

"WORCESTER, THE PRIDE OF THE WEST"

By Kathleen Garrett*

The grey frame building that stood on the block bounded by Canadian, Illinois, Smith and Miller Streets in Vinita, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, may not have been the handsomest in the world, but to the pupils attending school there it was the "pride of the West" as their school song said.¹

The building was the physical plant of the Worcester Academy, named in honor of the Reverend Samuel A. Worcester, D. D., who spent a long and fruitful life as a missionary among the Cherokees; and it was founded by the Reverend J. W. Scroggs, D. D., who also spent a lifetime in making religious and educational contributions to the Indian Territory and to the state of Oklahoma (and whose son Dean Schiller Scroggs of Oklahoma A. and M. College, continues to contribute as administrator and educator.)

The Academy was opened in November, 1882, and began its activities in the Congregational Church, which too had been founded by Dr. Scroggs (in 1879). People of Vinita recall almost lovingly that Dr. and Mrs. Scroggs in their devotion and their eagerness helped in the actual building, themselves nailing lathes.

By January, 1883, however, the Academy building was apparently ready for use, for *The Indian Chieftain* (Vinita), January 19, 1883, records the "dedication of Worcester Academy last Sunday at 11 o'clock." The newspaper further urges, "Give the school a trial before sending your children elsewhere."

The building was square, it had two stories, and it had a cupola, which was later to play its part in a Halloween prank. Outside the building between the windows were two mottoes carved in wood. One was *Per aspera ad astra*. Latin mottoes were always cropping up at the Academy. *Tibi seris, tibi metis* proclaims one of the commencement programs. More than one Worcester Academy pupil

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¹ The writer wishes to thank most sincerely Mrs. Grant Foreman, the Reverend William Neff, Jr., and Mrs. Thomas M. Buffington and her daughters for assistance in gathering material for this article.

will tell you rather proudly that two years of Latin was compulsory, and such a requirement is not surprising, for Dr. Scroggs was a very good classical scholar. But the cupola and the Latin mottoes could not account for the pride expressed in the school song nor the love expressed in such statements as "I loved that old school" and "I'll never forget my school days."

It was surely the long line of sympathetic and qualified teachers that even today keeps the Academy alive and dear to its pupils now long past the school age. The principals, as far as can be discovered from newspapers, odd documents, and memories, were the Reverend J. W. Scroggs, the Reverend I. N. Cundall, Professor John McCarthy, and Professor Heard, who was the last and who closed the school.

The teachers, without any attempt to list them chronologically or according to the number of years they taught or the subjects they taught, were as follows:² Misses Ada Durham, Jessie Durham, Elizabeth Webb, Mary Webb, Cordelia Myers, Madge Goodykoontz, Letitia Goodykoontz, Emma Musick, Kate Timberlake, Annette Brown, Ella Bodecker, Louise Graper, Emily Graper, Agnes Hubbell, Fannie Mae Browning, Birdie Trott, Sallie Griffin (matron), McNair, Gunn, Curry, Yancy, and Professors Hullinger and Douglas.

The founding of the Academy is recorded in the 1883 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: "In addition to the above [the 'two fine seminaries' at Tahlequah (Park Hill)] there are a number of 'pay schools' . . . Worcester Academy at Vinita, under the supervision of the Congregational society, erected during the last year by funds subscribed by citizens of the Cherokee Nation, is one of the best in the Territory and had about 100 students last year."

The current Indian agent was, however, partly in error in making his report to the Commissioner, for although some of the citizens of the Cherokee Nation no doubt contributed to the Academy funds, the major part was raised outside the Nation.

On page two of Nevada Couch's pamphlet, *Pages from Cherokee Indian History*, a paper read at commencement July 18, 1884, and later published, many facts about the Academy are given:

THE WORCESTER ACADEMY OF VINITA

Is a Congregational Mission School, intended especially to give the best educational advantages to Indian boys and girls.

It is established and is supported by the American Home Missionary Society.

It has a Board of Directors, composed of the best citizens of the locality.

Only a Nominal Tuition is charged to students, about sufficient to meet the incidental expenses of the school.

² The list is compiled from many sources and like all things human is subject to error.

The Salaries are paid from Congregational Home Missionary funds at New York.

The Home Missionary Society appoints the teachers, as it furnishes the funds.

The school is dependent on the beneficent regard of the friends of Indian Missions. Material interest in this work is urgently solicited.

The condition of the Academy is prosperous, increasingly so. Its efficiency would be greatly promoted if buildings could be immediately erected for boarding and trades purposes.

But before 1884 "material interest" was being "solicited." *The Cherokee Advocate* says that on February 22, 1883, (which was just five weeks after the dedication) the Reverend Mr. Scroggs left for the East in the interest of Worcester Academy. "An effort will be made," the *Advocate* continues, "to procure funds to erect additional buildings to increase the accommodations and efficiency of this promising institution."

Again in 1885 Professor Cundall was writing to Mrs. W. S. Robertson, daughter of the Reverend Mr. Worcester, that they were building but greatly needed funds to make the amount available to much purpose which was already invested.

It has been reported that the "Congregational Educational Society spent more than \$100,000, which was used in building two fine buildings."³ Funds to build a dormitory, Aldrich Cottage, were given by a wealthy woman from Connecticut (an informant believes) for whom the building was named. If this is the "Worcester Academy dormitory" the contract for erection of which was awarded to Messrs. Winterholder and Davis of Neosho in April 1893, its cost was \$7,769.92. Unfortunately Aldrich Cottage was destroyed by fire.

Although most of the pupils were day pupils, some were boarders, and although the school was situated in the Cherokee Nation, children of tribes other than Cherokee and white children attended. The average number in attendance was one hundred (122 were enrolled in 1890). The "nominal tuition" referred to was according to a pupil five dollars. The *Advocate* reported tuition at \$6.50 per month; even so it was apparently so nominal that one former pupil thought it was a free school when he went there, stating, "The people in the East raised the money."

"The best citizens of the locality" who comprised the Board of Directors in the year 1883 were Messrs. A. P. Goodykoontz, President, G. W. Green, Treasurer, Wm. P. Ross, Secretary, W. C. Chamberlain, L. B. Bell, J. C. Trott, Nat Skinner and C. V. Rogers.

The first graduate of the Academy was E. M. Landrum of Vinita, who graduated in 1885. "I led the class; I was at the head of the

³ *Indian-Pioneer History*, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society.

class," Mr. Landrum says loudly; then he adds *in sotto voce*, "since I was the only member." Not only has much general information about the Academy come from Mr. Landrum's lively memory, but many a shrewd comment on the faculty and not a few examples of "extra curricular activities."

One "activity" took place on a Halloween. Professor Cundall lived in a small house on South Smith Street opposite the Academy. He stepped out of his door the next morning after Halloween, stopped, looked up, and ducked his head. On the Academy cupola (a small square surrounded by railings) was a box stove with a flag—somebody's red underwear—sticking out of the stove pipe. Cundall laughed. He said to the boys, "It doesn't look bad up there, but we don't want it there now." The next night they took it down. You have only to look into Mr. Landrum's eye to know who one of the "they" was!

Jim Beatty and John Rogers met at the water bucket to get a drink. Jim drank first. There were a few drops of water left in the dipper, and he threw them on John. John picked up the water bucket and threw the water at Jim, but—(Yes, reader, you guessed it) Miss Madge Goodykoontz, second grade teacher, came out of her door and was the recipient of the whole bucket of water. John was made to apologize; he asked if he could write the apology. John wrote a beautiful hand. In apologizing he made "violent love" to Miss Goodykoontz; she said the apology was worse than the offense.

But Mr. Landrum was not above making love himself to the teachers. To Miss Emma Musick, the kindergarten teacher, he wrote, "Music, sweet music, how I love thee." And she could say nothing for he was merely quoting poetry.

Professor John McCarthy is remembered for many reasons: he married the house matron; he came from St. Louis, where he had worked in a foundry. Mr. Landrum recalls that McCarthy had a patented paddle. He laid the boys across his knee and worked the paddle like a sewing machine with a treadle.

Professor Isaac Cundall was one of the participants in a rather strange episode that took place in the early days of the Academy. The following story may serve as preparation for that episode which will be discussed later. Professor Cundall wanted to introduce a course in calisthenics, so he chose a pupil, Nevada Couch, to go to St. Louis to be trained. When she returned she was to teach the others, but they wouldn't do a thing she told them. "The choice had been a bad one," comments Mr. Landrum; "she was a 'white' girl."

It is of the Reverend Mr. Scroggs that Mr. Landrum has the happiest memories. He was an "even tempered man; he didn't have to roar at you to get things done." He had the best all round

education of any man that Mr. Landrum had ever known. And he always took interest in school concerts, charades and literary societies.

Dr. Scroggs was himself a singer and composer. Mrs. Berrigan of Norman, who knew Dr. Scroggs some years later, remembers especially a performance of the Anvil Chorus given at Kingfisher College. "His voice rang out," she says; "I can hear it yet."

The literary societies were apparently a high spot in the week. Every Friday a program was held. There were debating and singing. Mr. Landrum says that Frank Franklin, "just a friend of the School," helped with these programs. If no one else had a speech Preston Davis (later to be a prominent Vinita lawyer and judge) had one.

And one suspects that these literary societies were not all "literary." Mrs. J. S. Campbell (then Mary Garrett) gracious and charming wife of a successful merchant, mother of five children and grandmother of eleven grandchildren, remembers "singing and giggling and having the most fun" at these Friday afternoon sessions. And one suspects that this fun was not confined to girl fun, for in recalling the names of former pupils of the Academy she confides, "I can remember the boys' names better than I can the girls'."

Mrs. Hilton (Essie Fox) remembers the assemblies every morning, for each student had to have a quotation to answer to his name. The quotation she can quote today is one from Longfellow:

What would the world be to us
If the children were no more.

Mrs. Hilton made double use of her grammar book: she not only learned her grammar from it, but used it for getting the quotations for assembly.

From Mr. W. H. Klaus of Vinita comes news of the "wonderful glee club" which was "called back time after time" and which "raised the roof." When the question was asked, "Were you in the glee club?" Mr. Klaus exclaimed, "Gosh, yes," and immediately began singing:

"There was an old man so the story runs
The father of two blooming sons,
The older was a nice young man
Built on a Moody and Sankey plan
The second was a terrible son. . . ."

But one should go to 704 E. Tahlequah Street, Vinita, to learn the fate of that second son.

Not only the glee club remains in Mr. Klaus's memory: "Another thing we learned at Worcester Academy was Genesis, Exodus, Num-

bers, etc. Every Wednesday for one period we studied Bible. After the eighth grade we had to know how to spell every book and name in the Bible."

Professor McCarthy was really a kinder man than the patented paddle indicated. Mr. Klaus started at the Academy in the second grade, but he didn't finish, for his mother died. But encouraged by Professor McCarthy he took a special course (instituted by the professor) which consisted of bookkeeping, accounting, penmanship. *Bryant and Stratton Accountinghouse Bookkeeping* was the formidable title of the textbook he studied; he got a special diploma in bookkeeping and penmanship.

Mr. Klaus remarked that there was no football or other sport at Worcester, but there were leap frog and marbles and fights. So, perhaps football wasn't missed.

When Mrs. Paul Clinton (Fannie Knight) was questioned about her part in any pranks that might have been played while she attended Worcester Academy, she replied, "Well, I met my husband there." He was a boarder; she a day pupil.

Miss Myrtle Lucky's answer to the same question was a firm, "No, we never got into scrapes; we knew what would happen when we got home."

She and her two sisters, Sarah Frances and Sabrina, attended the Academy. Myrtle was six years old when she entered; she finished the eleventh grade. It was she who said "I loved that old school."

Small Myrtle had her troubles, for she thought one of the teachers took a dislike to her. Consequently Myrtle didn't do very well in school, and had to stay in the same class two or three years. This situation worried the little girl quite a bit, for as she says "I knew I was smart." Finally Professor McCarthy called her out of the class room and took her into another class room and asked her how she would like to be in that class. She did fine all the rest of the time she was at the Academy.

At commencements there were contests. Myrtle competed one year. She was about ten; the other competitors were seniors. They were given special training, after school and during lunch time, but Myrtle had just the ordinary class instruction. She won third prize. Her father knew that she had worked very hard, and thinking she deserved a special prize, he bought her one—a vase, white opaque glass with red glass roses on it. Antique collectors are going to be after this vase some day. Rewards were given for attending without missing, and Miss Lucky won a book which she still proudly possesses. Winning a reward for attendance was quite an achievement, for the sisters walked in every day from their farm home.

At one time they couldn't come in as the slews were up after heavy rains. When the girls didn't appear for several days, some of the teachers, Professor Cundall, Misses Griffin, Durham, Myers, went out in a surrey to see about them. The girls were as "tickled to see them as if they had been kin folks."

Every year, both Myrtle and Sabrina recall, there was a picnic. The teachers and pupils went in buggies, and the destination was Big Cabin Creek. Each took his own lunch, which was nearly always fried chicken, and there were red lemonade and ice cream. Sabrina (now Mrs. Moore) says, "We were excused early on Friday to go out to the prairie and pick flowers or have fun."

And now for the story of Nevada Couch, the same who was sent to St. Louis to be trained in calisthenics and whose school mates refused to be instructed by her when she returned: On June 18, 1884, at the Commencement exercises of the Academy Miss Couch read a paper on the life of Samuel Austin Worcester:

"Our Institution is called Worcester Academy in honor of Rev. Samuel Austin Worcester, D. D., a true and tried friend of the Cherokee people.

"It is the purpose of this essay to collect such facts as may be available, from whatever source and in whatever form, pertaining to the early and later life of this eminently faithful and good man with some leading facts of Cherokee Indian history identified with it."

The paper goes on to tell of the early Cherokee missions in Georgia, the arrival of Worcester and his bride, their early years as missionaries, the birth of their older children, the arrest of Worcester and his colleague Butler and their imprisonment and finally the long journey west.

Shortly after it was given, the address was published in a twenty-seven page booklet with the title page of the third edition as follows:

THE WORCESTER ACADEMY OF VINITA
AN INDIAN SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY

PAGES

—From—

CHEROKEE INDIAN HISTORY,

As Identified With

SAMUEL AUSTIN WORCESTER, D. D.,

For 34 Years a Missionary of the A.B.C.F.M.
Among the Cherokees

A Paper

Read at the Commencement of Worcester Academy
at Vinita, Ind. Ter., June 18, 1884,

By MISS NEVADA COUCH,
A Member of the Academy

Published for the Institution
Third Edition, Revised

R. P. Studley & Co., Printers, St. Louis

And then the storm descended on Nevada Couch's head. One feels at this date that the trouble was rooted in jealousy; not only was there resentment at Miss Couch's being a "white girl," but there seems to have been professional jealousy present also. The storm came in the form of attacks, first on errors of fact, then on the authorship of the pamphlet itself. The attacker, one is sorry to learn, was Spencer S. Stephens, for Mr. Stephens had given long and valuable service as a teacher to the Cherokees. Perhaps the story is best told in two letters written by I. N. Cundall to Mrs. W. S. Robertson, a daughter of the Reverend S. A. Worcester. These letters are the property of Mrs. Grant Foreman who has very kindly given permission for their publication. They came into Mrs. Foreman's possession through Mrs. Robertson's daughter Ann Augusta (Mrs. N. B. Moore).

Vinita Jan 17 -85

My Dear Mrs. Robertson.

Your Favor of 14inst recd this morning, discloses the fact that my last letter to you was misdirected, and accounts for my not hearing from it.

I have today mailed to Mrs. Boudinot $\frac{1}{2}$ doz copies of Miss Couch's "Pages from Cherokee Hist &c" and accompanied it with a letter of my own.

Miss Couch sends you by this mail three Autograph copies—one for yourself and one for each of your two daughters—and will do the same for any others whose names and addresses you will send to her. The second and third editions are identical except the imprint.

Some considerable delay was occasioned in trying to take advantage of all criticisms on the first edition by wh to improve the second. In this I have given my personal assistance to Miss Vada so far as I could do conscientiously and have it remain as her own.

And Mr Studley gave his own eye (than which I know no keener) to the proof, and "get up". He pronounces it one of the neatest productions which has ever gone out from his press—and this is after an experience of 40 years in St. Louis. We get many complimentary letters. It has been placed in all the leading Libraries, and acknowledgments received.

A Mistake fortunate or unfortunate has been made affecting the cost, but adding to the attractiveness of the book. In the final order, thinking that for Libraries, Special Mailing, and use of friends it would be pleasant to have a part gotten up in More attractive form, I requested Mr. Studley to print the last 500 with lighter colored cover, in colors and on fine heavy tinted paper. The result, he has printed the entire 2 & 3d editions in this nice shape. Which brings them to about \$10. per hundred. He claims to have followed orders, & the letter containing the order not preserved. This however is not your fault. I will hold and send to you whatever

number you may direct—and send to you in whatever way you may order. You paying only the rate I gave you in the former letter.

Miss C. has been assailed here most bitterly through the agency of a directly (sic) by Mr. S. S. Stephens—first by writing letters to "Advance" & "Independent" on minor discrepancies—& now these are entirely removed claiming that it was written by other parties. It has been charged successively—to Wm. P. Ross—Rev. J. W. Scroggs—Rev. Leonidas Dodson—Miss Ada A. Durham my first assistant and to myself.

The girl, who is very bright, worked grandly—and as few of her age could work. I received the pages page by page as they came from her desk. Most of the work being done in my presence, —some parts being corrected & transposed many times. No other party but myself saw a word of it.

Whatever aid she got, I gave but only as was proper as her principal, anxious that she should do herself and the institution justice. She has well earned the kind words she is receiving and from the highest sources. I know a word of appreciation from yourself would be specially valued by her.

Yours Heartily

I. N. Cundall.

Three months later he wrote to Mrs. Robertson again in reply to her request for more copies of the pamphlet. This letter is written on paper with an interesting letter head:

WORCESTER ACADEMY,
Vinita, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.

Vinita, I. T. Apr 21 1885

My Dear Mrs. Robertson:

In reply to your kind letter, I find I can send you 200 copies Additional "Pages &c as identified with the Life of Dr S. A. Worcester," your honored Father.

I do this the more readily as I feel that the use through you will be most discriminating for permanent good, I am surprised at the interest this little pamphlet has elicited at the East. Its publication was an individual matter of my own. For the 5000 copies all told I have paid \$270. Of this I have received back less than thirty per cent.

You have now 400 copies—I have from you \$10. If If you can send me \$15 additional I will be satisfied. To meet future exigencies we have 300 copies left only. And ten years hence they will be sought after, at a high value, as a reliable recount of the history of those troublous times.

I am glad to know of your daughters success in her boarding School Movement. She has special adaptations and advantages in that direction and I hope the institution may be the means of great usefulness. I will be glad to know of its development from time to time.

We are building here, —but greatly need funds to make the amount available to much purpose, which is already invested.

Yours Most Heartily

I. N. Cundall.

However, in spite of Professor Cundall's letters, it is said very firmly in Vinita today (August, 1951) that Professor Cundall wrote the book and signed Miss Couch's name.

It would be fruitless to pursue the question of authorship today. Certainly at first glance the rather long, formal, scholarly

sentences seem not to be those of a high school girl, but one should remember that in the Nineteenth Century such writing was the rule rather than the exception, and there is plenty of evidence even in domestic literature (letters, diaries, etc.) that "in those days" many "little fishes wrote like whales."

Yet Cundall was right in one respect. He predicted, "Ten years hence they will be sought after, at a high value, as a reliable recount of the history of those troublous times." No writer on Cherokee matters today neglects the booklet by Nevada Couch, and many quotations have been made from it in more ambitious and more comprehensive works. And when the present writer wished to read the pamphlet and obtained it through an inter-library loan she paid an insurance fee on \$50.00 for the tattered and water stained little twenty-seven page book.

Miss Lucky says that Vada Couch was supposed to graduate with the "big class" (six or seven members!), but that some girls got "mad" and dropped out. She thinks that Vada Couch never graduated. It is from her, too, that we learn that Miss Couch died of tuberculosis. All that one learns of Nevada Couch is sad. One hopes that she found somewhere in her association with the fine teachers of Worcester and in her study of him for whom the Academy was named some means of coping with those unhappy circumstances that seem to have come her way in life.

The first graduating class of the Academy consisted of E. M. Landrum, and the second class, of Freeman Ballard and Jim Dumas. The short list of students which follows is made up, like that of the faculty, from many sources and may be faulty from many causes yet will give some small pleasure to any Worcester alumni who might chance to read it: Birdie, Willie and Homer Trott; Tom Windfield; Mary Garrett (Mrs. J. S. Campbell); Bird and Bob Ironsides; Fred Radcliff; Fannie, Henry and Vic Knight; Bertha Rogers, Bess and J. L. Chouteau; Harrison Bethel; Paul Clinton; Preston Davis; Jim Beatty; John Rogers; Nannie Stafford (Mrs. Kornegay); Mary Raymond; Flossie Stephens; Rina and Carrie Blue-jacket; Celia Egan; W. H. Klaus; Charlotte Mode (Mrs. W. H. Klaus); Joe Butte; George Capp; Sarah Frances, Sabrina and Myrtle Lucky; Stella Davies; Liburn Scott; Essie Fox (Mrs. Hilton); Bert Chandler and Marshall Stevens.

Worcester Academy was built to fill the need for advanced education. The Vinita public school system answered elementary needs, but there was no school of higher learning nearer than the Cherokee Male and Female Seminaries at Tablequah and Park Hill. Statehood was near, the public school system was expanding, and in 1902 the sum of \$4,000 was appropriated by the town council out of school funds to purchase the Worcester Academy property. Worcester Academy then became a part of the Vinita school system.

In the summer of 1952, seventy years after the founding of the Academy, the last building was torn down to make way for a playground. When the cornerstone was opened, it was found to contain yearbooks, catalogues, student handbooks, and similar materials. These papers are now in the office of Mr. G. R. Griffin, superintendent of schools in Vinita.

Herbert Worcester Hicks, grandson of Worcester, stated:⁴ "My grandfather died with his ambition for a college among the Cherokees unrealized, but the old Worcester Academy at Vinita, established in territorial days by the American Home Missionary Society, was given his name."

Miss Couch in the concluding paragraph of her paper of 1884 says, "May the Academy whose anniversary we celebrate today, be worthy of the name it bears—committed to every good work and struggling heroically, even at cost of suffering, to be a blessing to the Cherokee Nation, for whom the noble Worcester gave his life." And there are many who say with conviction that it was worthy and that it was a blessing.

Worcester Academy has passed into limbo along with other fine academies and seminaries which offered to youth of an early day the educational and social benefits that were only too few in pioneer America.

And so we take leave of Worcester Academy in other words of that class song with which we began. The class song of 1887 written by Emma Beck concludes with the words: "Farewell to dear Worcester, farewell."

⁴ *Indian-Pioneer History* (1937), OHS.