

THE CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN  
TWO PIONEER COMMUNITIES\*

By T. J. Ballenger

Down through the years western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma have been more or less related to each other in several different ways. Both regions are somewhat similar physically—in surface, in soil, in climate, and in general topography. Both snugly set in the foothills of the Ozarks, they are drained by some of the same rivers and creeks and traversed by some of the same mountain ranges. Both regions are well perforated with an abundance of clear, strong springs of water. There are said to be some two hundred springs within a radius of two miles around Cane Hill, Arkansas. These springs, it is said, account for the cane growing on top of the hills, instead of in the lowlands as is commonly the case, hence the name Cane Hill.

Business relationships between them have been close. The Indians of eastern Indian Territory bought goods from the merchants of western Arkansas. In early days the same Indian tribes occupied both regions, the Cherokees in the north and the Choctaws in the south. Both regions were in close touch with each other during the War between the States. But by far the most conspicuous relationship, particularly between northwestern Arkansas and northeastern Oklahoma, has been one of education and culture. The chief purpose of this paper is to point out, in some detail, this latter relationship between the earliest schools of higher learning in these two respective regions: the Cane Hill College and Female Seminary at Cane Hill, Arkansas and the Cherokee National Male and Female Seminaries near Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

While the two communities to be compared in this article are Cane Hill, Arkansas and Tahlequah, Oklahoma, it is not the intention of the writer to confine his remarks rigidly to these two towns but rather to the vicinity or region centering about these two places. In distance Cane Hill and Tahlequah are about forty miles apart as the crow flies. They were both pioneer settlements rather far removed from other civilization at the time of their beginnings.

In its origin Cane Hill boasts of Spanish visitations at the time of De Soto's ramblings through Arkansas. The site of a sup-

\* The information from which this article was gleaned came from so many sources that it is not thought advisable to try to cite all of them. It was obtained through personal interviews with old-timers who knew some of these facts, from old newspapers, from college catalogs, and various other sources. The late Mrs. Ellen Earle Richardson, daughter of F. R. Earle who was president of Cane Hill College for a number of years, was very helpful.

posed old Spanish fort is preserved there by a recent marker. Some ambitious Oklahomans will even point out the remains of one of De Soto's abandoned mines a few miles southeast of Tablequah but history will hardly bear out this contention.

The two settlements were made differently. Individual families came into the Cane Hill region in the 1820's and in the early thirties, and hewed for themselves pioneer houses out of the virgin forests. John Latta, originally from South Carolina, came to this region from Tennessee about 1828, with his negro slaves, and established a plantation and industrial plant which he called "The Lord's Vineyard." He reared a large family, set up a blacksmith shop and furniture manufacturing plant, and built up for himself and family a reputation for thrift, industry, and dependable citizenship. The family came to be one of extraordinary size and possessed great versatility. Some were skilled in blacksmithing and carpentry work, some were peace officers, some were ministers of the Gospel, while others were farmers, businessmen, and teachers. Some of them remained there and others settled in and around Tablequah and remnants of the family still reside in both places today. The family as a whole played a conspicuous part in the industrial, social, and cultural development of this entire region from Cane Hill on the east to Tablequah on the west.<sup>1</sup>

Martha Jane Latta taught in Tablequah in the early eighteen fifties. After the Civil War James Latta was overseer of the George Murrell estate at Park Hill and lived in "Hunters Home," while his wife taught private subscription schools for the white children.<sup>2</sup> The Goddards were associated with the Lattas in Arkansas and some of their descendants have long since been citizens of Tablequah.

Another early family were the McClellans. They too have connections in Tablequah. Members of this family in Cane Hill live today in an aristocratic old mansion, built shortly after the Civil War, that superseded one of pre-war structure on the same site. This residence today, with its large fireplaces, contains some rare furniture and many interesting antiques of early Cane Hill. The Buchanans lived in Cane Hill before the Civil War, some were officers in the Confederate army, and some taught in the college there, both before the war and after. The Earles, the Richardsons, the McCulloughs, the Troups, the Reynolds, the Reeds, the Coxes, the Shannons, and others too numerous to mention, were prominent early settlers.

Unlike the settlement of Cane Hill, Tablequah was settled by a mass migration. When, in the winter of 1838 and the spring of 1839, the Cherokee Indians, under pressure of the State of Georgia

<sup>1</sup>"The Lord's Vineyard", p. 38. (This is a micrographed history of the Latta family compiled by F. F. Latta of Shafter, California, 1940).

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Carolyn Foreman, *Park Hill*, p. 161.

and compulsion of the Federal Government, were forced to leave their homes in Tennessee and Georgia and come to the Indian Territory, several thousand of them assembled in the neighborhood of Park Hill and Tahlequah. After a considerable period of factional strife over their removal, fraught with cruel assassination and much destruction of property, they effected a union of government, adopted a new constitution, and selected Tahlequah as their national capital. A few of the Old Settler Cherokees who had come here in 1828, like Black Coat, Young Wolfe, Riley Keys, and the German missionary Thomas Bertholf, had settled along Bear creek in the vicinity of Tahlequah, but the main settlement began in 1839. Tahlequah began its corporate existence under the direction of the Cherokee national government, and all at once. It was not built up gradually by individual accretion, at least not in its beginning.

John Ross, chief of the Cherokees for nearly forty years, established his home at Park Hill, three miles southeast of Tahlequah. His brother, Lewis Ross, treasurer of the nation, also lived there at first. George Murrell, a wealthy planter and merchant, built a very substantial home here in the middle forties. This old home is still standing and is now being restored by the State Planning and Resources Board. Andrew Nave, George Lowrey, Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, Riley Keys, David Carter, William P. Ross, Reverend Hamilton Valentine, John Henry Covel, and Dr. Samuel Austin Worcester were prominent leaders in the early days of Tahlequah.

Inspired with an imagination for the future and with the eternal verities of life uppermost in their minds the early leaders of both of these communities put education in the forefront of their thinking. The Latta family record says that "on the long road from South Carolina to Arkansas, traveling in slow wagons over roads that today we would consider impassable, he (John Latta) brought with him to his western wilderness a library of books that would exceed that found in many homes today."<sup>3</sup> This family record also says: "Cane Hill College was organized in 1833 in the living room of the old Latta home at Vineyard, near Evansville, and later established in a two-room log schoolhouse on a hill above the present town of Cane Hill as a training school for the ministry."<sup>4</sup> But the state marker that stands just across the street from the post office bears the following inscription:

Cane Hill College, the first Collegiate Institution of learning established in Arkansas, was founded here by Cumberland Presbyterians on October 28, 1834. The following persons were named by the

<sup>3</sup> *The Lord's Vineyard*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

founders as the Board of Trustees: Col. John McClellan, Dr. Robert Bedford, Rev. John Carahan, Rev. Jacob Sexton, and Col. Lewis Evans. Dr. Stephen B. Johns was Secretary of the Board.

This school was for boys only. At the same time that Cane Hill College was chartered, the Cane Hill Female Seminary, located about two and a half miles south of Cane Hill, was chartered. In 1875 the two were combined and made coeducational. The college was located on the top of one of the main hills overlooking the surrounding country. A strong spring gushes out from beneath the brow of this hill from among boulders that weigh several tons. The college consisted of two brick buildings and one frame, two-story structure, together with a frame dormitory about an eighth of a mile to the south. The brick buildings were burned during the Civil War but in 1868 a two-story frame building was built on the original site.

The Cherokee people were considerably advanced in civilization while still living in Georgia and Tennessee, having already had a written constitution, a printing press, a national newspaper printed half in English and half in the newly invented Cherokee characters, and a number of mission schools for the education of their children. Thus it is only natural that they would make ample provision for education in their new home in the West. In the constitution of 1839 provision was made for a system of free public schools. Then, in 1846, the Cherokee National Council established two institutions of higher learning, one for boys and the other for girls. The Male Seminary was located just southwest of Talequah and the Female Seminary was placed at Park Hill, some three miles southeast of Talequah. Thus the Cherokees, like the early settlers of Cane Hill, gave education the predominant place in their lives.

Miss Graham, the first principal of the Cane Hill Female Seminary, was a graduate of Mount Holyoke. Similarly, Miss Ellen Whitmore, the first principal of the Female Seminary at Park Hill, was a product of Mount Holyoke. Preparatory to opening the two Cherokee academies, William P. Ross and David Vann were appointed to go to Mount Holyoke and to other eastern colleges and universities to select a faculty for these schools. Both of these female academies placed much dependence upon Mount Holyoke, not only for their teachers but for their curricula and general standard of conduct. Miss Amanda Buchanan, daughter of John and Ellen Crawford Buchanan, attended school at the Oxford Ladies Seminary at Oxford, Mississippi, and graduated from Mount Holyoke, Massachusetts, in 1854. On her return to Cane Hill she became "Instructress in Painting" in Cane Hill College.<sup>5</sup> When

<sup>5</sup>Taken from a paper written by Jobella Holcombe of Fayetteville, Arkansas, upon the occasion of presenting to Mrs. Ellen Earle Richardson of Cane Hill the Distinguished Citizen Award, on September 20, 1953.

in 1852, Miss Ellen Whitmore resigned the principalship of the Cherokee Female Seminary to get married, she was succeeded by Miss Harriet Johnson from the Mount Holyoke faculty.

Several of the teachers at these institutions had Master's degrees. The Reverend Cephas Washbourne, who came to this country as a missionary to the Cherokees, taught at Cane Hill long before the Civil War. Major Quesenbury taught painting at Cane Hill from 1875 to 1880. He was a poet, an editor, a humorist, and an all-round likeable fellow.

Miss A. Florence Wilson was a native of Cane Hill and received her early training in the Cane Hill Female College. She later received a diploma from La Grange College in Tennessee. Then she came to Tahlequah, first to teach in the public schools and later to serve, for a number of years, as principal of the Cherokee Female Seminary. She impressed upon the young womanhood of the Cherokee Nation her principles of thorough scholarship, ladylike conduct, and stern but helpful discipline as perhaps no other person has ever done. Her former pupils still refer to her in terms of the highest praise and esteem.

Mrs. Foreman, in her *Park Hill*, said: "The seminary was run on the plan of Holyoke and Sarah (Worcester) not only imparted book knowledge to her pupils, but also the meticulous refinements thought essential to good breeding in those days. So the ideals of Mount Holyoke were carried into the wilderness and the learning of Cherokee girls educated there was no poor imitation of the refinements of eastern graduates."<sup>6</sup> While this was said of the seminary at Park Hill it would apply equally well to the female seminary at Cane Hill, since it too was so closely affiliated with Mount Holyoke.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century Prince Dolgorouky was associated with both of these educational centers. Mysterious and eccentric, he was supposed to have been a political refugee from Russia. In 1837 one member of his family was Prime Minister to Czar Alexander III of Russia. According to his own story, the Prince was exiled to Siberia as a political prisoner and set to work in the salt mines. He escaped by concealing himself in a salt barrel and, in this way, finally reached America. He was an accomplished musician, having studied under Rubenstein and other European teachers. Upon reaching this country, he naturally sought the seclusion of isolated regions rather than trying to remain in the eastern cities, where he might be recognized. He first taught music in Cane Hill College, then later in the Male Seminary at Tahlequah. When he taught at Cane Hill he boarded at Prairie Grove, eight miles distant and walked back and forth to his work. If the creeks were up he sometimes had to wade the water. The late Mrs. Ellen Rich-

<sup>6</sup> Foreman, *Park Hill*, p. 86.

ardson related that upon one occasion when she was taking piano lessons from him he reached in his pocket for a handkerchief and pulled out a wet sock. He was director of the band at the Male Seminary for a number of years and directed the choir at the Presbyterian Church at Tablequah.

Miss Ella Lake, fourth assistant at the Cherokee Male Seminary in 1889, taught music at Cane Hill College before coming to Tablequah. Reverend Samuel Newton, who established the first mission at Park Hill in 1830 and named the place, also the first postmaster at Park Hill,<sup>2</sup> later moved to Washington county, Arkansas, and was postmaster at Bonnesboro (Cane Hill) in 1847.<sup>3</sup>

Not only did several of the faculty members teach both at Tablequah and at Cane Hill but many of the young men and women of the Cherokee Nation attended school at Cane Hill College, particularly before the Cherokee seminaries were opened and during the intervals when they were closed, just before and immediately after the Civil War.

Eliza Christine Thompson, mother of Mrs. Ella Scott and the late Roger Zubauks, and also her sister, Anna Thompson, later the wife of J. W. McSpadden, Sr. of Tablequah, attended the Cane Hill Female Seminary before the Civil War. Maria Ann Thompson, mother of the late Judge J. T. Parks of Tablequah, also attended this seminary prior to the Civil War. She told of boarding at a place where they served opossum so much that the girls formulated them a prayer for returning thanks at the table: "Lord, deliver us from possum and help our landlady to serve some other kind of meat." Miss Eliza Jane Ross, the accomplished daughter of Lewis Ross and niece of the Principal Chief, attended the Cane Hill Female Seminary before she entered the Bethlehem Female Seminary in Pennsylvania. In 1854 she became assistant teacher in the Cherokee Seminary at Park Hill. The Schrimpsner girls and Mrs. Clem Rogers of Claremore received a part of their education at Cane Hill. Maggie Starr, aunt of the late Mrs. W. W. Hastings, attended school at Cane Hill while Mr. Looney was president. Miss Jane Buffington, later the mother of W. Buff Wyly of Tablequah, and Miss Nan Thompson of Beattie's Prairie, sister of the late Reverend Joseph Franklin Thompson of Tablequah, went to school at Cane Hill. Miss Mary Elizabeth Duncan, sister of the late Mrs. J. T. Parks, now a centenarian of Glendale, California, attended the college after it was made coeducational, in 1875. Reverend Stephen Foreman, with his party of Cherokees, camped at Cane Hill at the time of the removal in 1838. His son, Taylor Foreman, later returned there and married Miss Ada McClellan.

<sup>1</sup> Emmett Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> George H. Shirk, "First Post Offices in the Boundaries of Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Summer, 1948), p. 37.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Hinds family migrated from North Carolina to Newton, Missouri, then moved down to Cane Hill for the benefit of the schools at that place. Amanda Hinds, mother of Dr. P. H. Medaris of Tahlequah, attended the Cane Hill Female Seminary before the Civil War. She was held in prison for a time by the Union troops and the family moved temporarily to Viney Grove, Arkansas for safety. Her father, John Hinds, practiced medicine at Cane Hill and also preached for the Cumberland Presbyterian church. Descendants of this Hinds family have been prominent in business and civic affairs in Tahlequah ever since the turn of the century.

Joseph Franklin Thompson, Austin Worcester Foreman, Hooley Bell, Hugh Montgomery Adair, and Frederick B. Severn, a Creek Indian, all attended Cane Hill College before the Civil War. John Henry Covel, William Peter McClellan, John R. Vann, later principal of the Male Seminary at Tahlequah, Watt Watie, Jess Foreman, John L. Adair, captain in the Confederate service under Stand Watie, and John Drew<sup>9</sup> entered Cane Hill College shortly after the Civil War closed. Most of these went on horseback with their belongings in their saddle bags. Watt Watie boarded with Mrs. McCulloch, who lived across the little valley from the college. It was here that he died after a very short illness, the same year that he entered college. His father, General Stand Watie, came and took him home for burial. Sam Starr, the son of the notorious outlaw, Tom Starr, and Clem Rogers, the father of Will Rogers, went to school at Cane Hill.

Robert Fletcher Wily, later judge of Delaware district and editor of the *Cherokee Advocate* from 1889 to 1891, obtained part of his education at the Cherokee National Male Seminary and part of it at Cane Hill College. The late Ed Hicks of Tahlequah came very near attending college at Cane Hill. In the early eighties his guardian decided that Ed must go to college, hence he loaded him and his trunk full of clothing in a buckboard and drove over to Cane Hill, only to find that the college had just been discontinued. The late Dr. Jesse Bushyhead of Claremore, son of Cherokee Chief Dennis W. Bushyhead, selected his wife from Cane Hill. She was Miss Faith Reynolds, sister of the late Mrs. J. B. Crow of Tahlequah.

In this interchange of students not as many went from Cane Hill to Tahlequah as went from Tahlequah to Cane Hill because the Cherokee male and female seminaries at Tahlequah, being purely national schools, were supported by the Cherokee Nation and were supposed to provide free education only to Cherokees. Cane Hill

<sup>9</sup>John Drew was a halfbreed Cherokee, born in 1850. He held the offices of District Attorney, Clerk of the Cherokee Senate, Attorney General, and in 1894, was a member of the Cherokee Supreme Court. In 1890 he was editor of the *Indian Arrow* at Tahlequah. Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints*, p. 85.

College was a denominational school and it was to its advantage to have as many outside students as possible.

The Cane Hill country was a hotly contested region during the War between the States. The people were divided in sentiment, besides, the region was well supplied with such provisions as armies needed. The "Pin Indians", a group of fullblood Cherokee guerillas on the Union side roamed over this section pillaging, plundering, and killing, leaving terror and devastation in their wake. Mrs. Ellen Richardson of Cane Hill told me of the Pins coming to the home of her grandfather's brother and demanding apples. After their demands had been satisfied they shot him in the back and left him dead in the yard. The "Red Legs" of Kansas and Quantrill's band also raided this country.

Lieutenant J. M. Lynch of the Second Cherokee Regiment, in a letter to his sister, Caroline Lynch Bell, in 1864, after telling of Watie and Bell's defeat by some negro troops north of the Arkansas, said: "I was lucky enough not to be in that fight. Our company . . . was on our way from Cane Hill, Arkansas. We stayed about a month in Cane Hill had a fine time had more good apples than I ever saw. The people in Cane Hill are the strongest southern people I ever saw with exception of a few families who are union."<sup>24</sup>

Several of the Cane Hill faculty and most of the students took up arms for the Confederate cause. President F. R. Earle was made a major and Pleasant Buchanan, Professor of Mathematics, became captain. He was engaged to be married to Miss A. Florence Wilson and one of her brothers was in his command, but Captain Buchanan lost his life in an engagement near Cane Hill. James Mitchell was another teacher who served as captain in the Confederate army.

During the Civil War the schools at both Tahlequah and Cane Hill were closed and the buildings for men were used as hospitals. The Male Seminary at Tahlequah depreciated considerably during the war but was not destroyed. The main college buildings at Cane Hill were burned by the Union troops. Immediately after the war closed the citizens of Cane Hill set about, almost frantically, to rebuild their college. The frame building was finished on a Saturday in 1868 and school was opened the following Monday morning. They had no books and they had no equipment but they had "Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and the student on the other." Hence, school proceeded. The Cherokees did not get around to restoring their buildings until 1872. They then made suitable additions to both the male and female seminaries, of similar design, and reopened them. These two institutions, then, continued to function regularly until statehood. The original Cherokee Female Seminary at Park Hill was destroyed by fire in 1887 but it was immediately rebuilt

<sup>24</sup>E. E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*. (Norman, 1939), p. 164.



at Tahlequah, and is still in use today as part of the Northeastern State College.

The curricula of these two institutions, at Cane Hill and at Tahlequah, were considerably alike and they were of about the same standard of scholarship. They naturally would be since they served similiar communities and since so many of the teachers taught in both schools, and since both schools, to a large extent, looked to the same eastern colleges, such as Princeton, Dartmouth, Yale and Mount Holyoke, for their teachers and their curricula.

These two groups of educational institutions established somewhat similar sets of rules and regulations for the government of their respective student bodies. Social conditions and mental ideals in the two communities were sufficiently similiar to make this a natural circumstance. This was a day when educational leaders were serious minded and saw little place in colleges and universities for laziness, levity, or frivolity. Hard work was the order of the day. Recreation was to be obtained, not through frivolous pursuits, but through cultural activities provided and supervised by the college. Society seemed to expect the school to direct students in a course of rigid morality as well as in intellectual pursuits.

Some of these college regulations of a hundred years ago may seem peculiar to this modern generation. All association between the sexes was strictly forbidden except on stated occasions and by special permission of the faculty. Drinking was forbidden. No smoking was allowed about the college. Students were forbidden to loiter about the village. All students must be courteous and respectful at their boarding places. The carrying of concealed weapons was strictly prohibited. The students were supposed to confine their attentions solely to the primary purpose for which they were there, that is, to learn; and everything that tended to detract from this purpose was strictly banned. Today there are some students who like to go to college but are not interested in getting an education. Back at the time these two pioneer institutions were in their prime that attitude was inconceivable.

The inevitable increase in population, progress, and the natural social evolution of these two regions finally forced both of these schools out of existance. Cane Hill went first but Tahlequah followed soon after. The Presbyterians built a new school at Clarksville, and while they did not immediately withdraw their support from Cane Hill College, at least their interests became more or less divided. The University of Arkansas, one of the early land-grant state universities, was established at Fayetteville in 1871. This new state-supported institution of learning, located only a few miles from Cane Hill, naturally entered into competition with this older denominational school. With the advent of tax supported schools of higher learning the privately supported ones necessarily

operated at a financial disadvantage. Hence, the new brick college at Cane Hill, finished in 1886, was converted into a free public school and the famous old college that had trained so many of the early citizens of western Arkansas and eastern Indian Territory ceased to exist.

The dissolution of Cherokee tribal government and the coming of Oklahoma statehood, in 1907, with its establishment of a complete system of common schools and colleges, crowded out the two Cherokee seminaries that had served this Indian people so well for over a half century. The Cherokee Female Seminary was purchased from the Cherokee Nation by the new state and was made into the Northeastern State Normal School, starting in 1909. The same old building, with some internal rearrangements and repairs, still serves as the Administration Building of Northeastern State College. The Cherokee schools were both combined into one as a co-educational school, for a few years, at the Male Seminary. But, in 1910, this building was burned and the Cherokee people made no further effort to continue their tribal schools. They simply accepted and fell in line with the new state system.

The love the Cherokees had for these two tribal schools is still exemplified, however, by the annual homecoming of the former students and their friends and relatives for the observance of their founding day celebrated May 7, on the campus of Northeastern State College. Here they spend a day of handshaking and reminiscing together as they gather around the festal board and recount the glories of former days. Many of the older women still visit Northeastern, go through the building, and walk around the outside pointing to a certain window on the third floor where they "roomed" in their girlhood days. They still refer to some humorous incident in connection with Miss A. Florence Wilson or to some wonderful lesson they learned from her.

Though superseded by the inevitable onrush of modern development, these two pioneer, related institutions, the one at Tahlequah and the other at Cane Hill, served an excellent purpose in their day and, from the standpoint of influence and effect on the social life of these two great sections of the two states, they are not yet dead.

In both cases these early schools constituted the chief economic, as well as cultural, basis for the two towns. In the case of Tahlequah the old schools were replaced by the state college which has constantly grown larger and better. And the town has kept well abreast of the college in its growth. In the case of Cane Hill the new institutions that supplanted the old were located at other places, thus leaving Cane Hill "sitting high and dry" without economic or cultural support. Today the absence of these institutions is reflected in the appearance of the little village as much as was their presence in earlier days.