

History of the Old Goodland Indian School - by S.L. Bacon

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The history of the old Goodland Indian School, Goodland, Oklahoma, has been repeated to the public thru the press and from the pulpit, but, in some instances the truth has been carelessly handled, which naturally created a wrong impression. I have been ask upon several occasions to write a history of this old land mark to which I have finally consented.

In order to show that I am familiar with the school from its infancy to the present time, it will be necessary to give a brief personal history. I was born and reared in the Old Goodland neighborhood. When I reached the school age, I attended the neighborhood school: I spent several years here and then I spent two years at Spencer Academy, and, like many another man, who realizes his fatal mistake later in life, I left the school never to return.

About 1889 a mission school was established which took place of our neighborhood school. The people of the surrounding country were desirous of taking advantage of this, but boarding accommodations were not to be had. Seeing the need of these accommodations and the desire of the Indians to take advantage of the opportunities now offered them, Wilson Jones, Bartwell McCann, Wall Austin and myself , all full-blood Indians, and elders of the old Goodland Church took steps to build a small log house with our own means. The log house, being completed, Wilson Jones volunteered to take charge of the boarding house, acting in the capacity of a superintendent. This was the founding of the old Goodland Indian School.

The interest which was manifested by the full-bloods gave rise to another thought. This was to enlarge our school so as to take care of more Indian boys and girls. With this in view, I got in touch with Dr. J. N. Craig, who was then secretary of Assembly's Home Mission of the United States and he favorably responded with a pledge to build a small building, provided the Choctaw tribal government pay the tuition.

I was then appointed a school district trustee. Fully determined to carry out our well laid plans in spite of my lack of education, I decided to visit the several academies to gain such information I could to give my best to the Indian People. The schools I visited were the Armstrong Academy, Bokchito, Oklahoma, Hon T.W. Hunter, superintendent; Spencer Academy, Nelson Oklahoma, Hon. J. B. Jeter, superintendent; Jones Academy,

Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Hon. Sam Adams, superintendent; Wheelock Academy, Millerton Oklahoma, Hon. E. H. Wilson, superintendent; Tuskahoma Academy, Tuskahoma, Oklahoma, Hon. Peter J. Hudson, superintendent, and New Hope (Scullyville, then Oklahoma) Hon T. D. Ainsworth, superintendent. These schools each had an enrollment of 100 pupils. I discussed my plans with the different superintendents who gave their endorsement as well as a donation, the total of which enabled me to build a small frame building which is now used as the laundry room. Later on I again visited the different schools and in addition to the academies, I visited the neighborhood schools. I found that only two of the academies were enrolling more full-bloods than half -breeds. The situation was investigated and it revealed the fact that the half-breeds and those of lesser blood were given the preference. Then and there I decided to establish a school strictly for full-bloods.

With Dr. Craig's offer still pending, Wilson Jones was sent to appear before council to ask for this assistance. His mission was a failure. Our school closed and Mr. Jones retired. From the superintendency to be succeeded by Bartwell McCann. During the succeeding school year Mr. Jones and Mr. McCann both died, leaving Mr. McCann to fill out the unexpired term of her husband. Another school year found Mr. Austin as superintendent. He was sent to council in another attempt to secure aid for our school, but his attempt was a failure. He died during that year and left his wife to fill out the term. Our school then consisted of our boarding house, and old church and another small frame building, the later two buildings being used for school rooms.

A Board of Trustees was then created by Indian Presbytery under the Arkansas law and elected their officers. The officers and members of the Board were as followed S. L. Bacon, president; W.J.B. Loyd, vice president, H.C. Wilson secretary, J.P. Gibbons, treasure, James Dyer, Eastman Cole, Sam Dyer, Liston Noahby, F. M. Mosely, P.S. Mosely, Ellis Custer, E. P. Goforth.

So much to be done and so little to do with, I appeared before council for another appropriation for \$5000.00. In the meantime, I had taken the matter up with Hon J. George Wright, Indian Inspector, who approved of my plans and pledged his support. The appropriation was passed on by the tribal council and was submitted to the department for final action.

The following year I sought for a donation for a tract of land thru council. I consulted Hon. E.E. Mitchell, tribal Representative, who was visiting us at that time. I discussed the plans in detail with him, and there I met the greatest discouragement in my several years service. He responded

with the old familiar clause, "It can't be done." Receiving no encouragement here my hopes began to fail, my vision began to fade away, my plans began to shatter. It was only thru the repeated encouragement of my own wife that I regained courage to appear before council. I conferred with the different leaders who endorsed my plans and pledged their support. The result was I was granted a 640 acre tract of land. Previous to this, however, the department sent a Mr. M.A Miles to investigate and recommend approval or disapproval of the plans. I discussed the situation with Mr. Miles, and he recommended approval and immediate action. I was then advised by Hon. Thos. Ryan, Acting Secretary of the Interior, to make a selection of the land and file on it at the land office. Then came another disappointment. Hon D.C. McCurtain, who was acting Principal Chief at the death of his father, recommended disapproval of our \$5000.00 appropriation. Acting upon this recommendation, Mr. Burke, then Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs advised me of it's disapproval.

Recalling to mind the pledge of Dr. Craig, several years previous, my next attempt was to acquaint the Assembly's Home Mission with the above fact. Dr. Craig had died and a Rev. Caldwell was acting secretary. The General Assembly at that time convened at Little Rock, Arkansas, and I sent S. B. Springs, who advised me of his personal acquaintance with the Rev. Caldwell, to present my case to him but it was of no avail. No action was taken then till Dr. Morris was elected Secretary. The matter was taken up with him he immediately pledged us a building if we furnish the site. Indian Presbytery was then in session and I brought the matter up before them; advising them of Dr. Morris offer. A committee of three was appointed by Presbytery, Rev. W.T. Mathews, Rev. C. J. Ralston, and myself, to select the site. Atoka, Bennington, Boswell made us offers and the other two committeemen were in favor of accepting one of the three offers, however no definite action was taken till Spring Presbytery, which was held at the Old Goodland church. Dr. Norris came to visit us at that time and he suggested that we ask the city of Hugo to make us an offer. The matter was taken up with Mr. J.F. Larency, who was the Mayor at that time, and a mass meeting was called to discuss the proposition. An offer of \$1500.00 was made provided the school be located at Goodland. These offers were referred back to the committee but could not be decided upon as no land had been offered. For the site, I donated twenty acres of my allotment which settled the controversy.

The contract was let for the brick building, the contact price being \$ 3750.00. The contract was insufficient to cover the entire cost and I pledged and did place the material on the ground at my expense. When the contract price had been expended, the building was still incomplete. It was still incomplete. It was still without plaster, paper, paint, baseboard, window and

door facings, wainscoting and a fireplace. Dr. S. L. Morris then advised me to take charge at once and we forsook our own home to take charge of the school on March 8, 1908. Again at my own expense, I contracted with Frank Huneke & Co. of Hugo to complete this work.

With this building completed, our enrollment increased and still another building was necessary. I called on Dr. Morris who suggested that I appear before the Women's conference at Asheville, N.C. and present my case, which I did and as a result I received enough donation to build a frame building which is now the boys dormitory.

Major Victor M. Locke, Jr. having been appointed Principal chief, the disapproval of the \$5000.00 appropriation was referred to him, who suggested a mass meeting to be held at the Old Goodland School. This meeting was held for the purpose of discussing the appropriation at the same time to acquaint the Indians of the possibilities of the school. It had the desired effect. Instead of an appropriation of \$5000.00, which was formerly sought, an appropriation of \$10,000.00 was recommended to the Choctaw council.

The appropriation having passed the Choctaw Council without any trouble, I was instructed to appear before Dr. Fisher, Secretary of the Interior, at Washington, with a charter and specifications of my school with which I complied. Examining my papers the secretary advised me that my papers showed that my school was a sectarian school fund for that reason I was not entitled to the appropriation, however, if I would consent to qualify under the state law our \$10,000.00 would be forthcoming. I consented and with the assistance of Mr. Merritt, the law clerk, I made the necessary changes then and there. I returned home and called a meeting of the Board of Trustees and required them to qualify under the state law, which was done and I received the \$10,000.00. Prior to this time, this school had been the property of the Assembly's Home Mission Committee. Our change of status in order to receive our appropriation, made it necessary for us to purchase this property. This property consisted of two hundred acres of land and improvements, the valuation of which was about \$15,000.00. It was offered to us for a small sum of \$5000.00. The 640 acres which was granted to us was disposed of and the proceeds were invested in this property. With the \$18000.00 we added to our school a school building, a sleeping porch, kitchen and made other such repairs as were necessary.

Our first contract was given in 1901 by Hon. Calvin Ballard, then supervisor of Indian Schools, for the maintenance and education of forty pupils at \$21.00 to \$40.00 per quarter.

With no further appropriation in sight, I recommended that the school be returned to the control of the Indian Presbytery. A commissioner was appointed to confer with the Board of Trustees. He demanded the original charter, which I secured from the files at Washington, and submitted it to the Board. After waiting a year for this action which never took place, I recommended that the commission be discharged, which was done. Therefore this school is not under church control, as it has been represented, but it is an independent school. Regardless of the fact, that it is an independent school, Dr. Morris, who has always been a friend to the Indian, has asked, the people of other states to remember our school.

We must not lose sight of our faithful missionaries who were instrumental in good many of these undertakings. Rev. Chase. E. Hotchkin was a missionary who was loved not only by his people but by the Indian people as well. When he died he was buried among them. Rev. W. J.B. Lloyd was another of the faithful missionaries. His work was in direct touch with the school and being a member of the Board he had the interest of the school at heart. His death was a great loss to the school and to the Indian people. Still another man whose name is familiar with the Indian people even today. The fullness of the work of this man was not appreciated until his death. This man was the Rev. J.P. Gibbons. He was one time ordered to vacate from his old home place formerly known as the Hotema place and something had to be done. This place had been bought by Mrs. Sallie Battiest from the heirs which forced Brother Gibbons to be without a home. Refusing to part with the old missionary, which seemed inevitable, I consented to have him move his family into one of our buildings until something could be done to relieve the situation. I donated twenty acres of my own allotment to Rev. J.P. Gibbons, and his wife and asked Dr. S.L. Morris, Secretary of Assembly's Home Mission, to build them a home. This twenty acres was donated on condition that at the death of Mr. And Mrs Gibbons, it was to become the property of the school.

The greatest need we have among our full-blood Indians today is a Christian educational institution, especially for our boys. The girls are being cared for at the Oklahoma Presbyterian College at Durant. The boys have no such school. Additional buildings for boarding accommodations are the greatest need at the Old Goodland Indian School. As evidence of the need of Christian education several small churches are seeking to establish mission schools in their respective neighborhood.

In conclusion, I wish to state I do not have one penny's worth of regret for the many disadvantages I have undergone nor the sacrifices I have made for my people. For the most any of us can do in this world is too small and the glory and praise is due to the ONE who has seen fit to use me

in the way HE has. My heart and interest are still with the Old Goodland Indian School, and I pray the ALMIGHTY to spare my life and give me health and strength that I may do even yet more for the Indian boys and girls, for never was an educated boy or girl needed any more that now.