thousand dollars over the Home Board's administration.[63] The sum, of course,

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[60] Minutes of the 8th Annual Meeting of the Synod of Indian Territory, 1894 (Muskogee, 1895), 7.

[61] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1893, 146; Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 14 Oct. 1886; 20 Oct. 1894.

[62] Jeter to Board of Education, Nelson, 31 Aug. 1895; Tushkahoma, 13 Oct. 1896, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[63] Ibid.

represented the price of a largely inexperienced staff responsible to the National Council. Furthermore, the absence of missionaries did not decrease the frustration of non-English speaking students. Seventy percent of those enrolled comprehended only Choctaw.[64] Finally, home rule was no insurance against disaster. Jeter's third term was but thirty days old when several buildings were destroyed by fire.

On October 3, 1896, Spencer's main building and the storeroom were reduced to ashes. The evening before the fire Jeter had disciplined three students who were at the Academy against their wishes. After the teachers and students had retired, the three saturated the front and back stairs of the main building with coal oil. Once ignited the wooden buildings burned rapidly. The Superintendent heard the flames and sounded the alarm. The boys on the upper floor, but not all, jumped to safety in a pile of mattresses. Four students died that night and a fifth some days later. Seven were seriously burned. In addition to human life, buildings and supplies valued at $22,000 were lost.[65]

Spencer Academy was not insured for such misfortunes. In 1880, Allen Wright had urged a fireproof building and W. A. Caldwell later recommended fire insurance. The wisdom of those men was now manifest. After the disaster Jeter could only dismiss the school, and wait upon Council action. In the meantime, the Board of Education rented the

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[64]Jeter to Board of Education, Nelson, 31 Aug. 1895, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[65]Jeter to Board of Education, Tushkahoma, 30 Sept. 1897; Jeter to General Council, Tushkahoma, 13 Oct. 1896, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society; The (Atoka) Indian Citizen, 8 Oct. 1896; Mrs. Rosa Oakes Huff Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. V, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society; Mrs. Howard Morris, Soper, Oklahoma, personal interview with the author at Soper, 17 April 1965.

Spencer farm valued at $12,630 on the halves.[66]

At the Council session in 1897, Jeter urged the representatives to rebuild the Academy. "If the property was to be sold, it would be a waste of money and a crime against the people," he maintained. He estimated the cost of a new dorm at $6,000 and cottage at $500. With an immediate appropriation of $2,000, however, he could reopen the institution with sixty boys on January 1, 1898.[67] The Council accepted Jeter's report and in November appropriated $7,000 to rebuild Spencer to accommodate the regular class of one hundred boys.[68]

The Council acted to restore the Academy upon its burnt foundations. Before the decision was made, however, some urged still a third site for Spencer. John M. Hodges again boosted Atoka, who claimed that everything necessary for an efficient institution was at hand. Furthermore, Hodges promised to donate the land and contribute $5,000 to the construction.[69] The Council, however, was not induced to mark off their original investment and New Spencer remained north of Soper.

Funds to rebuild Spencer were not available until November, 1897. Jeter's hope to commence a new term the first of January was, therefore, thwarted. The Academy probably opened around September 1, 1898 in the rebuilt institution.[70] Eighty-four boys enrolled, but the average daily

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[66]Jeter to Board of Education, Tushkahoma, 30 Sept. 1897, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 29 Oct. 1897; 11 Nov. 1897.

[69]John M. Hodges to Committee on Schools, Atoka, n.d., File number 1994, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[70]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 22 Oct. 1898; Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for Indian Territory, 1900, 81.

attendance was only seventy. Besides Jeter, the Academy employed eleven assistants, and the annual cost of the school was $15,000. Either because of inefficiency or increased prices, the cost of local administration continued to rise.[71]

The first term in the reconstructed Academy was the Nation's last. The Choctaws signed the Atoka Agreement in 1897 and ratified it in 1898. It provided for the division of tribal lands and the dissolution of tribal government. The Choctaws incidentally also lost control of their school system, and particularly Spencer. By compact provision, revenue from coal and asphalt leases was earmarked for education. The Secretary of Interior ruled that the schools were thereby placed under his control. Accordingly, in 1899 he appointed John D. Benedict of Illinois as Superintendent of Schools for Indian Territory. E. T. McArthur of Minnesota was made supervisor of the Choctaw schools.[72]

During the summer, 1899, the Choctaws surrendered their schools, including Spencer, to the United States Government. The Choctaws released control of Spencer to Benedict, but the Council ordered the Choctaw Board of Education to reopen the schools in the Nation under tribal administration despite the Secretary of Interior's claim that they were controlled by the government.[73] In November, 1899, the Choctaws appropriated $12,000 from the coal and asphalt revenues held in the United States

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[71] Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1899, 22.

[72] Angie Debo, "Education in the Choctaw Country after the Civil War," Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (Sept. 1932), 386; Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1899, 87-9; 1900, 156; 1901, 224.

[73] Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1899, 22; Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 11 Oct. 1899.

Treasury to implement the earlier Act.[74] Both were futile gestures, however, as tribal authority was passing, and no Council effort could keep the schools and Spencer from the hands of the United States.

The Federal Supervisor of Choctaw Schools appointed Wallace B. Butz as the new Superintendent of Spencer Academy. Butz enrolled 105 boys for the term 1899-1900. He was an efficient administrator and by careful management, the average cost per student was reduced nearly fifty dollars from the term last controlled by the Choctaws. The Superintendent planned a second session, but the first year was his and the United States government's last.[75]

On June 23, 1900, the main building at Spencer burned. Sparks from a fire used to operate the steam water pump blew through an open window in the main building's second story, ignited bedding, and the flames spread rapidly through the unplastered, frame structure. No one was harmed but the building was a total loss. Pending a decision by the United States, Butz stayed at the Academy as custodian of the remaining property.[76]

No real effort was made to restore Spencer. John Benedict thought the building could be replaced for $5,000.[77] The Choctaw Nation would have rebuilt the Academy had it retained the school system. One

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[74]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 1 Nov. 1899.

[75]Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1900, 81 & 95.

[76]Ibid.; Thomas Ryan to United States Indian Inspector, Washington, 10 Dec. 1900, Vol. 19, Foreman Transcripts, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[77]Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1900, 81.

last effort was made to wrest the institution from the United States.[78] That attempt failing the Council, out of spite, authorized the sale of the Spencer facilities and grounds.[79]

The property was advertised for sale on December 10, 1900. Butz, however, refused possession of the property to the Sheriff of Kiamichi County.[80] Furthermore, the President of the United States disapproved the act which authorized the sale.[81] The land, therefore, remained in possession of the Federal Government until it was allotted at the end of the tribal period.

The Dawes Commission allotted the site of Spencer to Mrs. Howard Morris of Soper. From the lumber of the remaining buildings, Mrs. Morris and her husband built a home on part of the foundations.[82] Sixty-five years later all that remained of the once thriving Academy were scattered stones and water cisterns. A plowed field covered the cemetery and the dead slept in unmarked graves. No monument or sign marked the location of the institution and few area residents knew of its existence. Accessible only on foot, the ashes of the Choctaw's chief Academy provided sustenance for dense greenery. Peace reigned; a sharp contrast to its stormy final eighteen years.

In 1881, Spencer Academy was moved to new facilities north of

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[78]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1900.

[79]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1900 (a separate Act).

[80]H. S. Sanguin to Honorable G. W. Dukes, Goodland, 18 Nov. 1900, Gilbert Dukes Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[81]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 31 Oct. 1900.

[82]Mrs. Rosa Oakes Huff Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. V, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society; Mrs. Howard Morris, Soper, Oklahoma, personal interview with the author at Soper, 17 April 1965.



Front of New Spencer Academy, 1965

present Soper, Oklahoma. The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., a pre-Civil War benefactor, accepted oversight at the new location. Under the care and direction of O. P. Stark and Harvey Schermerhorn, New Spencer justly deserved the praise of its patrons. In 1888, the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions began an administration of six years, at the conclusion of which Spencer reverted to the direct control of the Choctaws. Two disastrous fires and the demise of tribal government permanently ended Spencer Academy. Thus, after fifty-eight years the proud Choctaw Harvard survived only in the lives of its countless students.

CHAPTER V

SPENCER DAY BY DAY

Some of them manifest a great desire to learn.

Edmund McKinney

Spencer Academy was established to promote Choctaw civilization. It sought to mold its students into useful citizens by instilling intellectual and spiritual values. Education at Spencer, however, was a day to day affair, with an established routine which provided moral and academic instruction. Spencer was a home for the students and required vast supplies of food and clothing. Some boys rebelled against the discipline, but others worked with such vigor that they were recognized by their peers. The significance of Spencer was the daily accomplishment of its students.

On different occasions, Spencer enrolled between thirty and one hundred forty students. A community of that many youngsters required a permanent routine to prevent chaos. Edmund McKinney, Spencer's first Superintendent, established a daily schedule in 1844 that served as a pattern for suceeding sessions. Seldom were his charges without supervision or with idle hours. He occupied their time with academic activities and manual labor aware that "to do nothing is the way to be nothing."

In 1844, Spencer students rose at daybreak. They dressed and prepared for the required morning prayer. Immediately following, the work hour commenced and continued until breakfast at seven. After breakfast, the grounds were policed, rooms cleaned, and beds made. Classes began at nine and lasted until noon, by which time lunch was prepared. Academic instruction continued until half past four when the boys turned to manual labor. The final meal was served at sundown, prayers were offered, and all retired to their rooms. At nine o'clock the students were in bed.[1]

McKinney's schedule remained unchanged until Alexander Reid made minor adjustments in 1851. At nine in the morning the bell rang for classes. There were two sessions of instruction, one from nine to twelve and another from one to four. Dinner was served only during the noon hour. After bathing in the creek, they ate again at a quarter past six and then retired to their sitting room until bed time at eight. Reid's changes tightened the schedule, but his charges had more sleep.[2]

After ten years' experience, the Sage of Spencer established an altogether different routine. The teachers got up at five, the boys at six, and then breakfast was served at half past six. School began at seven forty-five, and after a fifteen minute recess at nine forty-five classes continued until eleven thirty. Lunch was at noon, and classes resumed at a quarter past one and ran to nearly three. The students received industrial training until preparations were made for a six

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[1]McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 June 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[2]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 April 1851, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

o'clock supper. All were in bed at eight. By shortening the length of the class period, Reid retained the attention of his charges and devoted more time to their work habits and physical fitness.[3]

The daily schedule did not apply to Saturday afternoons, Sundays, or holidays. Sundays, of course, were devoted to church and religious instruction. On Saturday afternoons and single holidays, Spencer students did as they pleased. Game was plentiful in the forests and fish abundant in the streams, and many hunted and fished while others hiked through the virgin timber. All returned in the evening to prepare for the Sabbath. At New Spencer, Harvey Schermerhorn occasionally permitted twenty boys at a time to visit Nelson's store one mile away. The privilege was forfeited, however, if a student broke a dish.[4]

Without religious instruction, education was incomplete to the Choctaws. Spencer was established in part to provide instruction in spiritual values for its students. The General Council stipulated that only a minister of the Presbyterian Church could superintend the Academy.[5] Setting aside time for religious education was therefore expected.

Its religious benefactors considered Spencer as a mission point. The Superintendents, however, were charged by the Mission Board with spreading the Christian Gospel, and all administrators placed emphasis upon spiritual instruction. Edmund McKinney established the pattern in

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[3]Mrs. S. O. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 12 Oct. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[4]Ibid.; B. J. McPherson Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 71, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[5]W. A. Armstrong to W. Lowrie, Washington City, 8 Sept. 1843, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

the first term. In addition to morning and evening prayers, he required all students to attend a Sabbath afternoon Bible class. The boys were divided, and then McKinney and his assistant teachers expounded the word of God.[6]

McKinney's pattern did not vary during the existence of the Academy. Alexander Reid, however, established additional periods of prayer. The serious-minded student anxious over his soul met with Reid at half past four each morning. Thirty boys were generally present at those meetings. There were also Wednesday night discussions that followed the usual evening prayers. Reid's devotion to extra-curricular services intensified the religious atmosphere at Spencer. Consequently, his successors continued the meetings, but some preferred evening devotionals.[7]

In addition to prayer services, Bible instruction was also intensive. The Sabbath was set aside for worship and "moral recreation," or special Bible classes.[8] Reid met the boys daily in chapel at eleven and a new chapter of the Bible was taught through a familiar explanation.[9] The students were required daily to commit Bible verses to memory and to answer questions in the shorter Presbyterian catechism. At religious sessions, the questions and verses were recited. One scholar committed

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[6]McKinney to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 June 1844, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[7]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 15 March 1851; 24 May 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[8]George Ainslie to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 15 Nov. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[9]Reid to J. L. Wilson, 24 May 1855, Spencer, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society. Home and Foreign Record, September, 1852, 136-7.

seven chapters to memory.[10]

Spencer students received religious instruction through song as well. The students enjoyed singing and formed an excellent chorus. Each week they memorized a new hymn including the spirituals of Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva and the ancient and new world Christian anthems. The songs were sung eagerly at exhortations and daily prayer services. These religious lessons in song were as effective tools of spiritual instruction as any practiced at Spencer.[11]

The goal of religious education was a student instilled with Christian attributes. Some Superintendents were more successful than others in this regard. The students formed Temperance Societies during James Ramsey's administration, but few professed Christianity. "We have not enjoyed those visible evidences of God," he lamented in April, 1848.[12] For all of Ramsey's efforts and prayers, only fourteen students were admitted to the Church, two of whom intended, however, to enter the ministry.[13]

During Alexander Reid's superintendency, religious manifestations were more apparent. Tract and Bible Societies were formed in the Fall, 1849, and Reid served respectively as manager and executive committee member.[14] His early morning study classes and evening prayer services

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[10]S. O. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 5 Feb. 1861, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library; The Missionary, May, 1877, 110; June, 1878, 141.

[11]The Missionary, June, 1878, 141; Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 24 May 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 12 Oct. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[12]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 16 April 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[13]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 23 June 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[14]Choctaw Telegraph, 9 Aug. 1849; 4 Oct. 1849.

were well attended. In the mid-fifties, spiritual interest at the Academy and surrounding community initiated a revival. Students were among the hundreds who were received into the Church.[15] By April, 1858, however, he reported there was little "special religious interest among our boys and among our people in the vicinity."[16] The following year only four so-called pious boys entered the Academy and by 1861 the state of religion caused Mr. Lee to exclaim: "Oh how much we need an outpouring of that Spirit."[17] Thirty years later many students were converted at New Spencer and religious instruction continued during local administration. On the whole, however, the value of religious education was in its moral instruction and not in conversion.

Intellectual pursuits were the most significant at Spencer. The goal and design of the Academy was "a good English education," where the students would learn to speak, read, and understand the language.[18] Such a philosophy was not easily implemented. "To teach Indian boys thoroughly is labor indeed," reported Reid.[19] An effective educational system for non-English speaking students, therefore, involved enormous planning, patience, and dedication by teachers. Consequently, the success of

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[15]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1854; 2 May 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[16]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 7 April 1858, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[17]James Frothingham to Wilson, 21 Jan. 1859, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Mr. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 5 Feb. 1861, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[18]Lowrie to Reid, Pittsburg, 11 May 1849; Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[19]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 11 April 1851, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Spencer depended upon its instructional program.

Spencer students were classified generally according to their ages and academic level. Edmund McKinney divided his charges into three departments: primary, intermediate, and advanced. He paid little attention to age and based his classification upon English comprehension. During one period, in the advanced department, thirty-three boys understood English, but not all spoke it. Those less proficient in the language and the more capable Choctaw-speaking students were assigned to the intermediate group. Those totally unfamiliar with the Superintendent's language, he placed in the primary class. Academic level, therefore, was equated with ability to speak and understand English.[20]

James B. Ramsey retained the three departments, but changed the basis of classification. To prevent duplication of teaching, all non-English speaking students were in the same class. He divided the two other departments, however, according to subject.[21] That student ages in the classes might range from six to twenty-four was of no concern to Ramsey.[22] By 1848, he changed his mind, however, and recommended a separate department for the smaller boys. Accordingly, he selected thirty boys for the primary and appointed Miss Susan Dutcher as instructor.[23] When Ramsey left Spencer one year later, the primary department stood as his principle contribution.

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[20] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844, 387.

[21] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 June 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[22] Charles Fishback to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 5 June 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[23] Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 25 May 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Alexander Reid continued the three departments during the first year at Spencer. Experience convinced him, however, that an additional class was needed.[24] He made new divisions according to the student's age and the years spent in school. His classifications for the 1852-53 term follow:

SPENCER CLASSES, 1852 - 53[25]

Divisions	Age	Years in School
First	15 to 18	3 to 6
Second	12 to 16	2 to 4
Third	10 to 13	1 to 3
Fourth	7 to 12	1 to 2

Reid's departure from classifing according to English comprehension established a pattern for succeeding Superintendents. His innovation of four classes was not permanent, however. For when the number of students stablized at one hundred, he returned to three divisions.

An insufficient staff in 1855 caused the Sage of Spencer to make a radical adjustment in the two upper divisions. The advanced students met together for one hour and fifteen minutes. One half of the class then alternated at one and three-quarter hour intervals with the other half in additional class instruction and a work period.[26] This arrangement foreshadowed the "high school" of Superintendent Gaylord More in 1857. More sat with the upper division boys during study hours, and each thirty minutes sent students to recite to the assistant teachers.

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[24] Home and Foreign Record, February, 1851, 27; Reid to W. Lowrie, Little Rock, 26 Sept. 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[25] Reid to Bureau of Indian Affairs, Spencer, 22 Aug. 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[26] Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 5 Oct. 1855, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Reid and the Superintendents after the Civil War, however, returned to separate upper divisions.[27]

The subjects offered at Spencer varied from term to term and Superintendent to Superintendent. The basic courses, however, throughout the Academy's existence were reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. The prevailing philosophy of education in the United States placed emphasis upon classical studies. Spencer teachers, therefore, had difficulty in abandoning classics in the Choctaw Nation. Edmund McKinney and James Ramsey both instructed and examined students in Latin during their administrations.[28] The library from the first contained Greek and Latin lexicons, Greek grammars, and Latin texts of Horace, Caesar, Virgil, and Cicero.[29] Alexander Reid, however, deleted classical instruction from the curriculum. To him, Latin recitation was folly when few understood English.[30] Others made no such departure as More returned to Latin grammar during his year at Spencer, and after the Civil War, J. J. Read and Alfred Docking did the same.[31]

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[27] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1857, 132; Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1861, 19.

[28] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844, 387; The Foreign Missionary Chronicle, October, 1846, 289.

[29] W. Wilson to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 25 Dec. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[30] Home and Foreign Record, February, 1851, 27-8; Reid to Bureau of Indian Affairs, Spencer, 22 Aug. 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[31] The Missionary, June, 1878; R. J. Burtt to Wilson, Spencer, 14 July 1857, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Alfred Docking to John Turnbull, Nelson, n.d. File number 19951, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

In addition to basic courses and the flirtation with classical subjects, Spencer boys received instruction in other disciplines. Geography, natural philosophy, United States history, algebra, and Bible history were offered at one time or another. Reid even set up a course on astronomy. Special attention was also paid to vocal music. At old Spencer, the department instructors trained the students, but at New Spencer a special teacher was employed.[32]

A vital part of Spencer's program was vocational instruction. The Nation expected the missionaries to perfect the industrial habits of their charges and the work hours, already described, were accordingly arranged.[33] All students, therefore, chopped and hauled wood, assisted in building and repair activities, and labored in the garden and on the farm.[34] It was more manual labor than vocational education, but only once did the Choctaws protest. In 1880, the National Council asserted that students were at Spencer to go to school, and "not to work."[35] At New Spencer, the Home Board refined its industrial guidance and established a shop for trade instruction and J. B. Jeter kept the boys busy in the National period with drill exercises.[36]

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[32]Home and Foreign Record, February, 1851, 27-8; Reid to Bureau of Indian Affairs, Spencer, 22 Aug. 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Report of the United States Indian Inspector for Indian Territory, 1900, 95.

[33]Armstrong to W. Lowrie, Washington, 8 Sept. 1843, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[34]The Missionary, March, 1875, 110.

[35]Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 5 Nov. 1880.

[36]Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1888, 34; Jeter to Board of Education, Nelson, 31 Aug. 1895, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

To communicate effectively with the students, Spencer employed an interpeter. Jonathan Dwight, and later his brother Edward, both native Choctaws, served in this capacity at the old Spencer facilities. Jonathan attended Yale College in 1836 and while there secured the commendation of Professors Amos Smith and Benjamin Silliman, the famous natural philosopher.[37] Who filled this capacity after the Civil War was not recorded, but the non-English speaking students certainly required an interpreter.

Spencer Academy operated upon the basis of a "term" of instruction. When the term commenced and ended was largely in the hands of the Board of Trustees. It usually was a nine-month period which might begin in November and continue until July.[38] Ultimately, the term stabilized to include the interval between September and June.[39] Each date provided a festive occasion for adult Choctaws who descended upon the Academy expecting acknowledgement of their presence and importance.

The school term ended with an "examination" by the Trustees. Parents and leading men arrived the evening before bringing extra horses for the students' return home. As many as one hundred fifty guests were usually entertained at meals. In 1846, "a beef, three hogs, and two sheep together with a moderate quantity of bacon" were served in the Spencer dining hall in one day. On examination day, exercises generally commenced about half past seven in the morning and continued until three that afternoon. One major exception was in 1852 when it lasted twenty

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[37] Grant Foreman, The Five Civilized Tribes (Norman, 1934), 66.

[38] Ramsey to Lowrie, Spencer, 12 Nov. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[39] The Missionary, August, 1879, 189.

hours. The school's Trustees questioned the students over subject matter and English comprehension. In specialized courses like astronomy and Latin, the teachers conducted the examination. To add to the interest, some students presented orations and on at least one occasion Mr. R. J. Burtt lectured by means of a "magic lantern to the great wonderment of the people present." Finally, the students were presented gifts so they would "go home in a good humor."[40]

Before the day ended, speeches were made by the Superintendent and leading men. The Superintendent reported on the future plans of the Academy and the principal men extolled the virtues of education and the progress of the scholars. After a religious service, the audience and students scattered. "And such a scattering," wrote James Ramsey, "--- the saddling of horses, and running hither and thither, and shaking of hands and packing of saddle-bags I never saw. In less than two hours there were scarcely twenty students and strangers together. They seemed nearly all determined to start off, if they could only go five or six miles, and camp out."[41]

As a boarding institution, Spencer was home and the missionaries parents for the students. Children entering the Academy were supplied shelter, clothes and food for the term. Providing the essentials of life for one hundred students was no easy task; furnishing extra comforts required herculean effort. Thus, most of the mission's energies, physical and mental, were used in supplying the material necessities for a family

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[40] The Foreign Missionary Chronicle, Oct., 1846, 289; Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1852, 423; R. J. Young to Wilson, Spencer, 1 July 1857, Box 10, Vol. 2; Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 July 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[41] The Foreign Missionary Chronicle, October, 1846, 289.

of one hundred boys.

The students were assigned rooms in one of the four dormitories. Seldom were there less than five to a room and frequently as many as seven. During James Ramsey's administration, with only three halls, six boys occupied each room, with three in each bed.[42] The construction of the fourth dormitory, Wilson Hall, did not alleviate the problem immediately. Alexander Reid enrolled more students at first but later limited enrollment to one hundred to reduce overcrowding. At New Spencer, younger boys were assigned rooms in the main building, while the older students bunked in the adjacent dorm.[43]

To provide all the clothes necessary for two seasons was another difficulty at Spencer. Furthermore, the Superintendents did not know who would enroll and could not calculate the size required. At first, clothes were provided by the Mission Board in New York. The Superintendent classified the boys by physical size and supplied the measurements. Either ready-made articles or materials were then purchased. In the latter event, eastern Ladies Aid Societies sewed the garments from the patterns furnished. Once at Spencer, missionary wives maintained and repaired the clothes.[44]

Many imperfections arose in the system, however. Too frequently the clothes, packed in barrels, did not arrive when needed and when

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[42]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 June 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[43]Mrs. Howard Morris, Soper, Oklahoma, personal interview with the author at Soper, 17 April 1965.

[44]Ramsey to D. Wells, Spencer, 24 Dec. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 11 Nov. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

available were of improper size. Furthermore, the homemade articles were poorly constructed. The sloppy sewing elicited a caustic comment from Reid. "If the persons who made the pants sent last year are members of the church they ought to be disciplined for their work," he said.[45] A tailor by trade, the Sage of Spencer revamped the clothing department. He ordered the cloth from New York and had the Choctaws make the garments.[46] The Mission Board, however, continued to send the hats and shoes.[47] Altogether boys at old Spencer were comfortably, though not smartly, dressed.

New Spencer, on the contrary, emphasized uniformity of clothes. The students dressed in blue uniforms of trousers, coat, hat and tie.[48] One graduate, however, recalled that the clothes were skimpy. Besides uniforms, the boys were issued hickory shirts, brogan shoes, and cloth hats.[49] On the basis of pictures student attire seems to have been uniform in appearance and sufficient in quanity.

In addition to shelter and clothing, the third major task of the boarding school was providing food. The original design of Spencer called for a farm to produce a major portion of the diet. The soil poverty was not considered, however, when the Academy site was selected. Consequently, only through intense husbandry could the farm produce crops. McKinney

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[45]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 17 Sept. 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[46]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 5 Nov. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[47]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 9 Nov. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[48]Docking to Turnbull, Nelson, n.d., File number 19951, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical File.

[49]J. Norman Leard Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 78, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

cultivated one hundred acres and planted corn, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and turnips.[50] The harvest was meager, however, and by 1849 the farm yielded nothing.[51] Reid got as many as four hundred bushels of corn and some fine sweet potatoes in 1851, but the production was never equaled again.[52] By 1856, very little farming was done at Old Spencer.[53]

By contrast the New Spencer farm was highly productive. The fertility of the soil was instrumental in the site's selection. With one hundred forty acres in cultivation, the harvest yielded 2,000 bushels of corn, 500 bushels of potatoes, and quantities of sorghum, oats, and millet.[54] At one time, the pasture supported seventy head of cattle, one hundred fifty hogs and fifty-four sheep, as compared to a herd of one hundred fourteen cattle at Old Spencer.[55] The abundance of the New Spencer farm, therefore, made an important contribution to the food supply.

With an unproductive farm at Old Spencer, food was necessarily purchased to sustain the boarders. Pork was secured from as far away as Fort Smith, or corn one hundred miles south into Texas. Occasionally, grain and meat were obtained in small quantities from neighboring Indian

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[50] W. Wilson to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 25 Dec. 1845, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[51] Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 5 Jan. 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[52] Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 28 Jan. 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[53] Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1852, 250.

[54] J. B. Jeter to Board of Education, Nelson, 31 Aug. 1895, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[55] Caldwell to Board of Education, Nelson, n.d., File number 19969, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society; Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 28 Jan. 1852, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.



The Orchard of New Spencer, 1965

farmers. The Superintendents paid on the hoof per one hundred pounds $5.00 for pork and $3.00 for beef. Corn sold for fifty cents per bushel and flour $4.00 per hundred pounds. At New Spencer, every Monday a wagon went to Paris, Texas for supplies.[56]

Beef was killed twice weekly during Alexander Reid's administration, and pork semi-annually. The Academy required 25,000 pounds of pork yearly, or about two hundred hogs. Each season nearly one hundred head were slaughtered, sausage prepared, the rest smoked and hung in the meat house. Beef was butchered bi-weekly and grains were milled and stored.[57]

Individual meals were prepared and served in the kitchen and dining room attached to the rear of the Superintendent's house. The students and teachers ate the same food. A basic meal consisted of a meat, sweet potatoes, molasses and "Tom Fuller," a corn mixture. In season the garden provided a variety of vegetables, particularly at New Spencer. Strawberries and blackberries were abundant in the spring, and wild honey available year around. Fish, squirrel, and other game were served when caught by the boys, and on special occasions turkey and roasted peanuts were prepared.[58]

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[56]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 8 Oct. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1, Frothingham to Wilson, 27 Oct. 1858, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Peter Hudson, "Recollections of Peter Hudson," Chronicles of Oklahoma, X(Dec. 1932), 519; Ben J. McPherson, Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 71, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[57]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 20 Oct. 1859; 14 Dec. 1859; 23 Dec. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[58]The Indian Advocate, Sept. 1847; Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 12 May 1861; 4 Nov. 1859; 14 Dec. 1859; 23 Dec. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

When the Academy reopened after the Civil War, food was as palatable as before. Peter Hudson, a student during J. A. Colton's administration maintained that the boys "lived on beef, corn bread, milk and a cup of coffee. Biscuits were given only on Sunday morning."[59] Thomas Robinson agreed but recalled that at New Spencer the students "were better provided for than ever."[60] And certainly they were. The table was set with prunes, rice, sugar, coffee, vegetables, pork, corn, wheat, beef, milk and butter.[61] During Spencer's existence, the diet was varied and sufficient, and no cases of malnutrition were ever reported.

The health of the students was not always good, however. A family of one hundred boys was fertile ground for most communicable diseases. Ramsey's first term recessed when fifty percent of the boys were ill with inflammation of the lungs.[62] In his second term, eight died either from consumption, inflammation of the brain, or pneumonia. Ramsey called doctors from Doaksville to attend the students, but their services were expensive. For a fifteen day period, the Academy received a $353 bill.[63] The high fees led to Dr. Charles Fishback's appointment by the Mission Board.

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[59]Peter Hudson, "Recollections of Peter Hudson," Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (Dec. 1932), 519.

[60]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 11 Feb. 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[61]J. Norman Leard Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 78, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[62]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 2 Dec. 1846, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[63]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 10 July 1848; 21 Jan. 1847, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Alexander Reid had no respect for the medical profession and was glad when Fishback left. The Superintendent then became the doctor. In contrast to Ramsey, no medical bills were incurred during Reid's first term and in later years only in extreme cases.[64] The Sage of Spencer mixed and administered medicines, delivered his and his assistants' children and freely advised on home medical remedies. The youngsters were cupped and bled by Reid, and Mrs. Young's gathered breast was lanced. Mrs. Lee, on Reid's prescription, took a teaspoon of brandy to ward off constipation and for rash used a salve prepared by the Superintendent.[65]

Reid was not always effective in his ministrations, however. An epidemic of measles in May, 1851, disabled forty-eight boys, four of whom died.[66] It was a rare occasion during the epidemics that one student did not die, and always there were outbreaks of pink eye, whooping cough, severe colds, lung inflammation and chicken pox. The causes of the infections were manifold. Mrs. Lee attributed the colds and pneumonia to the freezing floors in the dormitories.[67] James Ramsey thought ill health stemmed from air contamination. Unable to reduce the number of boys in each room, he did remove fires from the sleeping

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[64]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 15 April 1850, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Home and Foreign Record, Feb., 1851, 27-8.

[65]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 6 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, 12 Oct. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[66]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 June 1851, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[67]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 28 Nov. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

quarters. Walter Lowrie, however, suspected general health would improve if the students washed their hands and faces more frequently.[68]

After the Civil War, sickness continued among the students. As previously mentioned, Dr. H. R. Johnson came to the Academy in 1875, and in the interest of preventive medicine urged examination of all students for diseased lungs. At New Spencer, the Home Mission Board provided a physician and drugstore.[69] During local administration and at the time of the fire, W. N. John, another doctor, was in residence.[70] Despite the best efforts of the medical profession, however, death and sickness continued to visit Spencer.

To operate efficiently, rules and regulations were established for the Spencer family, and the students were required to conform to the code of conduct. One step removed from an undisciplined rural life, the transition was difficult for some. Consequently, rebellion manifested in student conflicts, defiance and desertion. Most insubordination, peculiarly, came from the mixed-blood boys of wealthy families.

All of the Superintendents were sorely tried by discipline matters. In addition to frequent desertions, some of Edmund McKinney's students attempted to set the Academy on fire.[71] The sons of Colonel Peter P. Pitchlynn and G. W. Harkins caused James Ramsey great distress.

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[68]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 23 May 1847, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence M53, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[69]Docking to Turnbull, Nelson, 13 Oct. 1890, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[70]Mrs. Rosa Oakes Huff Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. V, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[71]William H. Goode, Outposts of Zion (Cincinnati, 1863), 185.

One Pitchlynn boy was punished and dismissed from school by O. P. Stark. The Colonel was advised and at first agreed to support the teacher. Later he avowed to bring the matter before the Trustees and Council.[72] David Harkins knifed a companion and fled the school, but returned later with a pistol to shoot Mr. Stark. Dr. Fishback prevented the execution and David was deprived of privileges and confined to Ramsey's quarters for two months, a singularly light sentence, but prudent in view of the Pitchlynn affair.[73]

Disrespect for authority and runaway students were the principal disciplinary problems of Alexander Reid. Boys rebelled more frequently when instructed by new teachers. In his first year, George Ainslie had one-third of his class run away and was physically attacked by his students. One pulled him about by his hair. J. H. Nourse, in a single session, had boys leave as many as six times. In contrast, Reid lost only one for the same period of time. Unlike Ramsey and McKinney who used the "light horse," Reid pursued the renegades himself. Once captured, they were flogged. It was an effective mode of punishment. After one whipping session, Reid asked to visit with those students "who were anxious about their souls." Forty to fifty boys appeared in the Chapel, which Reid interpreted as the work of the Holy Spirit.[74]

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[72]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, Number 733, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[73]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 25 Nov. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[74]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 12 July 1852; 17 March 1853; Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 14 Dec. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection, University of Oklahoma Library.

Parents and the National Council questioned the extent of disciplinary action. They were reluctant to have their sons chastised by the white missionaries. Said Reid: "We can't have a first rate school without discipline, but neither boys nor parents will bear strict discipline."[75] Because of great Choctaw respect, Reid was later able to administer the whip and expel students. His successors after the Civil War were not as fortunate. J. H. Colton was asked to leave and Harvey Schermerhorn critized for disciplinary actions. Few objected, however, that prison sentences were given to the boys who burned the Academy in 1896.[76] At both Old and New Spencer, therefore, a code of conduct was established, but the extent of enforcement varied with the Superintendent.

A day at Spencer was more than just food, shelter, education and religion. Many unclassifiable events played an important part. For example, some who enrolled had unpronounceable Indian names. Alexander Reid consequently named them after individuals for whom he had great respect and from whom he wished support. Joseph McElroy, James B. Ramsey, and Cyrus Byington were among some thirty names given during Reid's first two years.[78] Reid regarded student names important and when Walter Lowrie visited the Academy in 1852 he introduced the children by name.[79]

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[75]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[76]Mrs. Rosa Oakes Huff Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. V, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[77]H. A. Wentz to Wilson, Spencer, 3 Feb. 1858, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Acts of the Choctaw Nation, 21 Oct. 1876; 9 Nov. 1885.

[78]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, Number 243, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[79]Home and Foreign Record, Sept. 1852, 136.

In contrast, Harvey Schermerhorn placed little importance upon names. At New Spencer, the students were called by number only.[80]

As a frontier institution, Spencer was rustic in character and convenience. Mrs. Orlando Lee, a teacher's wife, constantly complained of the small red ants. Trousers, washed and hung out, were immediately covered with the pests. The bed was placed in pans of water to impede the insects, but the effort met with little success. Fleas and bed bugs were also abundant. The numerous martins roosted everywhere and one even laid an egg in Reid's pillow. To Mrs. Lee there were too many flies, but the unscented verbenas were lovely and the sunsets breathtaking. The wood and water delivered to her door caused Mrs. Lee to write: "I did not expect to find things so comfortable."[81]

Despite its bachelor character, Spencer Academy spawned numerous marriages. Alexander Reid met his second wife and Susan Dutcher her husband at the Academy. Miss Maria Davidson married the Reverend Mr. Moffet, a Baptist minister, after meeting at Spencer and Harvey Schermerhorn's daughter, Carrie, eloped with Preman McClure, a Spencer student.[82] Schermerhorn radically opposed the marriage on the basis of Preman's instability. After four years of marriage and four children, Schermerhorn's prophecy proved accurate and the union ended in divorce.[83] Most love was

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[80]Ben J. McPherson Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 71, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[81]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 1 Oct. 1859, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[82]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 5 May 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[83]Thomas W. Hunter Interview, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Vol. 30, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

honorable, but some was not. An employee named Hattie, either a daughter or slave of Nathaniel Wiggens, reportedly "learned from the blacks her very loose notions on some points which she is perfectly willing to put into practice."[84] She was sent home in the summer of 1860.

As a frontier island, little notice was taken of events in the United States. If James Ramsey was concerned over the War with Mexico, he did not express it. Alexander Reid either did not care or was unaware of gold in California and Randolph B. Marcy's historic trip across Indian Territory. Rumor from Fort Towson reached Spencer in 1853 that Santa Anna had crossed the Rio Grande with four to five thousand troops, but no reference was ever made concerning the conflict in Kansas.[85] All the missionaries preferred free soil, but comment on political maneuvering among the Choctaws preceding the Civil War seemed imprudent. Just passing reference was made to the effect of secession on the Indians and only Mrs. Lee was bold enough to express a preference for Lincoln.[86]

After the Civil War, Spencer continued as an island in the sea of current events. Thousands of Texas cattle passed north to the Kansas cow towns but the Academy took little notice. The difficulties of reconstruction or national elections played no part in Spencer's administration. Choctaw political actions were not important to New Spencer Superintendents unless it dealt specifically with the Academy. Thus, the school was provincial in character and outlook finding significance only in its own

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[84]Mrs. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 16 June 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[85]R. J. Burtt to W. Lowrie, Spencer, Sept., 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[86]Mr. S. O. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, Spencer, 5 Nov. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

purpose and design.

As an instrument of Choctaw civilization, Spencer Academy instilled in its students intellectual and spiritual values. An established, disciplined routine provided time for moral, academic and vocational instruction. For most of the year Spencer was "home" to its students who found there food, shelter, clothing and care. Thus, there was more to it than buildings and missionaries. The essence of the institution was found in the accomplishments of its students.

CHAPTER VI

AN EVALUATION

The retrospect is very humbling.

Alexander Reid

Spencer Academy was established as a tool of civilization. Walter Lowrie believed that with the blessing of God the Choctaw youth would rise to the level of their peers in the United States. The Academy undoubtedly was the most important educational institution in the Choctaw Nation, but was it really effective? Did it fulfill its purpose? Did it measure up to its design? If Spencer was intended as a civilizing instrument, an affirmative answer is necessitated.

The management of Spencer Academy largely rested with Church Mission Boards. Of the Superintendents supplied, Alexander Reid was by far the most capable and effective. He did not come to do good and stay to do well, but only to serve. Reid worked at maintaining the respect of the Choctaws whom he genuinely loved. He had the admiration and cooperation of his staff and to them, Reid was indispensable. The Nation supported the Academy with more vigor and the students achieved a higher level during his administration than before or after. When the crusty old Scotsman ended his connection with Spencer, the glory of the Choctaw Harvard

was in the past.

The oversight of the Southern Presbyterian Church was not effective. No comparison existed between Alexander Reid and Superintendents J. H. Colton and J. J. Read. Neither was an astute administrator nor an able teacher. Colton was so repugnant to the National Council that his removal was requested. J. J. Read allowed the facilities to deteriorate to such a degree that the Academy was moved. The once flourishing Presbyterian Churches in the Choctaw Nation were entirely neglected during the southern Church's oversight.[1] Consequently, the Council expressed the people's dissatisfaction when it failed to renew that Church's contract and returned Spencer to the northern Mission Board.[2] Therefore, the implication that the southern Mission Board was under no complusion to withdraw from Spencer was manifestly untrue.

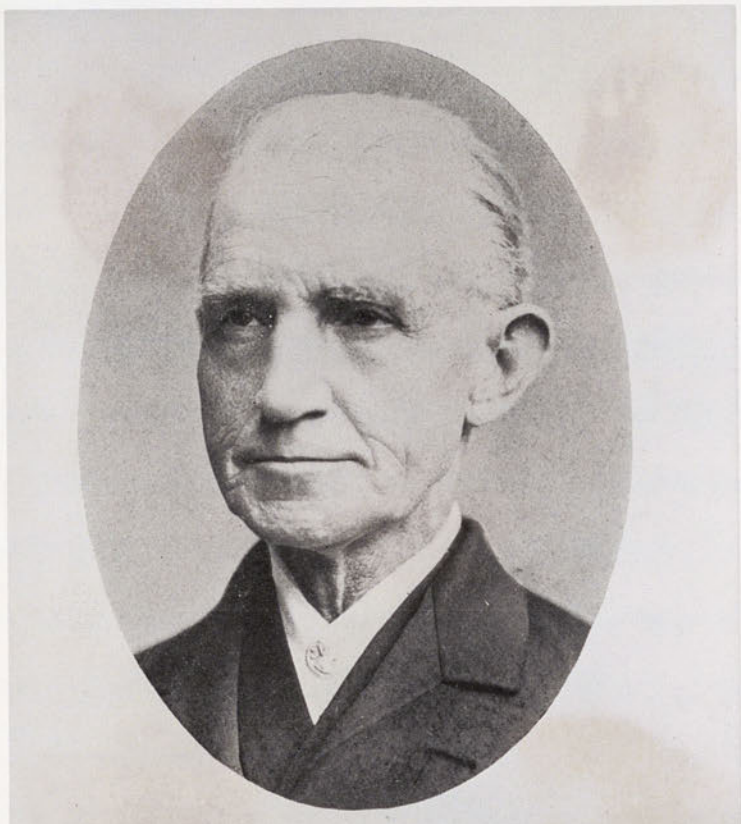
Spencer suffered constantly from insufficient personnel. The Mission Boards were unsuccessful in recruiting dedicated men and women to enter the Choctaw Mission field. Too many times those selected were unsuitable in temperament and did not reflect the character of Christ. Many who came did not stay, but those who did remain fortunately were dedicated men of God.

Spencer and the Mission Boards eventually lost the favor of the leading Choctaw men. The loss of support did not reflect upon the effectiveness of the institution, but upon the conflict of mixed-blood and full-blood Indians. Not designed to educate the full-bloods, the Academy was first filled with the aristocracy. Many mixed-bloods, however, were

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[1]Alexander Reid to the Indian Presbytery, Atoka, 22 Oct. 1882, Alexander Reid Papers MSS, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[2]Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1882, 48.



REV. ALEXANDER REID.
Spencer Academy, 1849-1861.

The Sage of Spencer,

Alexander Reid

unmanageable and left the school in disgrace. The institution then enrolled full-bloods, and consequently lost the favor of the aristocrats. Under the influence of the missionaries, the full-bloods increased in intelligence, capability, and assertiveness. The internal conflict broke out when the Nation took direct control of Spencer during Harvey Schermerhorn's administration. Once the nature of the transfer was known, the Academy reverted again to a Mission Board. The mixed-bloods were strong enough in 1894, however, to secure control of the institution permanently.[3]

The worth of mission management is gauged by the effectiveness of religious and academic instruction. As a mission point, efforts were made to convert the students into an organized Church. Emphasis was placed upon Christian attributes and doctrinal instruction. It was amazing, therefore, that very few Spencer boys accepted formal Christianity. James Ramsey and Alexander Reid witnessed more conversions than other Superintendents, but very rarely were more than ten percent of the students ever professed believers.

Those who did accept Christianity, however, were of unusual dedication. Most continued their theological studies and entered the ministry. For example, Daniel Pinson, Allen Wright, Thomas R. Benton, and Alfred Wright all became effective Presbyterian preachers. The fruits of their work and their instructors are the numerous Churches in southeastern Oklahoma. Furthermore, the Choctaws judged a man "proportionate to his moral standing first, and then his education and ability."

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[3]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 31 Dec. 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1; Cyrus Kingsbury to Wilson, Pine Ridge, 4 Sept. 1860, Box 10, Vol. 1; Turnbull to Schermerhorn, Goodland, 27 July 1886, Box 11, Vol. 4, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

This means of measurement and the churches were truely memorials to Spencer's mission management.[4]

The academic instruction at Spencer was provided by highly educated men. Most of the early teachers were graduates of Princeton Seminary. James B. Ramsey, Alexander Reid, O. P. Stark, Hamilton Balentine, A. Graham, Casper Gregory, John Edwards and Sheldon Jackson were as well trained and as qualified as most teachers in the United States. Lane Seminary, Hampton-Sydney, and Columbia Seminary all had graduates teaching at Spencer. With the high caliber instruction, a year at Spencer was probably more profitable than a year in secondary schools one hundred years later.

Success in instruction was measured by ability to speak English. Throughout its existence the learning of English by the students at Spencer was a signal failure. After four years of training, many students could not understand simple instructions such as "bring a stick of wood," or "go for a bucket of water." Forty-five years later the situation had not improved as J. B. Jeter reported that seventy percent did not comprehend the English language.[5]

To Spencer's critics, four causes contributed to the language failure. "In one word," wrote brash Dr. Fishback, "the education is so

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[4]Ramsey to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 23 June 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; S. O. Lee to Mrs. Woodruff, 27 Aug. 1860, Box C-34, Colonial Dames Collection MSS, University of Oklahoma Library.

[5]Charles Fishback to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 Dec. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; J. B. Jeter to Board of Education, Nelson, 31 Aug. 1895, Choctaw Schools-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

superficial as to be almost merely nominal."[6] The good Doctor, however, constantly exaggerated and doubtless did in this assessment. He was supported on this particular occasion, however, by the Trustees, who complained that Spencer did not teach the boys English.[7]

Others maintained that English instruction was ineffective in large educational institutions. The old missionaries commissioned by the American Board had advised the Choctaws not to create Spencer.[8] After the 1849 examinations, the Trustees regretted their inattention to the original advice and thought that there were too many boys to teach. James Ramsey came to doubt the value of the large school, and Charles Fishback determined as much on his arrival. R. J. Burtt, a teacher, advised in 1856 the division of the institution. Walter Lowrie and Alexander Reid never wavered in their support of the large school, however. Lowrie considered them more efficient, and Reid maintained that Spencer did as much "good for the Choctaws as all the little neighborhood schools in the Nation put together." Reid's vehement support insured the existence of a large National Academy among the Choctaws.[9]

Another cause for ineffective English instruction was the length of time spent at the Academy. Rarely did students stay three or four years. By estimate, an average of thirty new boys entered the institution

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[6]Fishback to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 20 Dec. 1848, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[7]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 7 Aug. 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Board of Trustees to Reid, Doaksville, 6 Aug 1849, Box 9, Vol. 2; R. J. Burtt to Wilson, Spencer, 30 April 1856; Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 1 May 1856, Box 10, Vol. 2, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society; Home and Foreign Record, Sept., 1852, 137.

each year. The positions they filled were vacated by boys who had been at Spencer for varying periods of time. Later the age limit was set at twelve to eighteen years. The accusation that Spencer was a big primary school, therefore, was valid. If the Trustees "would keep the youth in school for ten to fifteen years," said Reid, we "could get a higher level of education. But they can't make the boys stay at school."[10]

Finally, language comprehension was poor because boys were admitted to the institution who knew no English. The majority of new students entered either with ineffective, or worse still, without previous academic instruction. "Best results can't be secured in a National Academy," reported W. A. Caldwell, "until the neighborhood schools are made more efficient."[11] If the boys had some knowledge of English upon entrance, Spencer could then perfect their comprehension.

Judgement of Spencer, however, must not rest entirely upon the success or lack of success of English instruction. Spencer demonstrated its value in other areas. In 1848, the six boys selected to attend eastern colleges were from Spencer. As a result of their instruction at the Academy, James Ramsey considered the boys prepared to enter college classes.[12] In 1853, ten boys were sent to Tennessee to learn trades. Of the ten,

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[10]Reid to Wilson, Spencer, 12 April 1854, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[11]W. A. Caldwell to Board of Education, Muskogee, 8 Oct. 1894, Choctaw School-Spencer Academy File, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[12]Silas D. Fisher, Peter Folsom and Thomas LeFlore to Samuel Rutherford, Doaksville, 14 Jan. 1848, National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, Western Superintendency, Letters Received, Microcopy 616, Roll 199.

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seven were Spencer students.[13] Furthermore, during the Civil War officers of the Choctaw troops were largely graduates of the National Academy.[14] Some of the leading men of the Nation also passed through the halls of Spencer. Principal Chiefs B. J. Smallwood, Jefferson Gardner, Allen Wright, Jackson McCurtain, and Gilbert Dukes were all educated at the Choctaw Harvard. Judge Charles Vinson, National Treasurer William Wilson, educators Peter Hudson and Simon Dwight, Doctor E. N. Wright and churchman Frank Hall Wright were trained at Spencer. Gabe Parker, later a Spencer teacher, National Attorney and designer of the Great Seal of Oklahoma, also was a student at the Academy. Through these men and other students the school's influence pervaded the entire Nation.

Thus Spencer Academy stands as the most important educational institution among the Choctaws. With some exceptions, most of the Indians recognized the intrinsic value of the Academy. They were pleased with its efforts and generally satisfied with the results. Furthermore, most agreed with John Hobart Heald, a highly educated merchant, that Spencer was "equal to any of the good old schools of New England."[15] To them, it was a moral and intellectual fountain that sent forth crystal streams to a people thirsty for civilization.

When Spencer Academy ceased to exist in 1900, a chapter in Choctaw history ended. More than a half Century earlier, the Academy was created to further secure the fruits of civilization. Under the direction of

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[13]Reid to W. Lowrie, Spencer, 13 Dec. 1853, Box 12, Vol. 1, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[14]Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the C. S. A., 1862, 30.

[15]Muriel Wright, "John Hobart Heald," Chronicles of Oklahoma, II (Sept. 1924), 316.

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both the northern and southern Presbyterian Churches, Spencer was a source of academic and spiritual guidance. National control of the institution in 1894 essentially marked the progress of the Choctaws as a mature people.

During its existence, Spencer Academy was the most important educational institution in the Nation. To this end, a living monument was erected by the success of its students. As flames consumed its physical evidences, the Nation affirmed Harvey Schermerhorn's epitaph of his own administration. "Providence seems to indicate that the work is closing here. I believe that the day of final accounting will show that it has not been in vain."[16] Indeed, it has not.

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[16]Schermerhorn to J. Lowrie, Nelson, 23 April 1888, American Indian Correspondence MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Number 146, Roll 15, University of Tulsa Library.

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