

## Reverend Theodore Mannaseh Rights, His Sons, and the Cherokee National Male Seminary



*By James G. McCullagh\**

In the 1880s, for the first and only time, white boys were admitted to the Cherokee National Male Seminary at Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation. Three brothers, sons of the Reverend Theodore M. Rights, a Moravian missionary to the Cherokee Nation, began in fall 1884. Lewis Daniel, who graduated on June 30, 1887, was the first and only son, a young white man, to graduate. Eugene Jessie was expected to graduate on June 27, 1889, but controversy embroiled his graduation. Herbert Timothy, a junior, did not continue but rather the family moved to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, due to the controversy regarding Eugene. The decision not to grant Eugene his diploma was significant. It changed the lives of the three brothers and their parents and possibly the contribution the Rights family could have made to the Cherokee Nation.

## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY

This paper begins with the reopening of the Cherokee Female Seminary, then at Park Hill, and the election of Reverend Rights as its superintendent in 1876. The student and professional lives of Lewis, Eugene, and Herbert are sketched, followed by a discussion revolving around the withholding of Eugene's diploma.

On May 6, 1872, the Cherokee National Female Seminary officially reopened with Mrs. Ellen L. Eblin serving as the principal until about July 1873.<sup>1</sup> In March 1873 Mrs. M. J. Thompson was appointed to lead the Boarding Department.<sup>2</sup> The next term did not begin until mid-October with the appointment of Miss Ella M. Noyes as principal.<sup>3</sup> By September 1875 the Reverend Hamilton Balentine had assumed the duties of superintendent and principal, after a distinguished career serving among the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations since 1850.<sup>4</sup> His untimely death came on February 26, 1876, after an attack of pneumonia.<sup>5</sup> He was buried at the Worcester Mission Cemetery at Park Hill, not far from the Female Seminary.<sup>6</sup>

By March 1876 the Reverend Theodore Mannaseh (T. M.) Rights, a Moravian, was elected superintendent with Miss Florence Wilson as the principal teacher and Mrs. Balentine, formerly Nannie Annie Hoyt (1823–90), as assistant teacher.<sup>7</sup> In February 1877 Reverend Rights resigned after serving for almost one year to resume active mission work at New Springplace in the Cherokee Nation, replacing another missionary who was ill.<sup>8</sup> The *Cherokee Advocate* remarked that he “will retire with the hearty respect of the patrons, and the affections of the pupils of the school.”<sup>9</sup>

Reverend T. M. Rights was born in North Carolina to the Reverend Christian L. Rights (1820–91) and Elizabeth Hughes. At that time his parents were in charge of the Moravian Congregation Church at Friedland. Reverend Christian Rights was a bishop of the Moravian Church and president of the Moravian Mission Board for twenty-five years. He came to Woodmont, near Tahlequah, in the summer of 1890 as a temporary substitute to replace his son, Reverend T. M. Rights, until a replacement could be found. After serving as a minister for forty-six years, Reverend Christian Rights “fell asleep in Jesus, in the arms of his dear wife” on January 8, 1891.<sup>10</sup>

Reverend T. M. Rights (1846–1922) married Hannah W. Riegel (1838–1923) on August 2, 1870. In 1867 he graduated from the Moravian College and Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and then taught for three years at Nazareth Hall in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, where he had previously been a pupil. He and his wife were called in August 1870 to become missionaries to the Cherokee Nation. They arrived in October and took up residence at

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Above: Cherokee National Male Seminary (18827.672, Albertype Collection, OHS).*

*Below: Cherokee Male Seminary students and faculty (19282.26, Alice Robertson Collection, OHS).*



## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY



*Cherokee Male Seminary, destroyed by fire in 1910 (21932.33, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).*

the Female Seminary until February 1, 1872, two rooms having been made ready for them with permission received from Chief Downing.<sup>11</sup> In February 1873 they moved to Woodmont, just about a mile from the Male Seminary.<sup>12</sup> After serving for twenty years as missionaries in the Cherokee Nation, he and his wife returned to Nazareth Hall to teach and “partly because of concerns for his children’s education.”<sup>13</sup>

Reverend and Mrs. T. M. Rights had three sons: Lewis Daniel (1871–1951), Eugene Jessie (1872–1926), and Herbert Timothy (1874–1964). A daughter, Mattie Elizabeth, was born on November 15, 1876, and died on October 3, 1877.<sup>14</sup> Reverend Rights continued to preach in Tahlequah at the Male Seminary on Friday nights, occasionally at the Female Seminary, and once each month at the Presbyterian Church at Park Hill, which was led by the Reverend Stephen Foreman.<sup>15</sup>

According to Reverend Rights’s son Herbert, Colonel William Potter Ross, upon meeting Reverend T. M. Rights, stated, “Mr. Rights, you are acting as Chaplain for the Seminary and I think it is nothing but right that you send your boys there in payment for that service.”<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Ross stated that it was the Cherokee Board of Education that granted permission to attend the Male Seminary.<sup>17</sup> This exception was made because the three male scholars would be and were the only white students to ever attend the Male Seminary. Reverend Rights’s three sons began in the fall of 1884 with Lewis graduating on June

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Florence Wilson (19678, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).*

30, 1887, after completing his education in three years.<sup>18</sup> Eugene apparently graduated in the spring of 1889, but he is not listed by Emmet Starr in his *History of the Cherokee Indians* with the class of 1889 that graduated on June 27.<sup>19</sup>

Was it just a mistake by Emmet Starr? Herbert Rights claimed that Eugene graduated, as did Elizabeth Ross in a report dated November 29, 1937, for the Indian-Pioneer Papers project. Further, the July 4, 1889, issue of the *Indian Arrow* reported on the commencement exercises. On the stage was, among others, E. J. Rights, whose oration was the "Battle of Gettysburg."<sup>20</sup> Miss Florence Wilson (1842–1909), upon hearing his oration, "sat with tears running down her cheeks most of the time after the beginning of E. J.'s oration."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this was because she had lost her beloved during the Civil War.<sup>22</sup>

## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY



*Six former principal chiefs of the Cherokee Nation, c. 1891. Top row: William P. Ross, John Ross, Lewis Downing. Bottom row: Charles Thompson, Joel B. Mayes, Dennis W. Bushyhead (8149, Grant Foreman Collection, OHS).*

There were seven young men on the stage who “closed their four year course” with each giving an oration.<sup>23</sup> The four listed by Emmet Starr were William Arnold, David M. Ingram, John Melvin Lisenbe, and Suake Lewis Miller.<sup>24</sup> In addition to E. J. Rights, Starr did not list Joseph Alexander and James Welch, who were both on the stage and gave their orations.<sup>25</sup>

Herbert Rights, who was present at the commencement exercises, recalled that “when E. J. received his diploma it was tied with a piece of cotton string, and all the others with decorative ribbons. This nearly broke Mother’s heart and she cried bitterly at home.”<sup>26</sup> Herbert had attended the Male Seminary for “six years and had reached senior grade, but was not allowed to continue” due to the “anti-white pressure [that] was applied.”<sup>27</sup>

The oldest son, Lewis, after working at Stapler’s Hardware Store for eighteen months, enrolled at the Bethlehem Preparatory School in Pennsylvania for one term and then entered Lehigh University.<sup>28</sup>

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Cherokee Female Seminary 1875 graduating class at Park Hill, Indian Territory (2410, Grant Foreman Collection, OHS).*

His brothers, Eugene and Herbert, attended Lehigh University in Bethlehem, and all three graduated with bachelor of science degrees, with Lewis graduating in 1893 and Eugene and Herbert in 1895. Eugene died on February 16, 1926, in Puerto Rico, where he had been a professor of civil engineering at the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Mayaguez (now the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez) from 1923 until September 1925, when he left the position due to his ill health. He was buried at Mayaguez. Previously, he had been “employed on Messina Canal and later, on the location and construction of the New York and Ottawa Railroad. He spent several years inspecting steel at various eastern mills, and in 1907 became erection engineer for the Shoemaker Bridge Company” located in Pennsylvania.<sup>29</sup>

Lewis Daniel Rights died on October 29, 1951, and his spouse, Anna, died in 1949. Both are buried at Nisky Hill Cemetery in Bethlehem.<sup>30</sup> After a distinguished career beginning in 1906, Lewis Rights retired in 1934 from the Shoemaker Bridge Company in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, as vice president and general sales manager. He had been a member of

## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY



*Teachers at the Tahlequah Female Seminary, c. 1876. Front row: Mrs. Eunice Chamberlin, A. N. Chamberlin, unidentified. Back row: unidentified, Mrs. Eloise Butler Bushyhead, Abbie Chamberlin Tolbert, Kinny Davis, Miss Mary Stapler, Florence Wilson (1513, A. F. Chamberlin Collection, OHS).*

the Roselle, New Jersey, Board of Education and a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, among other important memberships.<sup>31</sup>

Herbert Timothy Rights, born on April 18, 1874, was the “chief bridge engineer for the Lehigh Valley Railroad” before he retired in 1939. In the 1920s he had been a designing engineer and then an assistant bridge engineer for Lehigh Valley Railroad. Among his many activities he was the “chief correspondent for his class for the Lehigh Alumni Bulletin” and a member of the Moravian Church where, for many years, he taught a young men’s Sunday School class.<sup>32</sup> On June 19, 1901, he married Clara A. Schultze, born on July 27, 1877, in Bethlehem at the bride’s residence.<sup>33</sup> Clara died on September 7, 1955, and Herbert died on October 27, 1964, at the age of ninety. Both also are buried at Nisky Hill Cemetery in Bethlehem.<sup>34</sup> His parents, Reverend Theodore M. Rights and Hannah W. Riegel, are buried at South Easton Cemetery in Easton, about ten miles from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.<sup>35</sup>

Did Eugene Jessie Rights graduate from the Cherokee National Male Seminary on June 27, 1889? His brother Herbert and Elizabeth Ross



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

believed that Eugene had graduated. He participated in commencement exercises. On the stage were a number of dignitaries, including the Reverend Walter A. Duncan, who offered the invocation. How could he not have graduated? Emmet Starr's *History of the Cherokee Indians* is silent on the Rights family, with only one notation, namely that "Lewis Right [*sic*]" graduated on June 30, 1887.<sup>36</sup> The two-volume *Old Cherokee Families, Notes of Dr. Emmet Starr* also makes no reference to the Rights.

A more definitive answer regarding the plight of Eugene Rights's status as a graduate of the Male Seminary was told by the Reverend Christian Rights, the father of Theodore Rights, in a letter to Brother Edward Rondthaler dated August 11, 1890, written while Christian was in Tahlequah.<sup>37</sup> Reverend Theodore Rights, according to Reverend Christian Rights, was scheduled to preach his last sermon on August 17 and leave for Bethlehem the following day. In regard to Reverend Theodore Rights's decision for the family to leave Woodmont near Tahlequah, Christian Rights remarked, "The trouble began in the refusal of one of the members of the Board of Education to sign the diploma of his second boy Eugene and the Chief [Joel B. Mayes] found it out and he told the Board the boy should have it and he got it. The mean part about it was that this man Hitchcock as a boy was an especial favorite of Brother Hillman, and his mother and he used to spend his vacations with them here at the mission."<sup>38</sup>

The board member was Timothy Brown Hitchcock, who served along with Board Chairman William Henry Davis and Board Secretary Eli H. Whitmire.<sup>39</sup> Hitchcock attended the Male Seminary from the fall of 1877 to the spring of 1879. His mother was Elizabeth Ann Duncan, who graduated from the Female Seminary in February 1856. Miss Duncan married Isaac Brown Hitchcock (1825–1911). Joel B. Mayes (1833–91), the principal chief from 1887 to 1891, was an early graduate of the Male Seminary. It is possible that Timothy Hitchcock could have been influenced by his mother, a Female Seminary graduate, and two of her brothers, DeWitt Clinton and Joshua Bertholf, who attended the Male Seminary, and also by their older brother, the Reverend Walter A. Duncan. Reverend Duncan was a longtime superintendent of the Cherokee Orphan Asylum, and from 1851 to 1853 was the superintendent of education for the Cherokee Nation. From 1882 to 1885 he was a member of the Cherokee Nation Board of Education and served as the president of the board from 1883 to 1885. His father was white and his mother a mixed-blood Cherokee. He married three times, and all of his wives were graduates of the Female Seminary.<sup>40</sup> Why Hitchcock refused to sign Eugene's diploma and why Eugene is

## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY

not included as a graduate in Starr's *History of the Cherokee Indians* is unknown, even though Chief Mayes told the board of education that Eugene should receive his diploma and that he received it. Perhaps that mystery will not be solved.

Leaving the Cherokee Nation to return East provided additional educational opportunities for Eugene and Herbert. Upon returning East Reverend T. M. Rights was employed at Nazareth Hall, and Eugene and Herbert enrolled at the Moravian Parochial School to prepare for entry to Lehigh University.<sup>41</sup>

The education that Lewis, Eugene, and Herbert received at the Male Seminary likely prepared each for university work and for careers as engineers and distinguished leaders. This unique experiment to allow three non-Indians to attend the Male Seminary ended badly and was not repeated. One only can speculate how the Cherokee Nation may have been enriched if all three young men were allowed to graduate in no way different than all other graduates.

# THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

## Endnotes

\* Dr. James G. McCullagh is a professor at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. He has published three books and authored approximately twenty articles and papers pertaining to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, among numerous other publications.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Eblin was likely Elizabeth Lowery Morgan (1821–1902), who first married High McDowell McElreath and then married William C. Eblin. Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians* (Tulsa, OK: Oklahoma Yesterday Publications, 1993), 370; “Female Seminary Re-opened May 6th 1872,” *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, OK), June 1, 1872, 3; “Cherokee Female Seminary,” *Cherokee Advocate*, August 23, 1873, 3.

<sup>2</sup> “Cherokee Advocate,” *Cherokee Advocate*, March 22, 1873, 4.

<sup>3</sup> “Female Seminary,” *Cherokee Advocate*, October 11, 1873, 3; “Cherokee Female School,” *Cherokee Advocate*, October 18, 1873, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, “The Balentines, Father and Son, in the Indian Territory,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1956–57): 418.

<sup>5</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, March 1, 1876, 2; *Cherokee Advocate*, March 25, 1876, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Terrill White, “Rev. Alexander Hamilton Balentine, Sr.,” Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GScid=875435&GRid=8153368&](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GScid=875435&GRid=8153368&).

<sup>7</sup> “Education,” *Cherokee Advocate*, March 25, 1876, 3; Jack D. Baker and David Keith Hampton, *Old Cherokee Families, Notes of Dr. Emmet Starr*, Volume Two (Oklahoma City, OK: Baker Publishing Company, 1988), 114.

<sup>8</sup> C. Daniel Crews, *Faith and Tears: The Moravian Mission among the Cherokee* (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Archives, 2000), 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, February 3, 1877, 3.

<sup>10</sup> “Rights, Christian Lewis: Gone to His Reward,” *Cherokee Telephone* (Tahlequah, OK), January 22, 1891, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert T. Rights, “Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights, Moravian Missionary,” *Goingsnake Messenger* 8, no. 3 (1991): 50; Herbert T. Rights, “Part 2: Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights,” *Goingsnake Messenger* 8, no. 4 (1991): 75.

<sup>12</sup> Rights, “Part 2: Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights,” 75.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Schwarze, *History of the Moravian Mission Among Southern Indian Tribes of the United States* (Bethlehem, PA: Times Publishing Co., 1923), 294, 303; Crews, *Faith and Tears*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Rights, “Part 2: Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights,” 77; Herbert T. Rights, “Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights,” *Goingsnake Messenger* 9, no. 2 (1992): 40.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert T. Rights, “Part 3: Rev. Tim Rights, Moravian Missionary,” *Goingsnake Messenger* 9, no. 1 (February 1992): 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Ross, “Students by Special Permission,” November 29, 1937, interview no. 12335, v. 108, 500–01, Indian-Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

<sup>18</sup> Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 240; Rights, “Part 3: Rev. Tim Rights, Moravian Missionary,” 19.

<sup>19</sup> Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 241.

<sup>20</sup> “Male Seminary,” *Indian Arrow* (Tahlequah, OK), July 4, 1889, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Florence Wilson (1842–1909) is buried in the Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park in Little Rock, AR. Rebecca McCraw, “Ann Florence Wilson,” Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=69686156](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=69686156); Rights, “Part 2: Rev. ‘Tim’ Rights,” 77.

<sup>22</sup> Lola Garrett Bowers and Kathleen Garrett, *A. Florence Wilson: Friend and Teacher* (Tahlequah, OK: Rockett’s Printers and Publishers, 1951), 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY

<sup>24</sup> Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 241.

<sup>25</sup> "Male Seminary," *Indian Arrow*, July 4, 1889, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Rights, "Part 3: Rev. Tim Rights, Moravian Missionary," 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Lewis D. Rights, "Letter to the Secretary of the Alumni Association, Lehigh University," dated February 24, 1926, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Myers, "Lewis Daniel Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Rights&GSfn=Lewis&GSmn=Daniel&GSbyrel=all&GSdy=1951&GSdylrel=in&GSst=40&GSentry=4&GSob=n&GRid=55173328&df=all&](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Rights&GSfn=Lewis&GSmn=Daniel&GSbyrel=all&GSdy=1951&GSdylrel=in&GSst=40&GSentry=4&GSob=n&GRid=55173328&df=all&); Tom Myers, "Anna C. Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=55173337](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=55173337).

<sup>31</sup> "Lewis D. Rights," *Globe Times* (Bethlehem, PA), October 30, 1951, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>32</sup> "Noted Bridge Builder Dies at Age of 90," *Globe Times*, October 27, 1964, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>33</sup> "Married," *Tahlequah (OK) Arrow*, July 13, 1901, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Myers, "Herbert Timothy Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62962054](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62962054); Tom Myers, "Clara Schultze Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62962048](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=62962048).

<sup>35</sup> Dan Stevenson, "Theodore M. Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=80932778](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=80932778); Dan Stevenson, "Hannah W. Riegel Rights," Find a Grave, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=80932940](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=80932940).

<sup>36</sup> Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 240.

<sup>37</sup> At the time he was the "newly installed president of the supervising Provincial Elders Conference of the Moravian Church, Southern Province (PEC), meeting in Salem, North Carolina." Schwarze, *History of the Moravian Missions*.

<sup>38</sup> According to Schwarze, *History of the Moravian Missions*, 296, Brother Joseph Hillman, a nephew of Sister Rights, served in the Cherokee Missions from 1877 to 1881 by taking charge at Woodmont. Brother Hillman also preached at the Male and Female Seminaries once a month (p. 298); C. L. Rights to Brother Rondthaler, August 11, 1890, M418, Moravian Archives, Winston-Salem, NC.

<sup>39</sup> Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 230.

<sup>40</sup> Gaston L. Litton, "The Principal Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 15, no. 3 (September 1937): 267; Stanley W. Hoig, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs: In the Wake of Empire* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 251.

<sup>41</sup> Reverend T. M. Rights returned to the Cherokees in 1891 and served until 1898 when he received a call "to serve at the New Fairfield Mission in Canada which he did until 1903." Herbert T. Rights, "Part 4: Rev. Tim Rights, Moravian Missionary," *Goingsnake Messenger* 9, no. 2 (1992): 38–40.