

Cherokee Female Seminary (Seminary Hall)
On the campus of Northeastern
Oklahoma State University
Tahlequah
Cherokee County
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-23

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N-TAHLEQUAH
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

ACCESSION
FOLLOWS

HABS
OKLAHOMA
HISTORICAL
1A-CHEROKEE FEMALE SEMINARY
(SEMINARY HALL)Location:

On the campus of Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

USGS Tahlequah Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 15/322440/397630

Present Owner
and Occupant:

Northeastern Oklahoma State University and the State of Oklahoma.

Present Use:

Offices; classrooms.

Significance:

Seminary Hall, as the structure is popularly known, has served the purposes of education since its completion in 1889. Built of locally produced materials, it replaced the original Seminary building in nearby Park Hill, which burned on Easter Sunday in 1887. It is a strong statement of the importance of education to the Cherokees, who had been from the time of the "Removal" the most culturally progressive of the American Indian tribes. The late Romanesque Revival building was the most elaborate high-style structure in the area and has always been a source of pride to the Cherokees. As a successor to the first Seminary building, it represents the oldest institution of higher learning for women west of the Mississippi.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1887-1889.
2. Architect: C.E. Illsley of St. Louis, Missouri.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The only title to the property prior to statehood was held by the Cherokee Nation for the Cherokee Tribe, as is true of all property within the Nation at that time. The only transfer of property occurred in 1909, when the State of Oklahoma assumed title of the building and grounds for use as the Northeastern Normal School.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: W.A. Illsley, a contractor from Chetopa, Kansas.
5. Original plans and construction: Ink on linen plans and principal elevations of the building from the office of C.E. Illsley, dated July 1887, are in the collection of the John Vaughn Library at Northeastern Oklahoma State University. These include room-use designations, and represent the original state of the building. Of the interior appearance of these rooms some general information is available. Two early photographs in the collection of the Oklahoma State Historical Society Library reveal two interiors in their original state. They are described as "Seminary" rooms, and there are no known major changes which were made during that period. The photographs show the dining hall, a large room on the first story of the east wing which was furnished and decorated in a spartan manner, and a bedroom or study, possibly that of a staff member's room, or a common room. Wallpapers and furnishings, as well as smaller details, are visible in this photograph. Another early interior photograph owned by Mr. R. Halliburton shows the semi-circular bay at the rear of the main building, taken while the room was in use as a music room. This view also shows other furnishings and interior details.

The arch in the upper area of the building and turrent domers as shown in the linen drawings were never built. Aside from these the building was constructed according to the architect's plans.

The building and its grounds were originally surrounded by an elaborate iron fence and entrance gate. These were removed at an indeterminate date, although portions of the fence may be seen on the campus and around town.

The first Female Seminary in nearby Park Hill was burned in 1887 and is known almost exclusively through a few early photographs and contemporary descriptions. Like its successor, at the time of its construction it was probably the most impressive building in the area. Its style was more classical, and has been called Cherokee Doric. It was nearly identical to its counterpart for the males of the Nation, which remained standing until 1910 when it also succumbed to flames. The building consisted of two blocks, a long rectangle of three stories, and on its side was a square of two stories. The square was surrounded on its free sides by a two-story portico with eleven columns, and was surmounted by a circular cupola with a domed roof. The Male

Seminary differed on the exterior only in that its cupola was square, with a pagoda roof. The interior arrangement was most probably as follows: beginning at front, a chapel flanked by classrooms, a library and a laundry, followed by a rank of three classrooms, then in the rectangle the first floor was entirely occupied by a dining room. All upper stories housed dormitories. Each seminary contained about eighty rooms. Exclusive of roof and structure, the fabric was of brick. The bricks of the columns were pie shaped. A memorial patio at the Tsa-La-Gi now surrounds the remaining columns. Some of the bricks of the columns of both Seminaries were used to reconstruct two short columns as a monument on the grounds of the Northeastern Oklahoma State University.

6. Alterations and additions: The building is reputed to have been the first major structure in the area to have indoor plumbing and steam heat. The 1904 Sanborn map shows a separate heating plant connected to the building by a steam line. This was removed after 1927 (there is a deletion made to the Sanborn map for that year), and another larger heating plant was constructed to provide for the larger needs of the proliferating buildings of the then Northeastern State Teacher's College.

A two-story wooden porch was removed from the back of the east wing prior to 1904. Between 1909 and 1912 the wooden porches which stretched between the main and end pavilions of the principal facade were removed. These porches were largely of wooden spindle-work. The principal entrance arch was originally assyrian, with several courses of foundation stone across half the bottom. This wall was removed and the steps widened between 1924 and 1935.

Many parts of the building underwent serious alterations in 1929 and 1930, under the direction of Oklahoma City architect Joe I. Davis. It involved flooring, plumbing, windows, wiring, stairways, plastering and roof work, with assurances that the exterior of the building would remain unchanged. The cost was \$85,000.

There is an apparent ambiguity between the original drawings and the present state of the building. The configuration of the rear elevation of the main block is identified as a lateral step-back from the first floor. The building is presently continuous across the third floor, and it is difficult to discern from its appearance exactly how much in-fill was made. The Sanborn map of 1927 shows the step-back in the building.

This map was updated several times, to November 1934, but it does not show the step-back. However, a change in the building's appearance, which is currently evident, may have been made between 1929 and 1934.

The renovation work during the summer of 1975 involved major exterior changes. The soft brick was sandblasted, and orange concrete-impregnated fiberboard was installed over the small-paned round arch windows of the first floor, which involved the removal of exterior woodwork. Wooden trim in general was painted orange. The interior renovations were also accomplished at the same time, involving the addition of dropped ceilings and air-conditioning ducts. All of the renovation plans were conducted under University supervision.

- B. Historical Context: The remarkable accomplishments and substantial achievements which may be claimed by the Cherokee for their history are seldom more impressive than those which may be made for their attention to education. Their institutions were rooted in their former homeland in the southeast United States with the teaching efforts of the missionaries. The Cherokees early recognized their value, and admitted the missionaries to preach the tribe only if they remembered that their first duty was that of education. The efforts of the Nation on its own behalf began in 1839, the year of the removal to Oklahoma, with the establishment by the National Council of a committee on education. By 1841, eleven schools had been provided for by National funds amounting to \$6,000. The number of schools and the amount of funding increased steadily to 1900 when there were twenty-four common schools and three high schools with a total enrollment of 4,964 and \$73,000 in support. Two of the high schools, the Male and Female Seminaries, were provided for by acts of Council dated 26 November 1846 and 12 November 1847. The latter of these was drafted by Samuel Austin Worcester, long a white patron of Cherokee advancement, and probably the most highly regarded white man ever to live among the Cherokees.

In 1878 the Rev. Almon Bacone came to Tahlequah as Superintendent of the Seminaries. Though he remained only two years he had a significant effect upon the education of the area. He established his own school at the Baptist Mission in Tahlequah after deciding that his philosophy of education would not allow for governmental control and demanded more vigorous religious instruction.

In 1880 Bacone left the Seminary for the Baptist Mission. Later, he left the Mission for the Creek Nation (Muskogee) to found his own school which eventually became Bacone College.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Cherokee Female Seminary, a Romanesque Revival structure built from 1887 to 1889, is undoubtedly the most architecturally pretentious 19th century institutional building in eastern Oklahoma.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, although the exterior has recently been sandblasted, and the interior has undergone an extensive remodeling.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The L-shaped building is 226' 4" across its front and about 143' deep along its right-hand side, its longest flank. At the first floor level, there are thirteen bays evident on the front facade, and nine bays along the right side. The building is three stories high, with a five-story clocktower.
2. Foundations: The building rests on a shaly limestone foundation of random ashlar blocks, approximately 2 feet thick and 2 feet above the ground.
3. Walls: The walls are of red brick, laid in common bond, with belt courses marking the first- and second-floor levels. Some foliate terra cotta ornament is used to trim the gable ends to mark the spring blocks of the arches.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick-bearing walls three bricks thick and cast-iron interior columns carry the loads of wooden floor joists in most areas of the building. The original plans indicate small channels, and "I" beams are used in the corridors and large classrooms to carry the increased load. Star-shaped anchors are evident at the third floor level holding front and rear walls. The attic is of simple truss construction, of sawn members, nailed together. Open-web bar joists have been inserted in the ceiling, replacing the former wooden second floor joists, so that the new air conditioning equipment and ducts can be suspended.
5. Porches, stoop: There is a shallow front porch under the great brick arch, between two engaged turrets in the center of the main facade. This porch has three, full-width concrete steps, and a

concrete floor, with a wooden board, paneled ceiling. There are two side porches, one at each end of a long interior corridor which is parallel to the main facade. Both side porches also have high arched openings. The porch on the east right has eight concrete steps, enclosed either side by vertical blocks of sandstone, leading to a concrete threshold. In addition, there is a three-foot square concrete pad in front of the entrance to the kitchen, at the rear.

The frame verandas which once graced the front and rear facades no longer exist.

6. Chimneys: There are four capped brick chimneys. Two rise along the inside of the two staircase-water towers which are on either side of the rear section of the main block, and two rise from the northwesternmost and northeasternmost corners of the building, formerly having served the kitchen and a corner classroom.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: The front entrance, with its shallow Romanesque arched porch, has double doors with Queen Anne sash and square paneled bottoms. Above the doors is a large semi-circular fanlight, while to the right and left are twin-fixed Queen Anne sash, with diamond-shaped panes. The doors of the side porch are replacements: steel double doors, with the fanlights filled-in and stuccoed over. Some of the rear doors have also been replaced with steel doors, although there are exceptions. An original four-paneled single door with a small semi-circular four-pane fanlight, as an exit from the schoolroom, is in third bay from the right, facing the rear elevation. A similar doorway may be found at the bottom of the stairhall-watertower, in the fourth bay from the left. Yet another doorway, formed from a window, between the second and third bay facing the front facade has been simply covered with a sheet of plywood.
 - b. Windows: The windows on the first floor on the front facade are arranged in groups of three, and are set within a single large semi-circular headed opening. These windows are wooden, with double-hung sash with one-over-one lights, as are the windows on the side and rear elevations at the same floor level. Over each window the tympanium of the arch consisting of small square panes of colored glass have been covered with board. At the second- and third- floor levels on the main facade, the semi-

circular headed openings have wooden double-hung sash with four-over-four lights. These are used singly, in pairs and in groups of four, in the typical Romanesque fashion. Also on the third floor on the main facade, flat-arched brick lintels are used. The window openings at the second- and third-floor levels on the side and rear elevations have wooden double-hung sash with four-over-four lights. Some of these and some at the first floor level have segmental arches. The windows on the front facade have rock-faced sills of shaly limestone, while the windows on other facades employ only sandstone. A few of the sills on the rear facade have been replaced with concrete sills. The sandstone window sill to the left of the rear kitchen door was used for knife sharpening.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The long hipped roof, with ridge parallel to the principal facade, is intersected by several smaller hips and gables, and is covered with gray asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: Stamped metal cornice gutters trim the building's horizontal lines with downspouts at the corners. Just below the gutters are the two courses of diagonally-placed bricks.
- c. Dormers: Two large frame shed dormers with wooden double-hung sash, having four-over-four lights, have been incorporated in the third floor of the principal facade, between the center turrets, and the two end gables.
- d. Towers, turrets: The square brick clocktower on the southeast corner of the building is perhaps the most notable feature of Seminary Hall. Rising above the third floor along the right hand gable of the front facade, the clocktower has a brick oculus on all four sides at the fourth floor level. Above is a wooden belfry, with twin-arched, wooden louvered openings, flanked by pilasters, all painted white. A pyramidal corrugated sheet metal roof, painted silver, tops the tower. Engaged turrets of brick flank the center pediment and central arched porch below. These turrets are three-stories high with curved glass windows with double-hung, four-over-four sash. Conical sheet metal roofs painted silver are used here.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The principal entrance to the first floor is in the center of the front facade. This is a shallow arched porch leading to the entrance vestibule. The vestibule, a large open space, has a wide staircase along its left (west) wall leading to the second floor, and a large fireplace on its right (east) wall. To either side of the vestibule, and accessible from it, are the large classrooms. Ahead is the center of the long transverse corridor, which is parallel to the main facade, and which is "double-loaded" with classrooms on either side. At the right end of this corridor, another double-loaded corridor, also flanked by classrooms and offices, intersects, just inside the right side entrance. Near the end of the main corridor are the men's and ladies' rooms, one on each end, and the two side staircases.
 - b. Second floor: The second floor is identical in plan to the first; the classrooms and offices are on either side of the double-loaded corridors and the rest rooms are stacked above those below.
 - c. Third floor: The third floor has only single-loaded corridors, for the outside half of the L-shaped plan is built to the third floor level, a kind of facade architecture. (The second floor was similarly built, but has since been filled-in, classrooms having been added along the rear of the central block). The classrooms on the third floor have been relegated to the end and corner rooms, and the offices have been partitioned in between.
2. Stairways: The staircase in the entrance vestibule has a two-flight (two-run with first floor quarter landing) arrangement. It has an open string, a molded handrail supported by spiral turned balusters and large square newels with pendant drops below. The underside of the staircase has been paneled in imitation walnut wallboard, to match the imitation walnut wallboard panels which have been inserted between the exposed beams of the second floor landing.

The two side staircases are two-flight (two-run with half landing) arrangements with a closed string and enclosed (in plasterboard) balusters and molded handrail. They are of wood, with its treads covered with linoleum tiles.

3. Flooring: The flooring of the entire building is of light gray and white linoleum blocks. This has been laid over the concrete floor on the first floor, and over the narrow tongue-and-groove hardwood floor of the second and third floors. The rest rooms,

unfinished in the recent remodeling scheme, have recently been given poured concrete slab floors.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The previous ceiling finish throughout the building was green painted plaster on sawn lath. This is being covered in the corridors, classrooms and offices of the building with a dropped acoustical ceiling. This ceiling, hung below the air conditioning ductwork which is being installed, is of fissured panels which are 5/8" x 23 3/4" x 47 3/4", and is standard vinyl white. The walls likewise are plaster and are painted green. The first floor corridor walls, however, are being covered with brown and yellow carpeting, alongside several student - executed Indian murals. The lower portions of the rest room walls are covered with glazed ceramic tiles.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The original four-paneled doors were 7'6" x 3"; they have since been cut down to 7'3". They were set in heavily molded doorframes, with single-light transoms. Presently the transoms are being removed, and plywood panels are being inserted; the head moldings are being removed and mitered with the side moldings at a lower level to frame new doors. While the old doors are being retained, louvers are being inserted in place of the two lower panels. Various other doors may be seen throughout the building: some are five-cross panel doors, some have frosted glass panes over three cross panels below. The most recent are hollow core, solid face with simple convex moldings; these are quite common on the third floor offices. All doors and door moldings are being painted brown.
6. Decorative features and trim: The fireplace on the right (east) wall of the entrance vestibule is the most notable interior ornament. (There is a somewhat similar fireplace which backs up to this in the adjacent office). It is built upon a single course of rock-faced limestone, with a large semi-circular arched opening of pressed brick. The opening is flanked by reeded pilasters and topped with a bracketed mantelpiece. The hearthstone is covered with white linoleum tiles.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning: A new Trane heating system and air conditioning are being installed. A mechanical room, the former classroom diagonally to the right of the front

vestibule, is being installed with the necessary equipment, and exhaust fans for the condensing coils are being located directly behind this room, outside, on a concrete pad.

b. Lighting: The lighting is by incandescent bulb and four-tube fluorescent fixtures. The new acoustical ceiling has twin tube recessed fluorescent fixtures, with plastic lenses.

c. Plumbing: Old plumbing fixtures are being replaced with new ones.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces south-southwest. It is built upon a slight hill surrounded by trees and other academic buildings. Most of the greenery, shrubs and hedges have been clipped recently to allow work on the building, but recent photographs have shown the bushes and trees to have obscured the first-floor level of the principal facade.
2. Historic landscape design: Previously, as may be seen in old photographs, there were trees and a cast-iron gate and fence that surrounded the grounds.

Prepared by: Michael A. Tomlan
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1975

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Ink on linen drawings of the Female Seminary Building from the office of C.F. Illsley, St. Louis, Missouri, dated July 1887, in the collection of the John Vaughn Library, Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

B. Early Views:

Photograph collection of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.
catalogue no. 88-13111, interior, students of Female Seminary "Performing Fatigue Tasks"
no. 88-13120, interior, Female Seminary, Dining Room
no. 88-13103, frontal view, Female Seminary
no. 88-13110, exterior, rear
A photo shows the exterior of the first Female Seminary, portico and cupola.

with dome, file number unknown.

A photo shows the remaining four columns of the first Female Seminary, file number unknown.

Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa Oklahoma. One photograph of the exterior of the first Female Seminary, identical to corresponding photograph of O.H.S., but the cupola roof has been doctored to appear conical.

Cherokee National Historical Society Archives, Tahlequah.

One photograph of Seminary students on the boardwalk from the seminary to Tahlequah. Various other photographs of all three buildings.

Mr. Rudia Halliburton, Professor of History, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah. One interior photograph of the semicircular bay of the first story. Mr. Halliburton also possesses copies of nearly all known photographs of the building, probably the most complete photographic record of the Second Female Seminary.

C. Interviews: Interview with Mr. Rudia Halliburton, Jr., Professor of History, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, August 7, 1975.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Fullerton, Eula E. "Some Social Institutions of the Cherokee, 1820-1906." Master's thesis in history, Oklahoma State University. On file in the John Vaughn Library, Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

National Register Inventory of Historic Places. Inventory-Nomination Form of Cherokee Female Seminary (first building) and Cherokee Male Seminary.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Cherokee Advocate. Newspaper article. Tahlequah, Oklahoma, December 9, 1847.

Cherokee Advocate. Newspaper article. "Take Notice" (announcement of the acceptance of bids for the construction of the new seminary building). Tahlequah, August 24, 1887.

The Cherokee County Democrat. Newspaper article. "\$85,000 Will Be Spent Remodeling College Building." Tahlequah, August 30, 1929.

The Cherokee County Democrat-Star. Newspaper article. "Historical Sketch from the Yearbook of 1905." Tahlequah, May 4, 1934.

Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. Park Hill. Muskogee, Oklahoma: The Star Printery, 1948.

Foreman, Grant. The Five Civilized Tribes. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934.

Halliburton, Rudia, Jr. "Northeastern's Seminary Hall." Chronicles of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Historical Society (Winter 1973-74): Vol. LI, No. 4, pp. 391-399.

Laws of the Cherokee Nation.
Tahlequah, Oklahoma: Advocate Printing Office, 1852, pp. 59-61.

Sanborn Map Company, New York. Maps for 1904, 1909 and 1927, the latter updated to 1934. In the collection of the Cherokee National Historical Society, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

The Telephone. "The Cherokee's Pride." Tahlequah, Oklahoma, May 3, 1889.

Tulsa World. Newspaper articles. "Your World." Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 25, 1959.

Wright, Muriel. Blood, Sweat, Prayers, Tears.

Yearbooks for various years, from the Seminary through the current State University, in the collection of the Cherokee Room of the John Vaughn Library, Northeastern State University.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Cherokee National Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1975, at the HABS Field Office on the campus of Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, by Michael A. Tomlan (Cornell University), Project Supervisor; John D. Hnedak (Cornell University), Project Historian; Bethanie C. Grashof (University of Florida), Vicki J. Higgins (University of Cincinnati), Nicholas H. Holmes III (Auburn University) and Roger D. Swayze (University of Oregon), student

assistant architects. The written descriptive data was edited for permanent HABS collection at the Library of Congress by Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, in the winter of 1981. Walter Smalling, Jr. of Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, U.S. Department of the Interior took the documentary photos of the building in October of 1979.

ADDENDUM TO
CHEROKEE FEMALE SEMINARY
(NORTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY,
SEMINARY HALL)
Northeastern Oklahoma State University Campus
Tahlequah
Cherokee County
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-23

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National Park Service
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