

Planting the “Long-Rooted Grass”:



The Eufaula Boarding School for Girls, 1910-1962

*By Linda Ford Wendel**

In 1859 during a Creek council meeting in North Fork Town, Indian Territory, Chief Opothleyahola reminisced about a beautiful island in the Chattahoochee River of his eastern homeland. He told how, over time, it had largely washed away under the force of the river, and he compared his people to that island, eroding away by the actions of white settlers. He said he had learned of a grass with such long roots that, if it had been planted on the island, the island might have resisted the force of the water. He concluded:

As the island in the river might have been saved by planting the long rooted grass upon its banks, so let us save our people by educating our boys and girls and young men and young women in the ways of the white man. Then they may be planted and deeply rooted about us and our people may stand unmoved in the flood of the white man.¹

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The Creeks, like the members of other so-called Five Civilized Tribes, had always valued a white education, and after their removal to Indian Territory during the 1820s and 1830s, their tribe worked to organize schools throughout the region. The Indian Territory's first education superintendent reported in 1898 that the Creeks had eight boarding schools, two orphanages, and sixty-five day schools. Among those boarding schools was Eufaula High School, located only a few miles from the site of Opothleyahola's speech.² Housed in an impressive brick building for a small town in eastern Oklahoma, it rose three-stories tall and included a bell tower, wide porches, and dormers in the attic. A young student, upon seeing it for the first time on top of its hill above town, was sure she was heading to prison.³ Opened in 1892 by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, it incorporated a nearby Methodist mission school known as the Asbury Manual Labor School.⁴ Coming under control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1910, it became the Eufaula Boarding School and served Indian girls from elementary through junior high grade levels.⁵

Currently called the Eufaula Dormitory, it remains in operation, but now as a residential facility, housing both boys and girls in grades one through twelve who attend the public schools in the town of Eufaula.⁶ This study focuses upon the years when it was actually a federal boarding school from 1910 into the 1960s. Under the leadership of several remarkable women throughout this era, it served the needs of young Creek women in the accepted manner of the time.

The long-time objective of the BIA's education plan for Indian girls was first to teach them English and then to concentrate on those skills necessary to be good housekeepers. "Civilization" would follow a clean home run by an English-speaking woman who embraced traditional middle-class, white values. Unfortunately, boarding schools like Eufaula prepared girls for lives that most would never lead, while undermining the values that had underpinned traditional Creek family life. Nevertheless, in a residential school environment, the girls were presumably safe and cared for by competent teachers and loving matrons who had good intentions about their futures. Judged by the standards of having loving, intact nuclear families combined with respect for cultural diversity, it may not have been an ideal childhood, but for many students such as Kay Ann Hickman Farrow, "It was all we knew."⁷

When the federal government took control of the school in 1910, it was already a fixture in the Muscogee Nation. The school occu-

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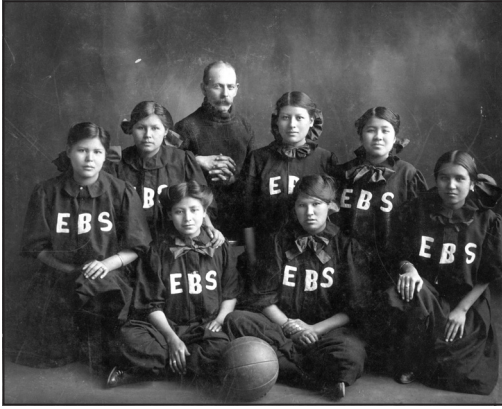
Eufaula Boarding School (photograph courtesy of the author).

plied a substantial building with a dining room, living room, chapel, sleeping quarters, and “recitation” rooms.⁸ Unfortunately, the institution also had numerous problems. A 1901 report from the Muskogee superintendent of public instruction to the chief of the Creek Nation noted outbreaks of pneumonia and malaria attributable to bad water, overcrowded conditions, and a deteriorating structure. The tribe operated the facility until a 1906 act of Congress gave control of all the schools of the Five Civilized Tribes to the secretary of the interior.⁹

At first the Indian Office contracted with the tribes to run the schools, but in 1910 they abandoned the contract system and took over direct supervision of all the Five Civilized Tribe schools.¹⁰ Olivia Moss Purdom was superintendent of Eufaula at that time. She had come to Eufaula in 1907, when it was first designated a girls school.¹¹ One of her first acts was to dress the girls “properly” with the purchase of blue uniforms and matching caps from merchants in Kansas City.¹² Aside from running the school, she participated in several literary and music clubs, a custom that other superintendents would emulate. Graduation in 1911 began the long tradition of transforming the ceremony into a literary and musical program for the entire town.¹³

The staff was small. The 1910 U.S. census listed, besides Purdom and her mother-in-law, seven white female teachers, one white male bookkeeper, and two black janitors, making a student-to-teacher ratio of 25 to 1.¹⁴ This was the last time that janitors were on staff.

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An early basketball team from the Eufaula Boarding School (McGrath-Benedict Collection, OHS Research Division).

From that time forward, each girl, even the youngest, worked as laundress, janitor, gardener, and cook's helper, following the accepted pattern at Indian Office boarding schools of using student labor to cut costs.¹⁵ Chores were extensive and were the most unpopular part of the school program.¹⁶

In her 1912 annual newspaper column, Purdom reported an increase in the number of facilities to eight buildings, with the addition of a laundry, barn, schoolhouse, and cottages for the employees. She added, "aside from steam heat, modern improvements have been made," the assumption being that the school finally had indoor plumbing. The tone of her report revealed a stern but caring temperament and a naïve but optimistic outlook. She and the other faculty were convinced they were bringing a better life to "these children of Nature," whom they regarded as an "alien race" in need of the knowledge of "white civilization." In Purdom's words, the students were "ladylike" and "as a whole, trustworthy."¹⁷

The curriculum followed "with slight deviation" the state of Oklahoma course of study, so that girls wishing to continue on to high school theoretically would have an easy transition. Purdom admitted, "pupils are somewhat slow in reaching the third grade" because of language "impediment[s]" including many English concepts that had no Creek equivalent; however, she maintained that once English was mastered, "with few exceptions [they] advance one grade each scholastic year." Beyond the third grade, homemaking skills were the primary focus. Students did their own cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing, and sewing so they might, in the future, return to their "ill kept unattractive homes" and bring cleanliness and civilization.¹⁸

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Mary Morley, superintendent of the Eufaula Boarding School for Girls (photograph courtesy of the author).

Purdum was superintendent through 1912, when following her resignation, Gertrude A. Campbell accepted the position. She previously had worked at the Cherokee Orphans' Home in Tahlequah. The newspaper announcement of her appointment reported other staffing changes. There were now principals, matrons, teachers, and a full support staff. A local doctor acted as physician. The student-teacher ratio improved to 10 to 1. Mary Morley, who later succeeded Campbell as superintendent, appeared for the first time on the faculty list.¹⁹ That same year Morley planted a small, native cedar tree in front of the main building. Forty years later, this tree became the living Christmas tree for the town. Lit in a public ceremony and visible from all over Eufaula, it symbolized for many the Christmas season.²⁰

Campbell, describing the graduation activities of 1913, praised the four girls graduating from the "prescribed Domestic Science Course." The girls chose as their class motto, "Forward Ever, Backward Never," selecting class colors of pink and green and the sweet pea as class flower. Campbell reported on several improvements at the school: concrete walks, a coalhouse, a commissary, screens for the doors and windows, and a chicken house that would accommodate several hundred birds. Because of the chicken house and the nearby school farm, the school itself provided the bulk of its food needs.²¹

In her newspaper reports in 1913, Campbell spoke of a long waiting list for admission, the acquisition of new playground equipment, individual and classroom music lessons, and instruction in "Land economics . . . what each child should know as to her allotment and

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how to care for her interests.” Every girl went to the local church of her and her parents’ choice on Sunday morning, and Sunday night occasioned an additional service in the chapel and meetings of the Young Women’s Christian Association groups for planning service projects. December 7 of that year had been designated Tuberculosis Day by the Indian Service. The boarding school marked the day with a lecture about tuberculosis from the school physician, a paper written on the subject by a student, a violin solo, and a song by the choir. Campbell concluded the program by inviting the community to the school’s Christmas cantata and said, “I was never more fully convinced that we are on the right road and that in a few generations our backward Indians will become good, progressive citizens.”²²

Easter 1914 brought yet another program of talks and music as well as a special meal with elaborate table decorations. However, an intriguing change appeared in this year’s report. Instead of just the usual overdecorated social events of the previous years, the students also presented an “Indian play” for a meeting of the Federated Women’s Club.²³ The year 1914 also brought the construction of a much-needed domestic science cottage, a model house in which the girls could practice their homemaking skills.²⁴ A diphtheria quarantine, a more efficient water heater, and an extended visit by a government dentist highlighted the year.²⁵ Indicating an increased tolerance for Indian cultural events, the school invited Bonnie McIntosh, a Creek woman, to address the group in the Creek language during chapel service, from which they all “greatly benefited.”²⁶

Campbell’s newspaper report on commencement activities the following year betrayed her condescending attitude toward Indian culture. Her extensive article mentioned several students by name, identified them as full-bloods, and while praising their elocution and deportment, labeled their program, an Indian dance with music, as “primitive.” However, the speaker for the day did make his presentation first in English and then in Creek. Twelve hundred persons attended—quite a crowd for a small Indian school.²⁷

The 1916 school year included two programs supporting Indian culture. A probate attorney talked to the girls about issues they might face if they sold their land and warned about the “promiscuous signing of papers.” In addition, the school celebrated American Indian Day at the request of the Society of American Indians. The program included several “Indian” songs, a speech by the superintendent of the Five Civilized Tribes, and an ethnocentric address by

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Campbell about the Indian's advance from "his primitive state to the present civilization he enjoys."²⁸ In late August 1916 Campbell surprised the school and the town by eloping with H. L. Melton, a prominent local attorney and popular, long-time bachelor.²⁹ She continued as superintendent, living at the school with her new husband.³⁰

In September 1916 Father William H. Ketcham, a former missionary to the Choctaws and an activist in Indian health issues, visited Eufaula as a member of the federal advisory Board of Indian Commissioners.³¹ At the time of his visit, there were thirteen buildings "crowded together on a 5-acre tract." Ketcham reported that the buildings were in good shape and that the main building had recently received new lighting and furniture. He recommended the addition of an employees' lodge to replace the numerous cottages that crowded the campus and a new laundry supplied with modern equipment. He ended by praising the school and its leadership, finding "unmistakable evidence of efficiency in every department" and declaring "no cleaner school could be found."³²

The 1920 federal census listed twelve teachers in residence, plus Mr. and Mrs. Melton. All were white. The student-to-faculty ratio was 11.8 to 1.³³ In June 1920 Campbell-Melton resigned as superintendent, citing health reasons, and the position passed to the long-time principal teacher Mary Morley. A teacher for thirty-two years since her graduation from the University of Arkansas Normal School, she came to Eufaula in 1912 after working at several Choctaw schools, most recently at the Wheelock School in Millerton, Oklahoma.³⁴

Given her already long service at Eufaula, it was not surprising that little changed under Morley's tenure. She, like her predecessors, stressed homemaking and the fine arts. In a 1922 interview she expressed her opinion concerning her charges:

As a usual thing, the Indian girl is better fitted for the finer arts or home life than a business career. Many fine musicians are found among the Indians and other arts are well represented, but in business, the Indian girl as a rule is much slower than her white sister, and also much more timid. Most Indian girls find their sphere in home-life, in nine cases out of ten, their paramount ambition is to be a good housekeeper, wife, and mother.³⁵

In 1925 Morley returned to Wheelock, this time as superintendent, and Zula Breeden (or Breeding), the superintendent there, took over leadership at Eufaula. However, her tenure was

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short-lived. Fired six months into the job after being indicted for drawing money from an Indian pupil's account while she was at Wheelock, Breeden was succeeded by Sadie White, whose only qualification seemed to be good Republican credentials through her husband.³⁶ Staying less than a year, White moved to the Indian Office in Muskogee in April 1927, and Morley resumed the superintendent's position, where she remained for nine more years until her retirement.³⁷

The memoirs of Esther Burnett Horne, a Shoshone teacher working at Eufaula in 1929, gave a brief glimpse into the life of a young teacher working there at the time. She was the only Indian on staff. She recalled Superintendent Morley and Principal Amanda Eld as "austere looking and very straight-laced, but later I came to appreciate having begun my career under such strict and exacting bosses." She taught thirty-five first and second graders in a large classroom above the laundry, reporting that some students were bright and eager to learn, but others less so. Several were overage; some were descendents of Creek freedmen. Horne used peer teaching with great success—those who already knew English helped those just beginning to learn. She loved sneaking out to go to the forbidden stomp dances outside of town. Horne taught at Eufaula for only one year and then moved to another boarding school to marry and work with a man she met at Haskell, the boarding school she herself had attended.³⁸

The 1930 federal census listed fourteen staff members living on campus. One of the matrons was Indian. The student-to-faculty ratio was 9.8 to 1.³⁹ Preparing the girls to be wives and mothers remained the core of the curriculum. The program now included food preparation and service, etiquette, interior decoration, the care and feeding of poultry, weaving, and sewing both clothing and simple household articles. Younger girls made their own everyday dresses, and some of the older girls made all of their clothes. Each girl was required to make her junior high graduation dress from fabric, patterns, and notions supplied by the government. One student who attended the school in the 1950s remembered that she constructed her graduation dress from old parachutes.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., substantial changes were coming to Indian boarding school policy. There had always been a push from the federal government to transfer able students into their local public schools. As early as 1911 the annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs included a decision to send the children of the Five Civilized Tribes to public schools, paying tuition when nec-

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essary and reserving the places at the boarding schools for only those students who needed special arrangements. The curriculum at the boarding schools would follow that of the state public schools but with added emphasis for girls on domestic skills.⁴¹ The reasoning for this seems to be that in the public school system, home economics did not enter the curriculum until high school. The Indian Office assumed its girls would not continue their schooling beyond junior high and therefore needed this domestic science instruction much earlier.⁴²

In 1916 the commissioner announced a “new and uniform course of study for all Indian schools” designed to enable the Indian students “. . . in comparatively a few decades [to] take their places alongside of white boys and girls as an integral part of the public schools.”⁴³ The detailed plan specified exactly how many minutes should be set aside for each school activity, from history to “Industrial Work” to breathing exercises (supposedly as prevention against tuberculosis).⁴⁴ Teachers were held accountable for passing at least 70 percent of their students, and uniform exams would insure that pupils were not promoted without learning the requisite tasks.⁴⁵

However, reality fell short of expectations. The 1921 report from the Board of Indian Commissioners included concerns about the quick transfer of pupils to public schools. These students often found themselves ill prepared to deal with the English language and consequently often left school entirely.⁴⁶ In a separate report on the schools in eastern Oklahoma, Samuel A. Elliot denounced the time and resources that agency personnel spent on the business of buying and selling the natural resources of the Five Civilized Tribes instead of giving attention to the matter of educating their children.⁴⁷

By the late 1920s the BIA ceased worrying about curriculum and became more concerned about budgets. Perhaps anticipating the release of the Meriam Report the next year, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles H. Burke decried the lack of funding resulting in incompetent, untrained, or inadequate personnel and outdated facilities.⁴⁸ In fact, the publication of the Meriam Report precipitated needed changes in boarding school policies while reiterating a desire for the elimination of boarding schools and the transfer of students to public schools.⁴⁹ The Indian Office hoped that increased appropriations in the following years would result in better conditions at the remaining boarding schools by increasing pay for teachers, establishing more rigorous require-

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ments for new employees, and creating a more progressive approach to education.⁵⁰

By the early 1930s a new tone entered the bureau's reporting, one supportive of new methods and increased funding and conveying more hope than resignation about the future of Indian peoples. There was also a renewed push for the enrollment of Indian children in local public schools. After 1934 under the leadership of Commissioner John Collier, the BIA's closing of boarding schools intensified. Boarding schools would now be reserved only for students who could not be educated near their homes, homeless children, or those from "unfit homes who live in districts where there are no social agencies equipped to make the necessary adjustment for them." Poverty was not considered a "sufficient reason for admission," and those considered "feeble-minded or delinquent" should go to schools where they could get specialized care.⁵¹ In addition, the 1936 inception of the Social Security system, with its provisions for aid to dependent children, freed many Indian children to remain at home rather than move to a boarding school for their education.⁵²

During this time at Eufaula, the junior high girls started attending the public school in town.⁵³ From evidence in the records, this did not go well, and the Indian Office in both Washington, D.C., and Muskogee initiated efforts to return the girls, many of whom were overage, to the boarding school for their classwork. However, the public schools protested the loss of income from the girls' tuition, and with not-so-subtle pressure from Congressman Jack Nichols, who was a resident of Eufaula, the matter was dropped and the girls remained in public school.⁵⁴

At the beginning of the 1936 school year, Morley retired after forty years of service. Her successor was Eva Lewers, who most recently had been the superintendent at the Carter Seminary in Ardmore, Oklahoma, and before that a teacher at the Pine Ridge Indian School in South Dakota.⁵⁵ Lewers, a gifted musician, an energetic administrator, and a Phi Beta Kappa with a master's degree, brought vitality to the job and a talent for promotion and politics.⁵⁶

Lewers made two immediate changes. She began Opportunity Classes for "over-age retarded girls." Their classes and extracurricular activities appear to have eliminated academics and concentrated on homemaking and "life needs" activities. Without access to individual student records, it is impossible to know if these girls actually had diminished mental capacities, were simply slower to pick up the English language, or perhaps were shyer than their classmates.

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Eva Lewers became superintendent of the Eufaula Boarding School for Girls in 1936 (photograph courtesy of the author).

Whatever the label, they needed the addition of this special track within the school.⁵⁷

Reflecting her intense interest in music, Lewers expanded the music program by increasing the size of the orchestra to thirty instruments, offering piano lessons to about half the girls, and beginning a band at the kindergarten level.⁵⁸ Lewers's musical and administrative impact on the school was evident in her graduation report of May 1939. The program featured seventeen different musical pieces,

The 1937 orchestra from Eufaula Boarding School (Eva Lewers Collection, OHS Research Division).



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most of them classical selections, and she herself handed out the diplomas, whereas in the past the superintendent of schools had distributed them.⁵⁹ In the future Lewers and her orchestra appeared at meetings and gatherings all over the eastern portion of Oklahoma.

A news article from May of 1940 illustrated Lewers adeptness at combining music, social contacts, and school promotion. The Shubert Music Club, a local music association, entertained a nearby town's music club in the boarding school auditorium. After the program of classical vocal and instrumental music, tea was served using Lewers's own "heirloom silver" in a room filled with painstakingly produced decorations. Before the program began she "welcomed all



A primary school-aged band from the Eufaula Boarding School for Girls (Eva Lewers Collection, OHS Research Division).

the visitors and gave an interesting resume of the Boarding School from the earliest days to the present time.”⁶⁰

Lewers was intent upon strengthening the school's support of the Creek culture. Under Morley, Indian music, or at least popular music about Indians, had entered the music curriculum. Now the chorus sang Creek hymns, visited Indian congregations, and shared their music. Lewers, a lifetime member of the Oklahoma Historical Society, sponsored a historical program at the school for an Indian women's society and touted the opening of a museum at the school to display Indian artifacts.⁶¹ The collection over time included more than two hundred items.⁶²

This early period under Lewers's leadership (1938-1943) marks the time when the most information about the student body is

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available in the archives, although individual student records remain sealed under privacy laws. Total enrollment during this time varied little, ranging from 136 to 158, with more than 50 percent of the enrollment consisting of full-blooded girls and more than 70 percent with at least three-fourths Indian blood. Thirty to forty girls lived at the school year-around because of inadequate or non-existent family support. Most of the students were clustered in the upper elementary grades. Because the usual age of a ninth grader is fourteen, the presence in the reports of so many over that age indicated that each quarter the school had at least thirty girls who were overage students.⁶³

Administrators were required to list on the report the name of each student who had left school during that quarter and her reason for leaving. During the years when these quarterly reports were required, sixty-seven girls left. Twenty-five of those transferred to public schools; nine transferred to other Indian schools; and two transferred to the school for the deaf. Twenty returned home, eight because of unspecified illnesses. Seven, with their families, joined the many Oklahoma residents who moved to California in the midst of the Great Depression. One left to be married, one transferred to the tuberculosis sanatorium, one died from tuberculosis, and one “deserted”—a term left over no doubt from the early days of boarding schools when they were run on a military model.⁶⁴

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought a patriotic sense of direction to the school. Within six weeks of the bombing, the students put on an operetta to benefit the American Red Cross, of which Lewers was the district coordinator.⁶⁵ In 1943 they earned more money for the war effort per capita than any other Indian school. Lewers, determined to support war-related causes in any way possible, harnessed both school and leisure time for activities that would either raise money or supplement their larder. The girls gathered and sold poke greens and pecans. They peddled flowers, seeds, and plants produced by the school garden as well as cakes and cookies baked in their kitchens. They were able to sell their labor to the surrounding farms because of the war-related worker shortage, and they harvested peanuts, walnuts, and strawberries. On the school farm they planted four thousand tomato plants and thirty-six thousand onion sets in one day, plus one thousand pounds of seed potatoes on another day. They raked and stacked fifteen tons of alfalfa. One story illustrated their hard work:

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Last spring Mr. Ballenger had 40 acres of spinach on his place ready to cut, but no one to cut it, so he offered it to those who would come and get it. Twenty Eufaula Boarding School girls came. In two hours and forty minutes, they cut and packed 437 bushels of spinach. They worked in competition as to which one would cut the most. The race was too close for a just award so all were given an ice cream treat. This was only the beginning of the spinach. It was taken to the school and desanded that afternoon and the big outdoor kettles used for cooking sofke, the national Creek Indian dish, were filled with water and set to boil. By 1 o'clock, 120 gallons of spinach had been maneuvered into cans and the canning continued for two days.⁶⁶

Teachers incorporated events connected to the war into their lesson plans. Correspondence from family members in the service became a history or geography lesson, and writing letters served as part of the language skills classes. The sewing classes made bathrobes for an army hospital, while the whole school rolled dressings and collected paper and metal.⁶⁷

With the end of the war, pressure returned to close boarding schools. Eufaula had always been a likely candidate for closing. It was a nonspecialized, single-sex facility on a small, boxed-in campus with deteriorating, out-of-date buildings, located in a small, out-of-the-way town. However, there were advantages to keeping it open. It was well run, generally supported by the local leaders, and the only federal facility of any kind in the Creek Nation. More troublesome, there was no other convenient place to transfer the stu-

The girls from the boarding school participated in a junk drive for the Army-Navy Relief Fund in 1942 (Eva Lewers Collection, OHS Research Division).



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dents, many of whom could not return home and would require foster care or another residential school. Oklahoma, at this time, did not have an organized system of foster homes and depended upon institutions to care for the neediest children.⁶⁸ The plan in Washington, D.C., seemed to be consolidation of all the schools of the Five Civilized Tribes into only a few co-ed facilities spread across eastern Oklahoma, with the conversion of the Eufaula campus into housing for “aged and homeless Creek Indians.”⁶⁹ The Council of the Creek Nation vehemently disagreed, and with additional pressure from local Congressman W. G. Stigler, the Indian Office held off the closing.⁷⁰

The next year panic spread when the necessary appropriation for the school’s operation did not appear in the Interior Department budget. Local town leaders and Congressman Stigler intervened, and the minimum amount needed for operating another year was restored.⁷¹ In December 1949 the director of Indian education in Washington, D.C., the director of the Five Civilized Tribes schools, and a representative from the State Department of Education met in Eufaula; although no records remain of the meeting, the fate of Eufaula Boarding School likely was determined at that time.⁷² Whatever the timing and reasoning, the officials decided not to close the boarding facility but to close the school, reflecting Washington’s policy of speeding up the transfer of educational responsibilities from the Indian Office to local or state control.⁷³

In the summer of 1952 the area director of Indian education notified the Eufaula Public Schools that starting in September all the girls from the boarding school would attend the local schools; the boarding school teachers would be reassigned to other schools in the Indian Department of Education.⁷⁴ Lewers reported the ensuing transfer was most difficult for the older girls, and she regretted that now only the high school girls, rather than all the students, would receive home economics training.⁷⁵ A follow-up letter to the Indian Office in 1954 implies that the transition went well.⁷⁶

In fact, teaching did not end at the boarding school. Several staff, including Lewers, stayed on and continued home economics instruction during the after-school hours and on weekends. The girls also received additional instruction in music, etiquette, and religion, and day-to-day life continued much as it always had. Daily chores continued, of course, and failure to comply resulted in demerits. More than three demerits in one week meant the loss of Sunday afternoon movie privileges.⁷⁷

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Girls prepare for a Saturday night party at the Eufaula Boarding School (photograph courtesy of the author).



Baths for the youngest girls were Wednesdays and Saturdays, with three girls to a tub, scrubbing done by the older girls. Saturday was also general cleaning day, including new bed linens and floor care. It was hard work except for the floor buffing, which they managed by pulling each other around on wool blankets. Saturday afternoon brought laundry duty, done the old-fashioned way with tubs and washboards. Saturday night was devoted to the *Lawrence Welk Show* on the new television or attendance at school parties.⁷⁸

For all but the oldest girls, the military-like regime of the old days was still evident with identical haircuts, lining up in their slips for physical exams, and wearing uniforms, which consisted of denim coveralls in the winter and plaid dresses in the summer. Head lice was controlled by dusting each girl's head with DDT on a Friday night, wrapping it up with a rag, and leaving it until a Saturday morning shampoo.⁷⁹

Lewers remained at the school until her sudden death in 1956.⁸⁰ Lura Wosley, who had been the girls' advisor at the school since 1935, replaced her.⁸¹ The position of superintendent eliminated, Wosley's title was principal. Both funding and enrollment had dropped radically because now only the neediest girls were entitled to attend. The staff dropped to eight women and three maintenance men, who presumably took on some of the students' chores.⁸²

Wosley retired three years later, and in 1959 Toru Herndon took over, the first Indian principal since before statehood.⁸³ Funding and enrollment continued to drop. By 1959 there were only fifty girls in residence, and closure was still a possibility.⁸⁴ The facility was now called the Eufaula Dormitory, and many buildings were no longer in use due to their poor condition. Eleven employees remained; all were of Indian descent.⁸⁵

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Over the Christmas holidays in 1962, the original, old brick building of the Eufaula Boarding School burned, ending a legacy that had begun more than seventy years earlier. Still reeling from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy just a month before, the staff and girls were devastated. No one was hurt in the fire, and the school was eventually rebuilt nearby, where it now serves as weekday housing for Indian boys and girls attending the public schools.⁸⁶ However, in 1962 it seemed that an era, both nationally and locally, had ended.

Evaluating the performance of Eufaula Boarding School over those years is complicated. Without individual student files, evaluation of academic performance and graduation rates is impossible. Based upon the records from the quarterly reports, runaways were minimal, but a fair number of girls left because of homesickness or failure to fit into the structured regime of a residential school. On paper, maintenance of the health and diet of the girls appears adequate; the school recording only one epidemic (measles) during the time of federal control.⁸⁷ Providing most of their own fresh food over the years must have helped. Menu plans submitted in 1949 listed an average of twenty-six hundred calories a day.⁸⁸ It was surprising to find nothing in the archives about how the school dealt with the severe drought in eastern Oklahoma during 1936.

The unique needs of a school populated by virtually all women and girls concerning the issues of puberty and sexuality rarely entered the records. When it did appear, it was under the guise of the euphemistic title "hygiene education." An early manual for Indian schools mentioned books and curriculum for what would now be termed sex education.⁸⁹ While at Carter Seminary Lewers petitioned Washington, D.C., for a school nurse who, among other duties, would be in charge of hygiene education.⁹⁰ At Eufaula, most likely, the matrons or the girls' advisor handled the matter. In an era before the routine use of disposable female sanitary supplies, the laundry issues alone must have been overwhelming for so many girls armed only with tubs and washboards.

Although the school regimes were undoubtedly restrictive and often harsh, it appears that Eufaula, because of its late establishment as a boarding school, learned from the successes and mistakes of its predecessors and presented a more nurturing environment than did earlier institutions. In addition, its location near the students' families may have made the boarding school experience more tolerable. Visits from family were encouraged throughout the school's history, and over the years the boarding school became increasingly supportive and

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encouraging of the girls' Creek heritage.⁹¹ The records include nothing about disciplinary methods. The demerit system used in the 1950s may have been in effect much earlier, but again without the individual student records, nothing can be assumed.

In the end, how can the school and its program be evaluated? Almost one hundred years before, Opothleyahola had pleaded for the "long-rooted grass" of education to sustain his people. Did the Eufaula Boarding School plant that stabilizing grass? Probably not in every student; however, the approach of Purdom, and more so of Campbell-Melton, Morley, and Lewers, over the years reflected a caring and competent approach to their charges, despite the paternalistic values of the times that governed the institution. As with any teaching enterprise, they did their best, rarely knowing what seeds might have been sown.

ENDNOTES

*Linda Ford Wendel is a retired food chemist and a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She divides her time between Omaha and her home in Eufaula, Oklahoma.

¹ John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Opothleyahola," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 9, no. 4 (December 1931): 444-45.

² Joe C. Jackson, "Survey of Education in Eastern Oklahoma from 1907 to 1915," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 29, no. 2 (1951): 201, 227.

³ Michelle Seeber, "No Slowing Down for Chase," *Woodward (Okla.) News*, March 22, 2009, <http://woodwardnews.net>.

⁴ The Muscogee (Creek) Nation has been known by a variety of names, among them Creek, Muscogee, and Muskogee. In this paper, the terms will be used interchangeably. The Union Agency, which directed the affairs of the Five Civilized Tribes, was located in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

⁵ Early in its history and currently, the school admitted both girls and boys, but during the period covered by this paper, it served only Indian girls. The number of grades offered also varied, sometimes eight, sometimes nine. Because these changes were so random, the words junior high are used throughout this paper.

⁶ Kay Ann Hickman Farrow (student at Eufaula Dormitory from 1952 to 1964), interview by author, March 2010; and "Eufaula Dormitory History," <http://themuscogeeecreeknation.com>.

⁷ Farrow interview.

⁸ Jerlena King, "Mrs. Alice McCombs Recalls E.B.S. Days," *Indian Journal*, July 27, 1961, 1.

⁹ 34 Stat., 137, 140, Section 10, April 26, 1906.

¹⁰ Jackson, "Survey of Education," 217-18; and U.S. Department of the Interior, "Schools," *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1910*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 17.

¹¹ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "North Fork Town," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 29 (Spring 1951): 80, 85.

¹² "To Uniform Academy Girls," *Indian Journal*, October 2, 1908, 1.

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¹³ Ibid., February 12, 1909, 1; *ibid.*, February 19, 1909, 1; *ibid.*, February 9, 1912, 1; and "Entertainment a Grand Success," *ibid.*, June 9, 1911, 1.

¹⁴ 1910 U.S. Federal Census, Oklahoma, McIntosh County, Eufaula, Ward 1. A low student to staff ratio seemed to result in fewer psychological problems for boarding school residents. Reported in "Indian Boarding Schools and Indian Women: Blessing or Curse? A Preliminary Report and Suggestions for Further Study," report prepared by Carolyn L. Attneave and Agnes Dill in U.S. Department of Education, *Conference of the Educational and Occupational Needs of American Indian Women* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1980), 211-30.

¹⁵ Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), chapter 6.

¹⁶ William M. McCombs (recounting stories of his grandmother Alice McCombs), interview with author, March 2010; and Farrow interview.

¹⁷ Olivia Purdom, "Annual Report Eufaula Boarding School Narrative," *Indian Journal*, July 19, 1912, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "Mrs. Olivia Purdom Resigns," *ibid.*, July 19, 1912, 2.

²⁰ "Mission Story is Rich in History," *ibid.*, July 20, 1961, 1.

²¹ "Eufaula Boarding School Notes," *ibid.*, May 16, 1913, 2.

²² "Eufaula Boarding School," *Eufaula (Okla.) Republican*, December 19, 1913, 6.

²³ "Eufaula Boarding School" and "The Feast of the Red Corn," *Eufaula (Okla.) Democrat*, April 24, 1914, 1.

²⁴ "Eufaula Boarding School," *Indian Journal*, July 3, 1914, 8; and "Boarding School Notes," *Eufaula Democrat*, July 10, 1914, 1.

²⁵ "Eufaula Boarding School," *Eufaula Democrat*, May 15, 1914, 1; and "Boarding School Notes," *ibid.*, November 6, 1914, 1.

²⁶ "Boarding School Notes," *Eufaula Democrat*, November 6, 1914, 1.

²⁷ "Eufaula Boarding School Commencement," *Indian Journal*, May 21, 1915, 3.

²⁸ "Eufaula Boarding School," *Indian Journal*, May 16, 1916, 1.

²⁹ "Eufaula Bachelor a Benedict," *Checotah (Okla.) Times*, September 1, 1916, 4.

³⁰ 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Oklahoma, McIntosh County, Eufaula, District 47.

³¹ Henry E. Fritz, "The Last Hurrah of Christian Humanitarian Indian Reform: The Board of Indian Commissioners, 1909-1918," *Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (April 1985): 160.

³² U.S. Department of the Interior, "Appendix D: Report on the Eufaula Boarding School, Eufaula, Okla.," report prepared by William H. Ketchem in *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1917* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 38-40.

³³ 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Oklahoma, McIntosh County, Eufaula, Oklahoma, District 47.

³⁴ Frankie Cornelius, "Eufaula Boarding School for Indian Girls Largest School of its Kind in Oklahoma," *Indian Journal*, October 12, 1922, 1; and Jerlena King, "Pioneer Teacher Relates Early Life," *ibid.*, January 10, 1963, 1.

³⁵ Cornelius, "Eufaula Boarding School," 1.

³⁶ "Indian School Job at Eufaula to Sadie White," *Indian Journal*, May 27, 1926, 1.

³⁷ King, "Pioneer Teacher Relates Early Life," 1.

³⁸ Esther Burnett Horne and Sally McBeth, *Essie's Story: The Life and Legacy of a Shoshone Teacher* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 54-57.

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³⁹ U.S. Federal Census, Oklahoma, McIntosh County, Eufaula Township, District 9, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth P. Wesezel, "Vocational Department of Eufaula Boarding School," *Oklahoma Indian School Magazine* 2, no. 5 (May 1933): 10-11; Eva Lewers, "History of Eufaula Boarding School, 1941," Eva Lewers Collection, box 1, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City; and Farrow interview.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, "Schools," *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 20, 1911* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 29-30.

⁴² Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928*, 3rd ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 66; and George C. Wells, "Fourth Annual Report of the Supervisor of Indian Education for Oklahoma to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1935," E596—Narrative and Statistical Reports, 1930-1954, box 1, Records of the Five Civilized Tribes Agency and the Muskogee Area Office, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Record Group 75), National Archives—Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas (hereafter cited as FCT Records).

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Interior, "Education," *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1916* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), 9-10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, "Education to Solve Indian Problems" and "Requirement of Indian Education," *Fifty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 20, 1921* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 11-13.

⁴⁷ Samuel A. Eliot, "Appendix C. Report on Schools and Agencies in Eastern Oklahoma," *Fifty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 20, 1921* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 30-31.

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⁵⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, "Education," *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1930* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 7-9.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 20, 1935*, "Attendance in Boarding Schools," (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1935), 130.

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⁵³ Helen Jimboy, "A Message from the Junior High School," *Oklahoma Indian School Magazine* 2, no. 5 (May 1933): 16; and George C. Wells, "Annual Report of the Supervisor of Indian Education for Oklahoma to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs

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⁵⁶ Langston, "Eva Zerline Lewers," 112-13; and "Eva Lewers, Principal Boarding School Dies," *The Indian Journal*, November 22, 1956, 1.

⁵⁷ Lewers, "History of Eufaula Boarding School, 1941, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ "Boarding School Holds Program," *Indian Journal*, May 18, 1939, 1.

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⁶² "Museum at Local Indian Institute has 200 Articles," *Indian Journal*, July 2, 1942, 1.

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⁶⁶ "Indian Schools Girls War Contributions Rank High Here," *Indian Journal*, July 8, 1943, 1.

⁶⁷ "Eufaula Boarding School Fiscal Year 1944," Eva Lewers Collection, box 1, Oklahoma Historical Society.

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⁶⁹ W. O. Roberts to Willard W. Beatty, July 23, 1948, in E595–Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, 1934-1961, box 3, FCT Records.

⁷⁰ Roly Canard to D. E. Murphy, August 4, 1948, transcript of phone conversation between Willard W. Beatty and P. W. Danielson, August 10, 1948, and Paul M. Niebell to W. O. Roberts, August 13, 1948 in E595–Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, 1934-1961, box 3, FCT Records; and Eva Lewers, "Indian School Will Continue to Serve," *Indian Journal*, July 31, 1947.

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⁷⁴ "Indian School to End 'Teaching': Children to Attend Public Schools," *Indian Journal*, July 9, 1952, 1.

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⁷⁶ A. B. Caldwell to Hildegard Thompson, January 15, 1954 in E595–Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, 1950-1954, box 4, FCT Records.

⁷⁷ Farrow interview.

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⁷⁹ Farrow, *Lake Eufaula Reflections*, 172; and Farrow interview.

⁸⁰ "Eva Lewers, Principal of Boarding School, Dies," *Indian Journal*, November 22, 1956, 1.

⁸¹ "Lura Woosley Head Eufaula Boarding School," *ibid.*, January 3, 1957, 1.

⁸² "Eufaula Board School Assured One More Year," *ibid.*, August 1, 1957, 1.

⁸³ "New Principal for Indian School," *ibid.*, June 12, 1958, 1.

⁸⁴ Paul Fickinger to Selene Gifford, July 14, 1959, E595—Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, 1934-1961, box 4, FCT Records.

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⁸⁶ Farrow interview; and "Eufaula Dormitory History."

⁸⁷ Olivia Purdom, "Annual Report Eufaula Boarding School," *Indian Journal*, June 19, 1912, 2.

⁸⁸ Eva Lewers, July 21, 1949, Daily Menus, in E595—Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, 1934-1961, box 4, FCT Records.

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Manual for Indian School: A Brief Discussion of Principles and Methods of Education with Reference to a few Changes Found Desirable in the Present System of Indian Education* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 8.

⁹⁰ Eva Lewers to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 11, 1934, E595—Correspondence of the Superintendent of Education, file for 1933-34, FCT Records.

⁹¹ The history of the Cherokee Female Seminary is nicely covered in Devon A. Mihesuah's *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). This school closed just as Eufaula started its service. Its students were primarily upper-class, acculturated Cherokees. Details about curriculum and interviews with former students highlight Amanda J. Cobb's *Listening to Our Grandmother's Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Bloomfield was the predecessor of Carter Seminary, and the book covers the history of Carter as well. David Wallace Adam's *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995) remains an authoritative work on early boarding school history.