

## EDUCATION | STATE'S FIRST SCHOOL



Alice Robertson Papers, University of Tulsa-McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections



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At left, Darlington Mission, shown in 1890, was operated by Mennonites as a school for Arapaho and Cheyenne children. It was located in what is now Canadian County. Above, students and staff pose for a picture in front of the Wetumka Boarding School. Alexander Posey, superintendent, and his wife Minnie stand at the far right, upper row. Posey later gained fame as a poet and humorist and as a Creek Nation leader. Below, a Creek and Euchee boarding school is shown.



Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

# Mission opened in 1821

By **KIM BROWN**  
World Staff Writer

**M**AZIE — More than 80 years before statehood, a small building near Mazie in Mayes County became the first school in what was to become Oklahoma.

Created by the United Foreign Missionary Society as the Union Mission, the objective of the school when it opened in September 1821 was to convert members of the Osage tribe to Christianity.

Today, the Union Mission's cemetery sits quietly along a dirt

road, boasting dusty memorials for its founders and a marker declaring it among the National Register of Historic Places.

But few remember its significance as not only the first school and mission in the area, but the site of the state's first printing press and the first published book.

Tulsa historian and author Guy Logsdon said that at the time, the mission was the westernmost white settlement in the United States.

"In those days, this was like going to Africa on a mission," Logsdon said. "This was consid-

ered foreign missionary work, not home missionary work."

In addition to teaching children to read and write, Logsdon said, missionaries also taught adults at the Protestant church that the mission established.

"People forget that Sunday school started as an education program in England to teach people how to read the Bible and how to read and write because the only day off was Sunday," he said.

A detailed journal that the missionaries kept tells of their initial struggles finding willing Osage participants, according to a histor-

ical leaflet published by the Gilcrease Museum. Some parents wanted their sons to leave school to help hunt for bears.

One entry tells of what the missionaries believed was success:

"June 29, 1822: Our Osage boys are doing well. They manifest a very contented mind and are docile in their dispositions and make excellent progress in learning to read and write," it reads.

Although it boasted 30 students at one time, according to the journal, the school closed in 1833, citing that few Osage chil-

dren were left in the area.

Tribes throughout Indian Territory soon would see more than 70 missionary schools open during the next 30 years with similar goals. Some tribes, such as the Cherokee, began their own schools, operated with tribal funds, according to "The Oklahoma Story," by Arell M. Gibson, University of Oklahoma Press.

During the Civil War, however, American Indian education stalled almost entirely, according to "Chronicles of Oklahoma" Vol. 27, No. 4, by Oscar William Davison.

By the late 1800s, schools be-

gan surfacing all over Oklahoma Territory, including private subscription schools and eventually a public school system with \$50,000 appropriated by Congress in 1890.

As Oklahoma's Centennial draws near, local residents in the area might take the time to drive by the place of its first school, said Tom Turner, superintendent of Chouteau/Mazie schools.

"The nice thing about these centennial studies is it makes you look back and find your roots," Turner said.

Kim Brown 581-8474  
kim.brown@tulsaworld.com

## Higher education took root years before statehood

By **APRIL MARCISZEWSKI**  
World Staff Writer

Before Oklahoma became a state, it already had seven public colleges and 28 private or religious colleges, according to the Chronicles of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Historical Society's quarterly publication.

Shawnee Indian Training School opened in 1874, followed by Sacred Heart Abbey near Asher in 1876, the Chronicles said. However, Bacone College, which started in Tahlequah in 1880 and moved to Muskogee, has claim to being the state's oldest college that's still operating.

Bacone began as a Baptist college for the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole and Delaware tribes and nations, according to "Bacone Indian University: A History" by John Williams and Howard L. Meredith. By the mid-1890s, the school had 703 students. College rules required students to have permission to go into Muskogee



Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

The Cherokee Female Seminary opened in Tahlequah in 1880, later moving to Muskogee to become Bacone College, the state's oldest institution of higher education.

and didn't allow men and women to get together except in their normal course of "school duties and religious and society meetings."

Territorial Normal School, now the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, was the state's

first public college, opening in 1891, according to [www.ucok.edu](http://www.ucok.edu). The teachers college had a graduating class of three women and two men in 1897.

Dan W. Peery wrote in the Chronicles in 1929 that Dr. J.W. Howard of Edmond "was a be-

liever in higher education, and he had but one object in serving in the Legislature and that was to locate a state school at his town. That he succeeded in his ambition, we have only to point to the Central State Normal at Edmond."

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, now Oklahoma State University, opened in 1891 in Stillwater's Congregational Church. A 1950 article in the Chronicles said the college met in various local churches until the Old Central building was completed three years later. A newspaper reporter, E. Bee Guthrey, wrote in the Chronicles in 1925 that the school was considered a political "prize."

In those early days, one of the college's regents said he paid his stenographer \$75 a month and didn't want to pay professors any more than that, the Chronicles reported.

The University of Oklahoma opened in 1892 with David Ross Boyd as its president. Classes

met upstairs from Atkins Furniture before the campus was nestled in farmland in time for the second academic year, according to the Chronicles and "The University of Oklahoma: A History, 1890-1917" by David W. Levy.

OU, like many other colleges, first taught its students college-preparatory curriculum, as many students had not had the opportunity to finish high school, Levy wrote. OU had 57 young men and women in its first class.

The University of Tulsa opened in 1893 as Henry Kendall College, having evolved from the Presbyterian School for Indian Girls in Muskogee, according to "The University of Tulsa: A History, 1882-1972" by Guy William Logsdon.

William Robert King, who persuaded a Presbyterian board in New York City to let him start the college, viewed the top goal as moral and spiritual education, followed by intellectual education, Logsdon wrote.

Among the public colleges,

Northwestern Normal in Alva began next, in 1897, and Colored Agricultural and Normal University, now Langston University, opened in 1889, the Chronicles said.

Black students were not allowed to attend other colleges, so black residents asked government officials for their own, according to [www.hbcunetwork.com](http://www.hbcunetwork.com) and [www.jimcrowhistory.org](http://www.jimcrowhistory.org). The residents put on bake sales, picnics and auctions to buy the land for the college. Under the guidance of its first president, Inman E. Page, enrollment grew from 41 to 650 and faculty ranks increased from four to 35 by 1915.

Also before statehood, University Preparatory School in Tonkawa opened in 1902, and Southwestern Normal in Weatherford opened in 1903, according to the Chronicles.

April Marciszewski 581-8475  
april.marciszewski@tulsaworld.com

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