

SCHOOL DAYS AT EMAHAKA ACADEMY

By Robert E. Treveshan*

It was rather unusual, during Oklahoma Territorial days, for a white boy to attend an Indian missionary school. It was even more unusual for a white boy to attend an Indian missionary school for girls. But Mr. Byron S. Blake¹ of Enid is one of a handful of oldtimers left who can make this "boast" for during the years 1894 through 1907 he attended classes at Emahaka Academy, the Seminole Indian girls' school which was located five miles south of Wewoka on the border of the Seminole Nation. Mr. Blake, now in his seventy-second year, has many fond memories of these early days, and like most individuals whose life has spanned the gap between frontier and modern times he likes to share his experiences of years ago with others.

The Blakes lived first in a log house then in a frame house just outside the high iron fence that surrounded the school grounds, the family consisting of the parents, U. S. Grant Blake and his wife Lola, two little girls, Byron, the oldest child, and another boy who was born while the family occupied the frame house. Mr. Blake's father was assistant engineer at the academy, and it was due to this circumstance that young Byron attended classes.

The academy building itself, the picture of which appeared on official school stationery, was a very impressive stone and

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¹ Byron S. Blake was born April 25, 1898 at La Fontaine, Kansas. After the Cherokee Strip was opened to settlement, he lived for a short while near a small post-office centered community named Jetmore, about a mile south of present day Hilldale in Garfield County. When his school days at Emahaka were over he removed to Herington, Kansas. He served in Company E, of 1st Infantry, Ft. Riley, Kansas, from 1908 until 1912. The following year he married Macy G. Wofford of Burton, Kansas. The couple have five daughters, all of whom are members of the Ruth Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, in Enid. The daughters are Lola McClain, Klotz Northrup, Ruth Weber, Marjorie Treveshan and Joan Lee Watts. Mr. Blake became a Mason in 1928, and is Past Patron, Ruth Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star; he is also Past Watchman of the Shepherds, Order of the White Shrine of Jerusalem. Mrs. Blake became a member of the Eastern Star in 1927, and was Worthy Matron in 1944. In November, 1957, Mr. Blake retired from carrying mail on Rural Route No. 5 out of Enid. At the time of his retirement he had worked for the post office department for almost forty years, and he had driven more than a million miles on his route, mostly on unpaved country roads.

brick structure four stories high in its central part, with spacious porches on the two triple-storied wings that were accentuated by turrets on the southeast and northeast corners. It was built by the Seminole Nation in 1892-1893, costing over \$50,000, an exact replica of Mekukey Academy, located four miles southwest of Seminole, which opened for school purposes in 1891, for Seminole boys. Full capacity of the boarding department at Emahaka was 112 students. The primary class room, Mr. Blake well remembers, was on the second or main floor, as was the superintendent's office and living quarters. Also on the main floor were the intermediate and music class rooms, the latter which contained a number of pianos, and the general assembly room, which was also used for the older students' class room. The kitchen was in the basement, as well as the laundry and the dining room, which was furnished with long wooden tables, chairs and benches and a piano. The infirmary was on the third floor, and the teachers and students roomed on the third and fourth floors, each of these floors having identical lavatory and bath arrangements in the central part of the building, west side. Very modern for its time, the building had hot and cold running water on each floor, with steam heat as well as fireplaces supplying warmth for the rooms. The engine and boiler house were located on the west side of the building, which faced east; and a huge wooden water tank bound with metal bands was in the upper part of the southeast turret.

Superintendent at the school from the time its doors opened in 1894 until the end of the school term in 1906, was William Paeker Blake,² Byron Blake's uncle. The Reverend Blake's missionary work among the Seminoles had begun in 1887, when his services were secured by John Jumper, former principal Chief of the Seminoles and well known Baptist preacher, but an adequate discussion of his wonderful and influential work among the Seminoles would require a separate article. A daughter, Mrs. Clarence Hixson, now living in Shawnee, was very helpful in recalling many details of the Emahaka building. And her memories of her father and of her early school days at Emahaka are indeed cherished.

Byron's teacher at Emahaka was a Miss Zanna Prickett, who was in charge of the primary department. Attending classes with Byron was another boy, the son of one of the two women on the cooking staff. The two boys naturally became close playmates, surrounded as they were by upwards of 100 Seminole girls who boarded at the academy. The boys got more than a fair share of teasing, too, but somehow they managed to weather this in stride. But at times the girls made it a little uncomfortable

² A biographical sketch of the Reverend Wm. P. Blake is given in the *Appendix* at the end of this article, including a letter written by him at the age eighty years from Hyattsville, Maryland, to Dr. Great Foreman.



MIL. AND MRS. T. S. GRANT BLAKE
And their children, the son Byron standing at center

for him, Byron remembers. "I still have calluses on the backs of my heels where some of the girls used to step on 'em when we marched into the dining room in the basement," he says jokingly.

One of the things he remembers about his teacher Miss Prickett was that she gave him a barlow knife for Christmas, a knife that he carried for years afterward. That Miss Prickett was highly regarded and loved is attested to in a letter Byron's mother wrote in early December, 1895, to her own mother, who lived on a claim in northern Garfield County. Miss Prickett had suffered an attack of pleurisy, and Mrs. Blake said in her letter: "I went up to see her awhile. . . she was so glad to see me. She is just as sweet as she can be."

This letter, written on both sides of a sheet of Emahaka Mission letterhead stationary, has a Bible message (Proverbs IV, 7-9) along the left-hand margin, and it also gives candid insight into family and school life at Emahaka. The letter was begun on a Sunday evening and said, in part:

Byron and Blanche [Byron's younger sister] went to Sunday School this morning. I made Blanche's little blue and white cashmere dress over and she wore it to Sunday School this morning. How sweet the little things did look after I got them dressed and how thankful I am that they can go to Sunday School together. Little Boob (Beryl, the youngest of the Blake children at this time) cried because she could not go with them but she had to have a handkerchief with some fums on it just the same so I put a clean dress on her doll and she wrapped her doll up in it and was all right then. Grant ate dinner with us today but he just stayed one hour and it seemed unloosoms I went over and stayed in the engine house with Grant a while. . . Byron has taken the water bucket over to his Pappa, and is back and now getting feed for the cow. . . Monday morning. Will try this morning to finish my letter. We are all well. We just finished breakfast and it is 8:15, nearly time for the first school bell to ring. It looks as if we are going to have a nice day but it is freezing.

It was a coincidence that this letter made mention of the "water bucket" and the Blakes' cow, for there were incidents concerning each that Byron vividly recalls. The cow had been bitten by a rattlesnake and had to be shot. Byron remembers that his father led the cow about a mile beyond a pond west of the academy where the suffering animal was put out of her misery with a Winchester rifle bullet. Concerning the water bucket, one of young Byron's chores was to haul water to their house from one of the cisterns near the academy building, using a five gallon can which he let ride on his "hand" wagon. One day when he was hauling some water to the house, just after he passed through the gate in the iron fence, "several Indian boys came up on horses, yelling and shooting off sixguns, showing off for the girls at the school." That was one time when Byron, who was then about eight years old, was thankful for the hollow

postoak tree that stood near the fence. "I forgot all about my bucket of water and ducked into the hollow side of that tree," he recalls. Then when the excitement was over, it was a scared boy who peered around the old dead tree and saw a stream of water spouting from a bullet hole in the side of the five gallon can. But, aside from a few uneasy moments, the water "bucket" was the only casualty, and it was soon replaced.

The only other time that Mr. Blake was frightened by Indians happened on his trip to Elnuhaka from his grandfather's claim near Jetmore, which used to be about a mile south of present Hillsdale. His father had preceded the rest of the family, and it was necessary that Mrs. Blake follow with the children. From Jetmore to Perry the trip was made by wagon (a vehicle used in the Cherokee Strip opening), with Byron's uncle doing the driving. Byron recalls:

Before we started on the trip, Grandpa had told me a lot of tales about Indians. . . . At this time I had never seen an Indian, and what Grandpa had told me made me dread meeting one. Later I learned he had been talking about the wild Plains tribes that had caused so much concern some years before, but I didn't know this when we struck out for Elnuhaka. To me an Indian was an Indian, a red-skinned warrior who would just as soon lift your scalp as not."

So it was with grave foreboding that young Byron boarded the Santa Fe train at Perry, heading for "Indian country." There were momentary diversions when the train passed through Guthrie and Oklahoma City, but he continued to worry about what he should do to save his scalp once Indians were encountered. When the train arrived at Purcell a norther was making up, Byron remembers. And after their luggage was taken inside the Santa Fe depot, his mother sent him to a store on a hill about a quarter of a mile away to get a half gallon can of milk. Buttoning up his coat against the chill in the biting air, Byron started to the store, fearful of meeting an Indian but knowing he had to fetch the milk for his baby sisters. Miraculously, it seemed, he made the trip without seeing a single Indian. By the time he got back, he was shivering in the piercing wind that was howling in from the north, his hand stiff and cold in its grip on the bail of the milk can. He could hardly wait until he got back inside the depot where he could thaw out in front of the big pot-bellied stove. Opening the door, he quickly rushed inside the building, the icy wind at his back. And it was at this moment that he became aware of a half dozen or more dark-skinned, blackhaired men who were hunkering around the stove, their hands held out to absorb the heat from the fire. Indians! Feeling the draft from the open door, the Indians looked around at young Byron. He froze in his shoes, unable to move a muscle. Then before he knew what was happening the biggest Indian in the crowd came over to him, shut the door, and picked up the

stunned boy and stood him on a table near the stove. "The Indian pried my fingers from the bail of the milk can and took both by freezing hands and began rubbing them in his long hair, making huffing noises like a buffalo." The Indian was rubbing his hands in this manner to warm them, Byron later learned. But at the moment he only knew that a very big Indian had hold of him, and did not seem to want to let go. "That Indian's face was right up against mine," Mr. Blake recalls with humor. "His face seemed to be a yard wide, and I knew my luck had run out. Something inside me just melted right down and turned to water. . . . I'll never forget it as long as I live."

At Emahaka Byron Blake became close friends with a number of Seminoles, relatives and parents of the boarding students. He remembers that sometimes they brought in wild strawberries and gave them to the school, receiving a loaf of bread from one of the cooks in exchange. And at Christmas the Indians brought in lots of pecans, filling a huge wooden box in the storeroom of the basement next to the kitchen. "That box was so big I could barely see over it standing on tip-toe," Byron said. "And when the box was empty I could lie down inside and stretch out without my hands or feet touching either end." Once one of the Seminole town chiefs made him a present of a bois d'arc bow and a half dozen blunt-tipped second-growth dogwood arrows for his birthday. Byron took the bow and arrows to Saw Pit, Colorado, when the family visited there in 1896, and he remembers lending them to some cowboys who wanted to "shoot at one another."

Ewing Saddler, the farm boss at Emahaka, met Mrs. Blake and her children at Purcell and took them the rest of the way in a wagon drawn by a team of oxen, making the trip in three days, fording Little River above Sasakawa. Mr. Saddler was a big, raw-boned man who wore a full mustache and a wide-brimmed hat, Byron remembers, and once a week it was the farm boss's job to butcher a beef and several hogs. The smoke house was built over the cyclone cellar west of the Academy and north of the huge woodpile near the engine-boiler house, and here a good supply of pork was kept on hand. Mr. Saddler had a tobacco patch near the log house where he and his mother lived with the Blakes, and the seeds for the bermuda grass that still grows on the east slope of the old academy grounds was planted by him, Mr. Blake attests. Another pleasant memory associated with Emahaka was the evenings spent around the fireplace in the log house, when the children popped corn and "Grandma" Saddler smoked her clay pipe, picking up live coals from the fire hearth with her fingers to keep her pipe lighted.

Mr. Blake also remembers the interesting process by which the farm boss cured his own tobacco. He would take a length of

hickory sapling, about two feet long and five or six inches in diameter, and drill a three-inch hole through the center with an auger. Then a plug was put in one end of the hole, and half a dried peach prepared by "Grandma" Saddler was tamped down tightly inside the hole against the plug. Next, stemmed tobacco leaves which had gone through the "sweat" process were tamped into the hole with a stob and a mallet, until a layer about half an inch thick was attained. Another half of dried peach was added, then a second layer of tamped tobacco. This process was repeated until the length of hickory was filled, then another plug was wedged into the open end of the hole against the tobacco. Green hickory was used, too, so the juices could work on the tobacco, supplementing the peach flavor. When the farm boss had thus prepared several caches of "plug" tobacco, he would toss them into the hay in the shed loft behind the log house, and here the tobacco would season, ready for use some months later.

Other memories Mr. Blake has of Emahaka school days include the occasion he was carried out into deep water in the pond southeast of the academy building and was obliged to learn to swim; the winter that ice was cut from the pond and stored in kegs in a makeshift icehouse for use the following summer; the barrel of apples with the crook of applesauce in the middle that the superintendent received from Maryland each Christmas; the time he saw a huge pile of walnut poles at Wewoka which were cut for the government to be used for gunstocks; and the incident of a male teacher who, about to punish a big Indian girl for some infraction of the rules, got pushed into a handy laundry basket and "accidentally" got tumbled down a flight of stairs, fortunately getting no broken bones in the process.

Yes, Byron S. Blake has many fond memories associated with school days at Emahaka Academy. And even though his early school experiences were definitely unusual, aside from the regular sessions of spelling, reading, arithmetic and "Barnes' language lessons," there is not a day of it which he regrets having experienced.

APPENDIX

William Packer Blake was born in Martinsburg, Pa., November 14, 1857. He was the son of James Blake, Sr., who, having lived in Martinsburg since 1820, was declared "the oldest male resident of Martinsburg" in his obituary story that appeared in *The Martinsburg Weekly Herald*, issue of July 9, 1896. After attending the public schools of Martinsburg, W. P. Blake learned the printer's trade, which he followed for three years at Singer's Glen, Va. He was a member of the Baptist church, and he began preaching at Singer's Glen prior to a

two-year course of study he pursued in the Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Ky. In 1880 he became pastor of a church in Weldon, N. C., and remained there until 1883, when he succeeded Dr. H. F. Buckner in general missionary work among the Creek and Seminole Indians. He resided at Eufaula during this early missionary work, and helped to edit a denominational organ entitled *Indian Missionary*. (Ref., *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 29, p. 488.) In the fall of 1884 he went to Herington, Kansas, where he organized a Baptist church and was its pastor for two years. He returned to Indian Territory in 1887 as missionary to the Seminoles, at the request of the Rev. John Jumper, former Principal Chief, and was made superintendent of the Seminole Academy for girls at Sankwa. Usually there were about thirty boarding pupils at the Sankwa school, and he remained here until removing to Emabaka Academy, where he was both superintendent and postmaster until 1906, at the close of that year's school term. (Seminole Indian education and the control of tribal revenues passed to the Department of Interior with the passage of the Five Tribes Act in 1906.) Afterward, he was a general missionary for a short time, then superintendent of an orphan home at Uchebuka, Choctaw Nation. Later, for a two-year period, he was at Okmulgee, at the Creek Indian Orphan's Home. His relationship with the Seminoles brought him into close fellowship with the whole Nation, and the effects of his nineteen years work among the full-bloods, mixed-bloods and the Negroes among them is felt to this day.³

The following letter was written 3/3/37 by W. F. Blake, addressed to Grant Foreman, Oklahoma Historian. It is found in the "Indian-Pioneer Papers" (Foreman Collection), Vol. 77, pp. 213-216, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society.

Hyattsville, Md., 3/3/37

Dear Mr. Foreman:

Now in my 80th year, I am not so sure I can recall much of interest of my work with the Seminoles, tho' I think I am wide awake enough to the present condition, to retain my seat on the Supreme Court, if I happen to be there, and I am sorry about the attack.

My relation with the Seminoles were of such a nature as to bring me into intimate fellowship the whole Nation, both of the full-bloods, mixed bloods and the negroes among them.

Casper Rowles, well-known in the Nation once said, when shaking hands with me, "Why, Mistah Blake, you're de Fadda of all the Seminole children—" This grew out of the fact that I was Superintendent of one of their schools for about 19 years. Some of the girls who were there in our first years, later sent their children.

Rev. John Jumper, was Principal Chief when I was called to the school, and through him, the America Baptist Home Mission Society of New York, commissioned me as Missionary to the Seminole Government on November 14, 1887, 30th anniversary of my birthday—That suggests the sort of man — Bro Jumper was over six feet tall, large body, and very dark for an Indian. He was a Baptist preacher, and greatly beloved as their Chief. He had a close friend, Rev. James Factor, who in their early life in the South, before their removal to

³See the Indian-Pioneer Papers (Foreman Collection), Vol. 77, pp. 213-217, for a more detailed account of William Packer Blake's work among the Seminoles. Also see D. C. Glenn, *Indian Territory Descriptive Biographical and Genealogical* (New York and Chicago, 1910), pp. 667, 668.

Indian Territory, had been whipped publicly for profane Christianity. That was, I think before Bro. Jumper was Chief. Both these men were Christians, tho' some time troubled by drink, which was common in those days.

May I say here, in my contact with the Seminoles, I found, drinking intoxicating liquor, did much harm to them. It was hard for them to resist an invitation to drink, and Christian character suffered much.

I thought then, and am sure now that their early drinking of coffee as children created an appetite for whiskey etc. Drink is a curse.

Rev. Hulputa, who succeeded Jumper as Principal Chief, was much interested in his people, a loyal friend of the schools and carried on much the same as Bro. Jumper. During Hulputa's incumbency they thought seriously of a removal into Mexico, and Hulputa in company with others went down into Mexico to view the country. He could talk a very little English, so that an interpreter, Mrs. Alice B. Davis, a half-breed, accompanied the party as interpreter. However, nothing came of this trip.

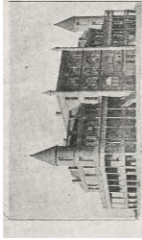
This Mrs. Alice B. Davis, was a sister of John F. Brown, who succeeded Hulputa as P. Chief of the Nation. Mr. Brown was in merchandise business at Sasakwa when I first met him, and I had called on him to get the keys of the academy building. He was, I think the real leader of the interests of the Nation, even while Jumper and Hulputa were in the Chieftancy. His Bro. Jackson who was treasurer of the Nation was in business at Wosoka, merchandise. This Brown family, John F., Andrew Jackson, and Mrs. Alice Brown-Davis, were undoubtedly the real leaders, and did much to advance their people.

They were highly favored by birth, their father having been a U. S. Surgeon Physician, a Scotchman, in the U. S. Army, located at or near Ft. Gibson in the early days-- He was a linguist and master of several languages, (as I was told). Any way John F. Brown and Mrs. Davis and Jackson received considerable education, which added to inherited talent fitted them for leadership.

In the affairs of the Seminole Nation with the U. S. Government-- in arranging the Educational part of it, two large brick buildings, and necessary other buildings for schooling purposes were erected and as I understood it, a sufficient sum of money was set apart to maintain the schools. These were boarding schools to accommodate 112 pupils. We tried them one year as co-educational, and then decided it would be better to make one a Boys' school and one a Girls' school. I should say it was first a Girls' School -- capacity about 30 -- when the new buildings were ready we tried the co-ed plan.

As I then understood, it was my impression, the Educational question was practically settled for years to come. Provision had also been made for attendance of some of the children at Public Day schools-- So far as the Seminole support of the schools was concerned, and the money allotted each of the Boarding Schools was believed sufficient for all expenses.

At first the A. B. H. M. Society was associated in the support of the school. About 1834 the Society withdrew, with the full consent of the Seminoles, who gladly took over the support of myself and other helpers, and we were under the management of the Supt. of Education of the Seminole Nation. I was given a free hand, so to speak, and carried on just as I had when in cooperation with the ABHM Society.



U.S. of B. B. N.

STEMINOLE INDIAN SCHOOLS.

EMA HAKA MISSION.

REV. W. P. BLAKE, Supt.

Miss SARIE PROBERT, Principal Teacher,
Miss JESSIE SPOFFORD, Intermediate Teacher,
Miss ZACKA PRICKETT, Primary Teacher,
Miss C. M. HILLIARD, Instrumental and Vocal Music,
Miss M. A. HAYWARD, Principal Singer,
Miss FRANCIS TUCKERSON, Industrial Mission,
Miss L. A. BROWN, Missionary and Industrial Teacher.

Cowhatch, Ind. Terr., Sept. 20th 1906.

EMA HAKA MISSION, STEMINOLE NATION

Letterhead, 1906, showing names of the Superintendent and members of the staff.

Later we came under the management of the Indian Agency at Muskogee, which also gave me a free hand, and we carried on just the same — Having begun in 1857 as a mission school, and being retained in charge as the changes in management came on, we carried on as a Mission School, to May 1900.

During these years the Brown family were leaders — At my suggestion Mrs. Alice Brown Davis succeeded me as Superintendent of the school.

As I recall H. Thomas McGilsey, a full blood, was Supt. of Education when I began my work. I think he was followed by Rev. Dorsey Pife, who was a frequent visitor to the school, and a good influence among the people. Later Staunton (?) Brown was chosen Superintendent. Wm Factor was on the School Board. The Brown Brothers, John F. and A. J. had associated with them in business Mr C. C. Long in the name of the Wewoka Trading Co. His opinion as he expressed it to me, of John F. Brown, was "he is the soul of honor." My business relations with the Browns were always pleasant, and they trusted me with the respect, that made me appreciate them among my dearest friends. None of them perfect. Neither was I, but in our work together we welded a friendship that holds, and it would be a joy today, to meet any one of them — It is a hope of mine that some, at least, of their children will hold up the high standards of those who have gone on.

Now, you may have to write me again, if you wish to know more.

Respectfully,
W. P. Blake