

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

HISTORY OF "4-D" SCHOOL DISTRICT, CHEROKEE STRIP

Notes on the history and some reminiscences on "4-D" School District in the "Cherokee Strip" have been contributed to *The Chronicles* by Mrs. Ferrol Ellis Butts of Covington, Oklahoma. She is a daughter of the late A. H. Ellis who made the run into the Outlet in 1893, and later served several terms in the Territorial Legislature. He was a prominent leader in Garfield County throughout his lifetime, and as a member of the Constitutional Convention, Ellis County, Oklahoma, was named for him. He was elected and served as a member of the First State Legislature of the State.¹ In her letter accompanying her manuscript, Mrs. Butts says that the "4-D" School was in the southeastern corner of Garfield County, on her father's homestead, a little over a mile east of old Elgin post office. The name "4-D" was the cattle brand used by the John Ford Ranch in this vicinity of the Cherokee Outlet before the Run in 1893.² For more than twenty years the former pupils of the school have held an annual reunion, and have erected (1966) a large granite marker on the site of the schoolhouse in memory of the old "4-D" School, a history of which follows here:

EARLY HISTORY OF "4-D" SCHOOL DISTRICT

Sometime in the spring of 1894 after the opening of the Cherokee Strip settlement, a school meeting was held at the home of a resident; probably the home of L. D. Groom, as their home was one of the largest houses. The Groom family was given to hospitality and civic enterprise.

Board members were chosen as follows: A. H. Ellis, L. D. Groom, Wm. Hinson (a civil war veteran). A discussion followed on the type of school house to be built. It was voted to build a frame building (some districts built sod buildings). Lumber was hauled from Orlando and a building erected by volunteer labor. It was located on the N.E. corner of the A. H. Ellis homestead. Desks and blackboards were bought and installed. The school room was warmed by a stove in which wood was burned. Wood was furnished at \$1.00 per wagon load by various residents of the district. Pupils ranged in ages from 6

¹ A biography of Hon. Albert H. Ellis by Angie Debo is in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Winter, 1950-51).

² It was reported by Buzz Bennett that a branding iron and an iron kettle were found in this part of the Outlet on the Marlon and Rehnert farms before the opening in 1893. Elgin Post Office was established on this 100 acre tract in 1894, with John Rehnert (or Rehnert) as the postmaster.—Ed.

years old to 17 years of age. The texts studied were: McCuffeys Spelling Book, McCuffeys Readers, Rayes Arithmetic, Barnes History and Barnes Geography.

The school started with Oscar Helton as teacher. He was 18 years old. He boarded at the Millering home near by. Near spring he resigned and Miss Mollie London finished out the term.

The following families were represented in the school: 3 Grooms, 4 from Baker, Clint Port, 3 Holingers; 1 Quinn, 1 Dawson, Nellie Wood Millering (later Braithwait; she lived with her Grandparents), 2 Shoppells, 1 Allen, 4 Shaffers, 4 Daniels, 3 Hinsons, 3 Ellis, 1 Doty, 2 Knopfels, 2 Millers (Clyde and Lilly), 1 Capper, and 1 Wilson (a colored boy).

In this school house were held religious services, literary and community dinners.¹

The second term was taught by Miss Martha Loyd who homesteaded a quarter section of land one mile south and two miles east of the school house.²

Miss Martha Loyd later married George Estes and her homestead is now occupied by her daughter and family, Esther Weinkauf. She rode a pony to and from school.

The next teacher was Florence Dixon, a young woman from Kansas. She boarded at the Groom's home.

The Evangelical Church was organized. A minister from Orlando, Reverend Beck, and later a Reverend Smith pastored here.

A cemetery association was formed by this Church. Emma Marion gave land located one-half mile west of the Olmstead farm. To my knowledge, there were only three burials there: Elmer Hayward, the first (first owner of the present Olmstead farm), a Siegel baby who died at the home of her Uncle Bill Taylor (located one-half mile west of the school house), and an infant child of Emmett and Mary Miller.

¹ Two outstanding characters in religious services were Mrs. Dawson and Emma Marion. Miss Marion drove a blind horse and buggy and lived 3 miles away. Some families drove teams and wagons, buggies and some walked. At night they carried a lantern filled with coal oil. Young men and girls often rode horse back. The girls and women used wide saddles and wore overskirts.

² Directly west of her farm was the homestead of Lydia Potter, a young spinster. At an early date of the territory, Lydia Potter obtained a charter for a Post Office and it was named Potter for her. She later married a man named Beaard. The office was moved to the Kaywood farm two miles east of her store for several years. The present Potter church and school took this name from the Post Office.

There were Baptist meetings held occasionally and a Baptist service held on a creek some miles southeast of the school house. The names of the Baptist pastors officiating at different times were the Reverends Lovitt and Veach. Mr. Veach always brought his big family with him from the Crescent City vicinity.

Sometime during the first year, a sawmill was moved on the creek just west of the Olmstead house on the north side of the road. This sawmill was brought in by L. D. Groom. Cottonwood trees were sawed into lumber and, in spite of its tendency to warp, was used by the settlers for building material.

About this time a Post Office was established with John Behimer as Postmaster.¹ It was named for the Elgin family and known as the Elgin Post Office. It was located on the eighty acre tract directly north of the present Olmstead farm. The Elgin family lived on the adjoining farm east of the Behimer tract. The Elgin family still owned the land at the time of this writing, May, 1966.

According to the record I have access to, the school districts of Garfield County were reorganized in 1897. This called for the moving of school houses nearer the center of population.

The "4-D" school was put on house-moving, horse-drawn equipment, moved just over the Ellis line, and left on the John Robertson farm on the half-section line. No school was held that year. Grass grew tall around it and in late winter John Cowan, burning cornstalks on the John Robertson field, had the misfortune of letting the fire get away from him. It swept the prairie and, except for the help of the men of the neighborhood, would have destroyed the school house. Years later children starting to school where it was at last located on the west side of the Robertson farm observed blackened sections near the foundation.

J. W. Kidd was the first teacher hired at the new location (Ellis farm, T20N, R3W). He boarded at the Behimer home. He was a young man who was sincerely interested in the development of young minds and also in community activities. At this writing, he and his wife make their home at the Christian Church Home, Edmond, Oklahoma.

¹ Both John Behimer and Isaac Marlon settled on this homestead; and by arbitration determined John Behimer as owner to the east 80 and Marlon as owner of the west 80 acres. Isaac Marlon, brother to Emma Marlon who gave land for the cemetery, was a huckster and later married Lydia Girard. Mrs. Behimer had a set of stereopticon pictures. When I had walked the mile from our home to the Post Office, she often invited me into her living room to have a cool drink, rest and look at the pictures. She had a book *Stanley in Africa*, my first introduction to foreign missions.

With the redistricting, new families were added and some families were lost to Potter and Red Star districts.

One outstanding family that moved into the district was the John Dykeman family. He had a large family and owned and operated a threshing machine. They lived in a house built on the John Robertson farm. The Dykeman's had a daughter, Maxine, who became the grandmother of Debbie Reynolds, who later married Eddie Fisher of T.V. fame.

In the summer of 1902, Martha Zeller taught a subscription school at "4-D." She had 18 pupils enrolled and received \$1.00 per pupil each month.

We read McGuffey's Readers; its lessons stressed: (1) Providential Wisdom; (2) Advised Accuracy in all things; (3) Truthfulness; (4) Honesty; (5) Obedience; (6) Kindness; (7) Industry; (8) Thrift; (9) Freedom; and (10) Patriotism.

It would be interesting to follow the careers of the children who were products of "4-D" School. Though our formal schooling was meager, suffice to say it produced an honorable citizenry. Some have remained near the homeland and some have made homes in distant states.

"4-D" REMINISCENCES IN THE CHEROKEE STRIP

The first year was marked by church being held in the Bahimer home. It was a 3-room log house; the logs were hewed and stood perpendicular, and painted white.

I recall the congregation singing "Beulah Land" with such fervor, I was certain we had reached it when we reached Oklahoma.

The next day, a freckled faced little girl would stand on the highest hill on our farm, take off her sunbonnet and sing:

"I've reached the land of corn and wine,
And all its riches now are mine"

In that first summer of 1894, word came to the community of the drowning of Mrs. McPeet and her children in Skeleton Creek. Mrs. McPeet drove her team and springwagon into the swollen creek where no rain had fallen. A heavy rain had fallen north of it, and she was returning from the home of a relative.

The creek was searched for three days before finding the family; the drowned team was found the next day. Neighbors had gathered on the bank, hoping to find the bodies somewhere. Men working in the fields heard a woman's voice break into

a song. "What a friend we have in Jesus." Others joined in the song, even the men in the fields. As related by my father, the late A. H. Ellis, who was one of the men working in the nearby field.

In about the year 1896, the Daniels family with seven children, sold their 160 acre farm (price \$800). Later it was the Elmer Cooper farm, and uncle of Dr. Angie Debo, writer, who lives in Marshall, Oklahoma.

The Daniels family moved to "Old Oklahoma," where they lived one year. They boarded the train the following winter for Illinois where he was raised. On the train some of them fell ill, and while waiting in Union Station in St. Louis they broke out with the small pox. They were all taken to the Post house, where Mrs. Daniels and one of the boys, Roy, died. The Coroner and Marsh, the seventeen year old boy, dug the graves in the hard frozen ground and buried them; so contagious and deadly was the disease, no services were held. Nellie, the oldest daughter, wrote back to the Wm. Hinson family some months later, telling of the tragedy.

My first trip to Guthrie was when I was twelve years old. Vicki and I went with her father, L. D. Groom, and Stella McBride, the other daughter who had a baby, R. L. We went in the farm wagon and forded Skeleton Creek north of Guthrie. There was no bridge.

Oh, the rose trees bloomed in July in Guthrie! I have since learned they were pink and white Rose of Sharon.

My first trip to Enid was in 1904 where I saw my first automobile. The Frisco Railway had come through in 1903. We boarded the train at Hayward.

Anna Borren was an outstanding teacher in the lives of many of us. One morning she came, found the lock on the door had been broken, a warm fire burning in the stove. She knew a wandering tramp had spent the night there. On the blackboard were written these lines:

"Across the fields of long-ago
There sometimes comes to me—
A little lad with face aglow—
The boy I used to be.
"And yet he looks so longingly
Once you have looked within—
I sometimes think he still hopes to be
The man I might have been."

On the 4th of July and Memorial Day everyone far and wide went to Marshall (just south of the county line in Logan

County). There was a Civil War veterans parade. As I recall, there were seventy-two veterans who wore uniforms of the Grand Army of the Republic and formed that organization.

In our community we had two honored citizens who served in the Confederate army, Mose Baker and Mr. Malone.

In earlier days of the Cherokee Strip our homes were made of sod, or were dugouts.

The Ellis home was part cottonwood logs and part dugout. Walls were papered over so often with clean newspapers.

In summer we often saw covered-wagon trains of Indians crossing the prairie going to visit other tribes where they held their tribal dances.

—Ferrol Ellis Betts

BURNING OF SPAULDING INSTITUTE, MUSKOGEE SEPTEMBER 25, 1899

The following account of the burning of Spaulding Institute, written by Ella Robinson (1937), is found in the Grant Foreman Collection, "Spaulding Institute," Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society:

SPAULDING INSTITUTE DESTROYED BY FIRE

The well known institution that had developed from a little school in the old "Rock Church" on the corner of Cherokee and Okmulgee Avenue, sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was destroyed by fire September 25, 1899. The fire was discovered in the boy's dormitory at 5:30 P.M. while supper was being served in the dining room. The dormitory being a frame building, the flames spread rapidly and were soon beyond control of the fire department, which was inadequate to cope with the situation. Smoke was seen coming from the second story windows, the alarm was sounded by a switch engine in the Katy Yards [R.R.]. Twenty minutes later, the entire mansard roof of the main building was in flames. Had sufficient water been available, the brick building could have been saved.

As the town had no water system and had to depend on the cisterns on the premises, and with only a small company of firemen, it was soon apparent that any effort to save the buildings would be futile and all attention was turned to saving the personal effects of the teachers and pupils and as much furniture as possible.

As is always the case, everyone lost all presence of mind and books, chairs, mirrors, mattresses, in fact, everything that would

go through a window, was thrown to the ground. Lace curtains, portieres and pillows were dragged across the street in the dust. Three fine pianos were saved and two were lost. Quantities of furnishings were taken to the W.C.T.U. Building on C Street, half a block away.

Teachers and pupils alike were busy the next morning trying to find and identify their belongings.

The firemen worked like heroes until the danger of falling walls compelled them to leave the burning building.

The origin of the fire was unknown, but some half hour before the alarm was given, several small boys (not pupils of the school) were seen playing in the gymnasium which was on the first floor of the dormitory. It was supposed they had been smoking and had carelessly thrown the matches away.

The total loss of the main building and dormitory was \$15,000; \$2,000 on furnishings.

Several substantial improvements had recently been made to the institution. Mr. H. B. Spaulding had given \$5,000 to the fund. A complete steam-heating system and an electric lighting system had been installed, of which the entire faculty together with the pupils and Superintendent was duly proud. Muskogee did not boast of many modernized buildings at that time.

All residences within the proximity were in danger of the fire brands blowing from the burning building.

The teachers and pupils, who were wild with excitement, not knowing where they were to sleep that night, were taken into the houses of friends all over town. No matter how small a house was, hospitality was offered to them.

Reverend C. M. Coppage, President of the school, was on a business trip to St. Louis at the time of the fire. He was notified of the disaster and started home immediately.

A meeting of the Board of Control was called early the next morning to formulate plans for the continuance of the school work. The members of the board were: Reverend Joseph S. Key of Sherman, Texas, (afterwards Bishop Key); Dr. Walter R. Lambuth of Nashville, Tennessee, who also was made Bishop; Dr. J. H. Pritchett of Nashville, Tennessee. The meeting of the Board of Directors also was called, they were: Rev. Joseph F. Thompeon, Salina, I.T.; H. B. Spaulding, Muskogee; Honorable N. B. Ainsworth, McAlester, I.T. From three large comfortable buildings housing some 100 pupils and a faculty of 15 members to a mass of smouldering embers, was a matter of some three hours time.

—Ella Robinson

A LETTER FROM KOWETAH MISSION, 1850¹

An interesting letter written by Charles Barnett, one of the older boys attending Koweta Mission in 1850, gives some notes on the daily life at this old school in the Creek Nation. Charles Barnett speaks of himself as a Creek, though he was of Yuchi descent, an ancient Indian tribe of the eastern seaboard that joined the old Creek Confederacy at a early time in Georgia history. Bands of the Yuchi came west and were identified with the Western Creeks or McIntosh Creeks in the region of Coweta on the Arkansas River before the Indian Removal in 1838. Charles Barnett's letter follows here (from *Creek Miscellaneous Documents*, in *Indian Archives*, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City):

Koweta Mission, March 5th 1850.

My Dear young friends

Hearing that you wished to hear something about us Creek Indian boys & all the scholars, both of the boy & the girls I proceed to give you an account of them — being one of the scholars myself. You will very readily guess who it was told us about you; I[t] was Mr. W. S. Robertson who himself was either your teacher or some acquaintance of yours. He is now teacher of the Tvlvhassee scholars which school commenced as a boarding school on the 1st of March, consisting of thirty children besides some of his day scholars. There are at this place about thirty scholars, fifteen boys & fifteen girls, a list of whose names I will give you on another piece of paper. Revd. H. Balentine has been or rather is our present teacher. Revd. J. Ross Ramsay is the superintendent at this place. He and Mrs. Ramsay takes charge of the boys, & Mr. and Mrs. Balentine takes charge of the girls. Health has been quite bad during the greater part of this term & I myself have been unable to go to school for the last two or three weeks and do not expect to go till next session if we are spared to see that time. This place is situated a few hundred yards from the prairie & about a mile or three quarters from the Arkansas River.

Most of our country is an extensive prairie & we generally live where we can procure wood for our fires & for timber to build with; all the houses at this place is mostly built of cottonwood with the exception of one of the larger houses which is of oak besides other small cabbins. The timber is of not much account except on the Rivers & some of the larger streams. The prairies & most of the wood land is generally undulating; there

¹ An account of "Koweta Mission" by Augustus Loomis was published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XLVI, No. 2 (Summer, 1963). The site of Koweta Mission and the old cemetery there have been acquired by the Oklahoma Historical Society for historical preservation. This site also is on the south edge of present Coweta in Wagoner County.—Ed.

are no mountains but little mounds hills & hillocks. In these places the "Prairie wolves have their dens; they are comparatively small but are of great annoyance to the natives. They catch the young pigs & chickens. The[y] run at the sight of a man but in the spring of the year and along the first part of the summer they are said to be cross. The principle employment of the natives in the summer are raising corn potatoes &c besides ball playing dancing busking &c &c. But of the boys at school fishing is generally followed on Monday afternoons it being a play day. In the winter time the men generally hunt — some go for weeks & camp out in the woods until they think it is time to come home. Sometime they take their women with them and sometimes they let them stay at home. The boys at school go squeril hunting on play days & some time the[y] kill some & some time they do not.

When vacation comes on & the boys go home & the girls too they ride about on their Ponies either to ballplays or to church. The Creek Indians are divided into various towns or tribes as it is called & hence these divisions bring on these ballplays which sometimes end with a very serious sequel — for sometimes when animated to such a degree & being also engaged in athletic exercises break each others arm, rib or collarbone, but what is worse than all this, some are killed in the contest.

Though I promised to give you the list of the scholar's names on another peice of paper I find that I can as conveniently write them on this as not so I proceed and these are they, viz — C. Barnett, J. Perryman, Wesley Perryman, D. Perryman, Wm. McIntosh, D. Steel, Jno. McKillop, Wm. Gregory, Jas. Gregory, Richard Lee, Robert Anderson, Henry Martyn, D. Porter, Thomas T. Rogers, D. Hodge, A. McIntosh. The last one mentioned does reside at this place but comes to school from a near neighbour of ours. Most of the said boys are quite small with the exception of C. B. J. P. W P. who are large boys. You will see that the names of the Individuals are not placed according to the right or custom of seniority but just as they came to my thought or mind. I will be about the same way with the girls' names. And these are their names viz — L. Derrisaw K Anderson, A. Anderson, D. Tiger, N. Hardage, S. Hardage, R. Milford, S. Milford, M. J. Christmon, M. A. Porter, M. Lee, S. Vann, M. Wirts, L. Sells, F. Harper. The last one mentioned is also a neighbour Scholar. As it will very soon be vacation I do not know whether all will again return to their study or not. The Lord only knows these things & not I or any of us This being about all I can say at present I will close my imperfect letter by asking of you to look upon this poorly written epistle as just

what it is which is nothing more than a poor Indian production. You will therefore not criticise upon its imperfection.

I hope you will give my best respects to your Teacher.

Please write soon, some of you & let me know at least what is there going on and tell me about your school its progress & how many scholars there are & who they are also your present Teacher &c. all of which I would like to hear. I hope will also remember us in your prayers that we might become an enlightened & happy people. I therefore conclude by subscribing myself,

Your sincere & affectionate friend

Charles Barnett,