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Winter 2016
Vol. 23, No. 2
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In the years following the end of World War II, Thomas Gilcrease and Vinson Lackey embarked on an unusual creative collaboration. Working from site visits, interviews, old plans and documents, and the rare photograph, Lackey documented in paint more than a hundred missions, schools, tribal agencies, forts, and other structures important during the days of Indian Territory. Many of these no longer exist, but the stories they tell about the state's unique history are preserved at Gilcrease Museum in Lackey's images.





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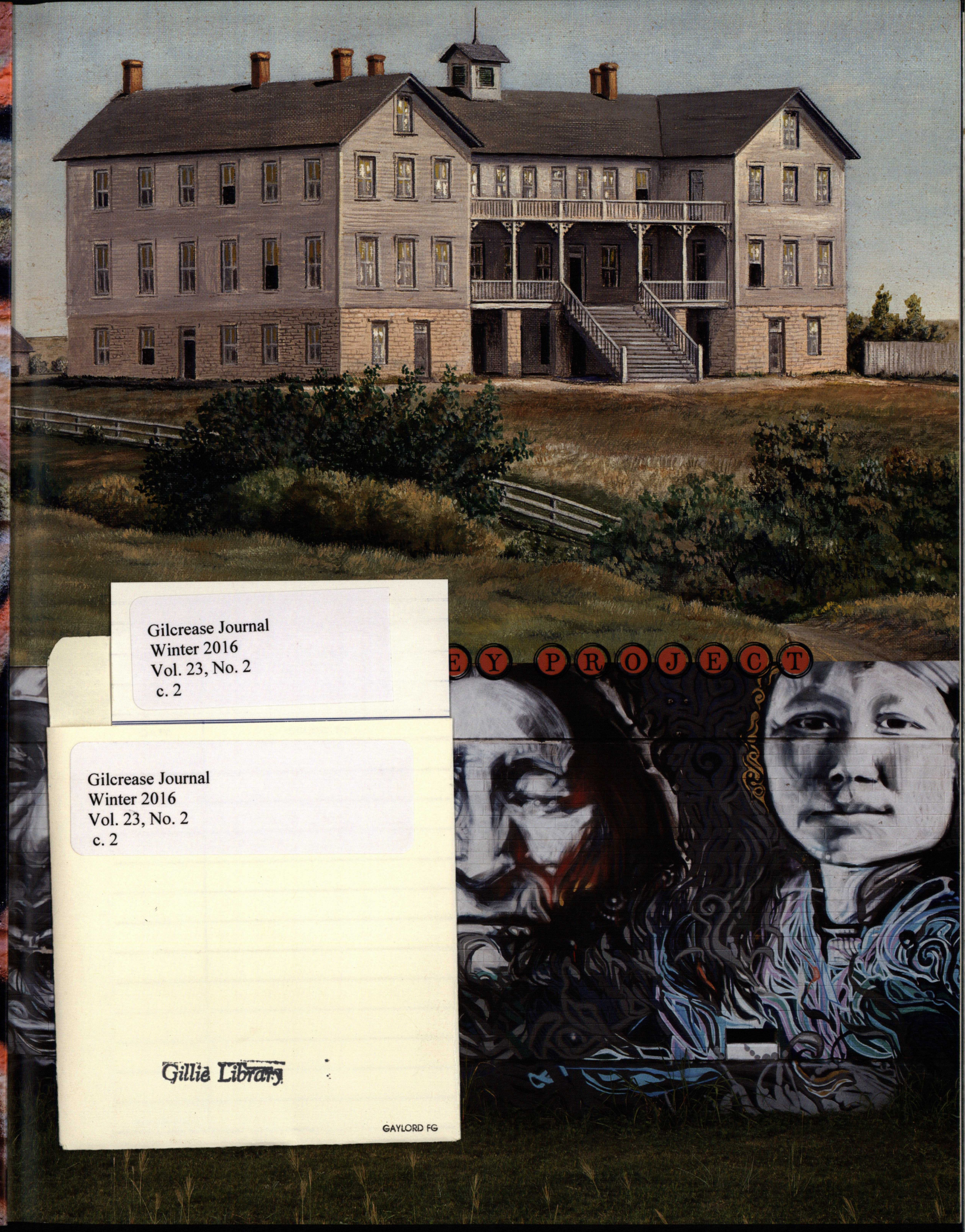

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Thanks to Gillies Helen Tate, Bill Hellen, and Cordi Mansfield for help with research.

THOMAS GILCREASE INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART
1400 North Gilcrease Museum Road, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74127-2100 918.596.2700 | gilcrease.org. Published biannually. ©The University of Tulsa. All rights reserved. Printed in Korea.

Front cover: Choctaw Council House at Tuskahoma, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, courtesy of OHS, 20615.11; *Choctaw Council House,* Vincent Lackey. GM 0127.1454. **Front flap:** Comanche School. Photo by Robert Stevens Cross. **Above and facing:** First Quapaw Agency, GM 4326.10034; *First Quapaw Agency,* detail, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1350. **Back cover, top and bottom:** Second Bloomfield Academy Building with Students and Faculty, c. 1890–92, T. W. Hunter Collection, courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, #1316; *Bloomfield Seminary,* near Achille, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1442. **Back flap, top and bottom:** Ponca School, Ponca Agency, c. 1910–18, photo by Lambrecht, Ponca City, OK, Ruth Mohler Collection, courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, #15654; *Ponca Boarding School,* White Eagle, Vinson Lackey. GM0127.1432. **Inside cover:** Murals, First Cheyenne School site. Photos by Robert Stevens Cross. **Overleaf:** Map of Indian Territory, Department of War, 1866. GM 3926.660b.

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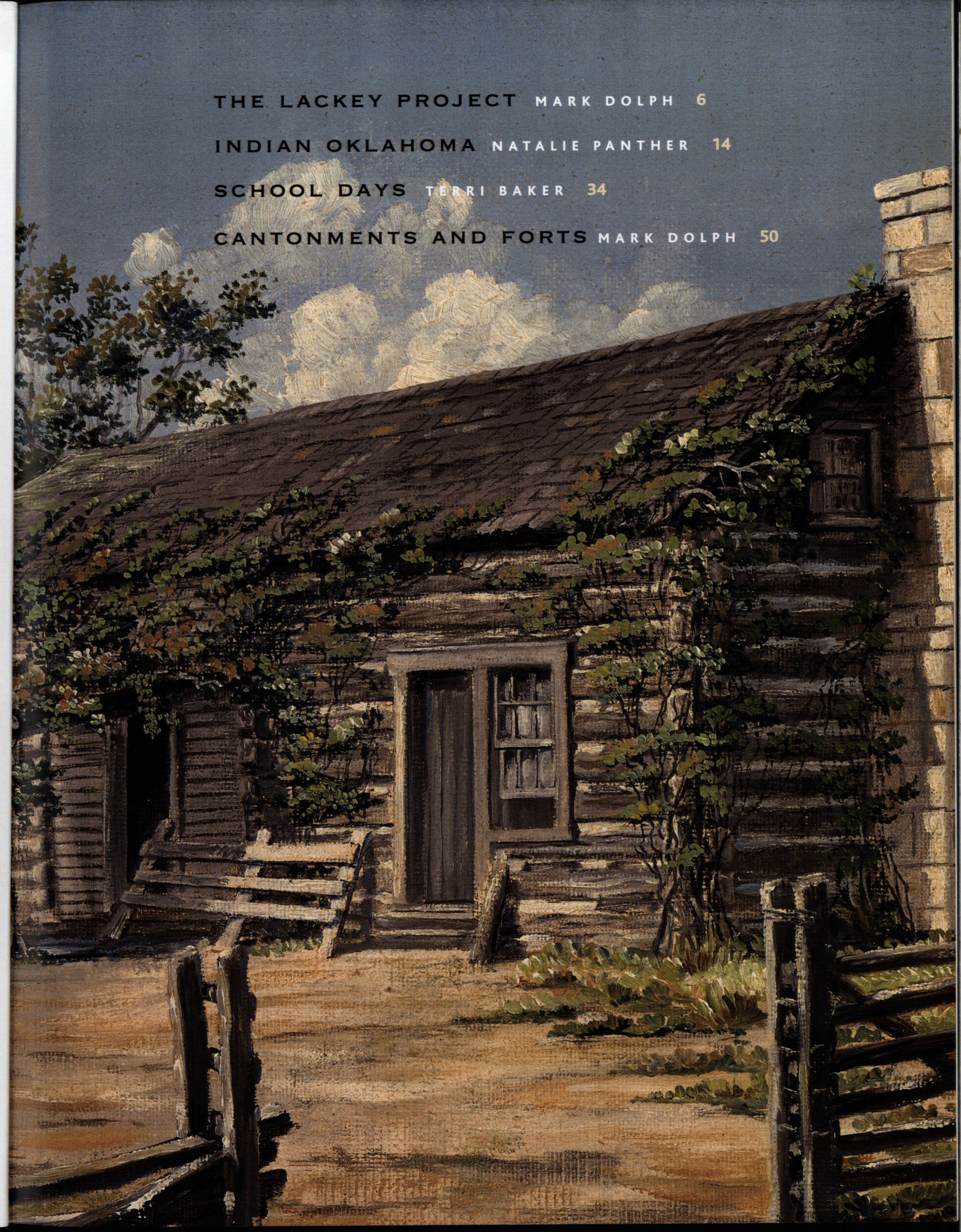

CHEROKEE COUNTRY

Treaty Oct. 28th 1868

Gypsum Region

Ceded to the U.S. by the Seminoles March 21st 1866.

Ceded to the U.S. by the Creeks June 14th 1866.

LEASED INDIAN TERRITORY

Ceded to the U.S. April 28th 1866

Proposed Reservation for Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches Treaty 1867.

CREEK COUNTRY

CHICKASAW NATION

CHOCTAW NATION

STATE

Red River

Canadian River

North Fork of Red River

Main Red River

Little Witchita

Big Witchita

Salt Plain

Little Arkansas

Red Fork

Salt Fork

Sweet Water Cr.

Middle Fork

Comanche Camp

Mulberry Cr.

Boggy Cr.

Gypsum Cr.

Clear Cr.

Rock Run

Otter Cr.

Wichita

Rock Mary

Caddos

Ft. Cobb

Wichita's

Kechies

Comanche's

Seminole Town

Chofans

Old Ft. Arbuckle

Mountains 1867.

Mt. Scott

Camp Radzminski

Observatory

Proposed New Post 1867.

Initial Monument

100°

Antelope Hills

Salt Fork

Red Fork

Tuley

Big Spring Settt

Big Vermilion R.

Little Vermilion R.

Dog C.

Cabin C.

Rutledge

Spavinaw Settt

Spavinaw Cr.

Ft. Wayne

Maysville

Grand River

Bryans Cr.

Selme

Saline C.

Hildebrandt Mills

Fayetteville

Spring C.

New Spring Place

Alberts Store

Sandtown

Thomass Store

Coweta Mission

Conchanty

Polecat C.

Snake C.

Cane C.

Chocky

Tallahoosa Missn

Creek Agency

McIntosh's

Ft. Gibson

Ft. Davis

Warfield's Salt Spring Post

Shields

Osolomoby's or Greenleaf's Store

Council Ground

Honey Spring

Hilarby Square

Elk

Illinois R.

Barren Fk.

Baron Fork

Grouch Cr.

Ross

Mackeys Salt Works

Kedron Mission

Webber's Falls

Van Buren

Ft. Smith

Robertstown

Briartown

North Fork Town

Old Ft. Coffee

Sans Bois Riv.

Scullyville

Cedar Cr.

Holloway Sta.

Riddles

Basil Cr.

Mountain Sta.

Push Metean

Heckobee

Coal Cr.

Shawnee Town

Old Ft. Holmes

Chisholms

Little River Ards

Perryville

Johnsons

Academy Cochrans

Council House

Spring Sta.

Brushy C.

Rocky Cr.

Little Boggy Cr.

Kiamichi River

Big Cr.

Mc Kinneys

Winchester Sta.

Boggy Depot

Coal Spr.

Prairie Pt.

Middle Boggy Cr.

Clear Boggy Cr.

Cross Roads

Seven Devils

Spencer Academy

Bloomsdale

Wheelock

Eagletown

Ultima Thule

Old Ft. Towson

Folsom's Fy.

Doaksville

Rocky Comfort

Colberts Fy.

Jonesboro

Pinehill

Upper Pine

Pine Cr.

Paris

Clarksville

Lancsport

Rock Comf. Acady

Pecan

Bois d'Arc C.

Preston

Sherman

Bonham

Colberts Fy.

J. Camps Fy.

Camps Fy.

Academy

Ft. Washita

Ft. McCollough

Nails Bridge

Armstrongs Academy

Carriage Point

Alexander's Bend

Mud Creek

Walnut Creek

Blue

Sandy C.

Tishomingo

Ft. Arbuckle

Kickapoo Town

Smith Paul Settt

Cherokee Village

Wild Horse Cr.

Signal Mts.

Rush Cr.

Spr.

Proposed New Post Witchita Village

Timbers

Cross

Beaver Cr.

Main Beaver Cr.

West Branch

Main Cashe Cr.

Waggoner's Store

Warren's Store

Gainsville

Route

Delaware Ridge

Washita

Sans Bois Mountains

Kiamichi Mountains

Poteau Mts.

Black Fork Mt.

Rich Mt.

Sugar Loaf Mt.

Black Fork Cr.

Rich Mt.

Poteau R.

Fourche Maline Cr.

Fourche Maline

Lees Creek

Boston Mountains

Rolling Fk.

Buffalo C.

Fin River

Lee's Creek

Mc Pherson Riv.

Illinois R.

Ross

Grouch Cr.

Barren Fk.

Baron Fork

Elk

Illinois

Fine Cr.

Wilson's

Cain

Sallisaw

Sallisaw Cr.

Wapanucka

Wapanucka Cr.

Fish Cr.

Haw Cr.

Brushy C.

Rocky Cr.

Little Boggy Cr.

Kiamichi River

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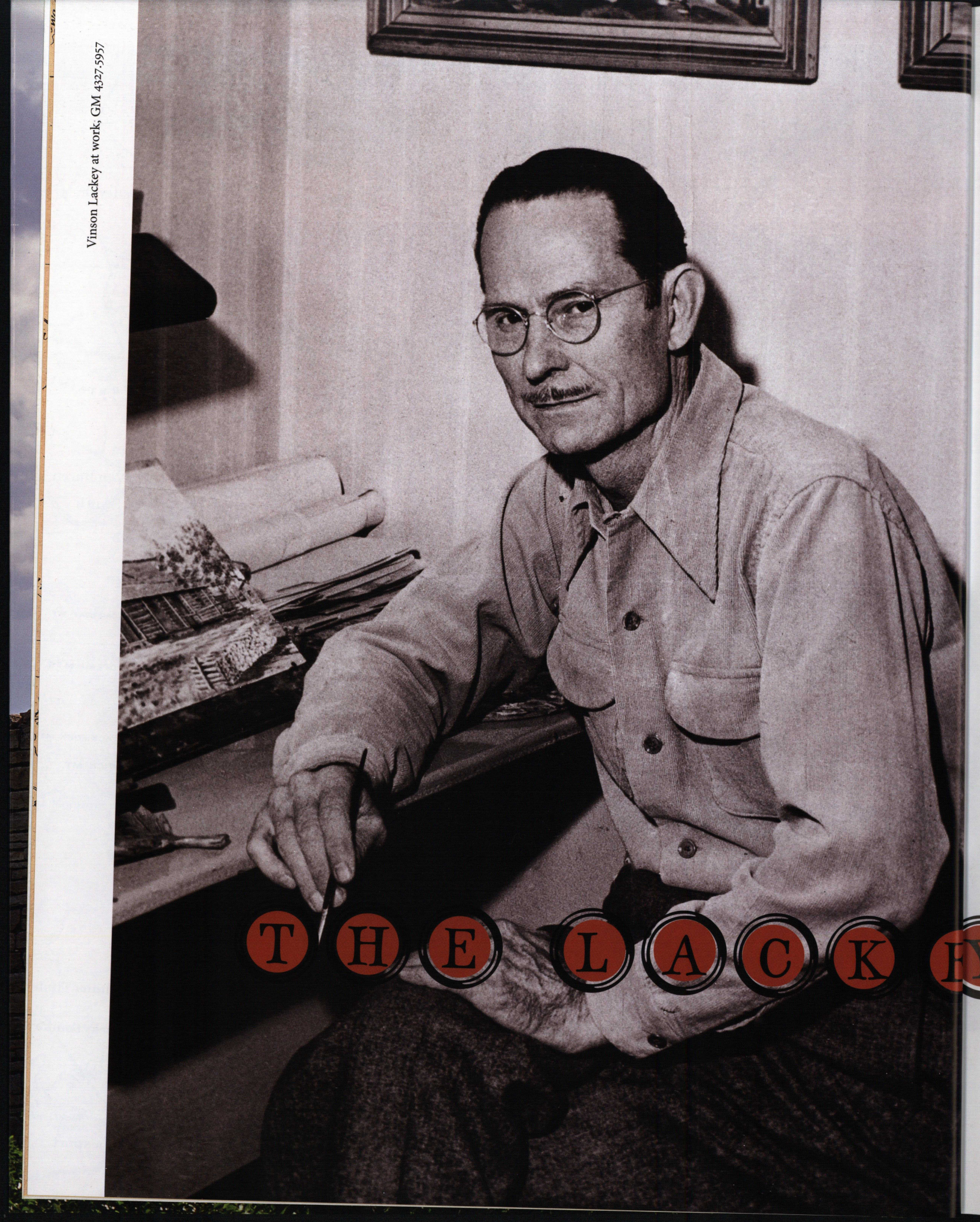


Vinson Lackey at work, GM 4327.5957

THE LACKEY PROJECT

THOMAS GILCREASE AND VINSON LACKEY'S AUDACIOUS PLAN TO RESCUE THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE.

BY MARK DOLPH

ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF HISTORY, GILCREASE MUSEUM

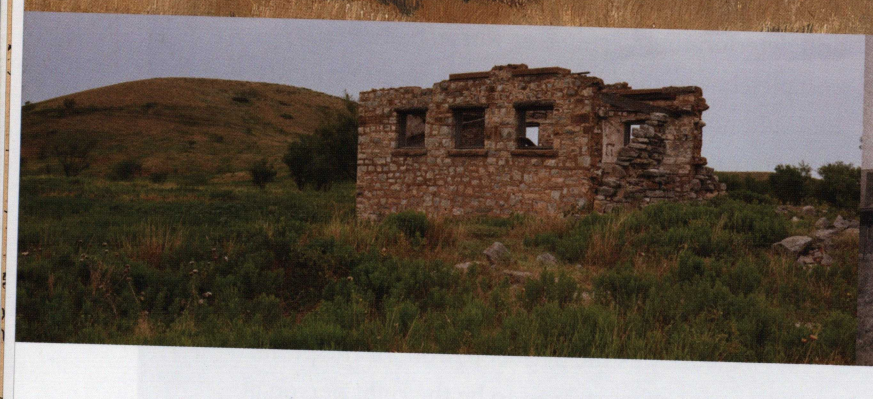
This issue of the *Gilcrease Journal* is a tribute to, and an appreciation of, the foresight of Thomas Gilcrease and the historically important work of historian-artist Vinson Lackey. Gilcrease's vision and Lackey's talents resulted in a creative collaboration that added more than one hundred paintings to the museum's collection between 1945 and 1949. These works documented as art historically important forts, missions, schools, tribal agencies, and other structures dating back to the earliest days of Indian Territory. Acutely aware of the state's unique history, Lackey and his patron clearly understood the importance of recording for posterity places that were "built and operated by Indians, for Indians, or on account of Indians" in the Territory.

In many cases, their exhaustive efforts provide us with our only knowledge of what those nineteenth-century buildings looked like and how they appeared upon the Oklahoma landscape. Without what we now refer to as the Lackey Project, it is likely that many of the structures highlighted in this issue would have long since passed from our collective historical memories. Viewed from this perspective, the Lackey Project preserved what would otherwise have been lost to history.

What vision or instinct would have prompted Thomas Gilcrease to undertake this act of historic preservation and entrust Vinson Lackey with its execution, a project so unique that it remains the only complete series of art ever commissioned by Gilcrease for his museum? Gilcrease collected art, archival material, and the objects of human culture that held within them the many stories of American history. A man of Native heritage, Gilcrease valued the many positive influences early institutions in Indian Territory had contributed to the culture of the future state. He could have looked around Oklahoma in 1945 and seen how many of these once-vital buildings were derelict and deteriorating to ruins, or worse, had already completely vanished from the landscape. Obviously he could not reconstruct the structures that had been lost, nor could he collect those still standing and bring them to his soon-to-open museum for rehabilitation and preservation. But he could, with Vinson Lackey's abilities and assistance, see that they were preserved as part of his collection as art.

If Gilcrease was the perfect patron for the project, then Vinson Lackey proved to be the right person at the right time to make Gilcrease's vision a reality. Born in Paris, Texas, in 1889, Lackey moved with his parents to Hobart, Oklahoma Territory, in 1902. Young Vinson







often accompanied his father, a housing contractor, while making his rounds in a horse-drawn buggy through the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache country and the Choctaw, Creek and Cherokee Nations. It is likely that during these travels Lackey saw many of the buildings he would one day paint for Gilcrease.

After graduating from Muskogee Central High School, Lackey earned degrees in art, history, and journalism from the University of Oklahoma. He also saw service as captain of a field signal battalion during World War I. He was wounded at Soissons, France, for which he was awarded the Purple Heart.

After the war Lackey worked as a writer and reporter for *Oklahoma News* and managed the publicity and conventions departments for the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce. During the Great Depression Lackey added to his extensive knowledge of Oklahoma history as the state supervisor and field editor for the WPA's Federal Writer's Project and as state supervisor of the Oklahoma Historical Records Survey.

He also worked for Douglas Aircraft Company in its east Tulsa facility in the same department as Woody Crumbo, a future Artist-in-Residence at







FACING, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *Rainy Mountain School,* Kiowa Reservation, near Cooperton, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1438. (*All Lackey paintings are oil on board, created between 1945 and 1949.);* Rainy Mountain Indian School. GM 4326.10035; the site today, photograph by Robert Stevens Cross.

Rainy Mountain Indian School. Left to right: Henry Tanedoah, Gauson Ennap, Martin Haunpa, Stephen Poolaw, Frank Tauegoodle, Jasper Simone, Louis Daitibo, Oliver Tanedoah. Mrs. John R. Williams Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #19658.14.

TOP AND LEFT, THIS PAGE: Rainy Mountain, contemporary images by Robert Stevens Cross.





LEFT AND BELOW: *Sac and Fox Agency House,* near Stroud, Vinso Lackey. GM 0127.1373; 2016 photo by Robert Stevens Cross.

The goal of the project was a faithful picture of each subject as it appeared when it was functioning in the capactiy to which it was primarily intended . . . . each picture started with an on-the-spot study of the site, its terrain and background. — **VINSON LACKEY**

Gilcrease Museum. While Lackey was known more for his writing and knowledge of Oklahoma history than his skill as an artist, the totality of his life experiences surely influenced Thomas Gilcrease's decision to commission him to paint the historic institutions of Indian Territory.

Gilcrease instructed Lackey to depict as faithfully as possible the forts, Indian agencies, and government buildings, churches, missions, schools, significant homes, and commercial enterprises as they would have appeared when first constructed to serve the needs of Indian Territory. Lackey described his role in the project in his *Short Histories of the Early Institutions of Indian Territory,* as "attempting to portray, in an authentic and documentary manner, more than a hundred of Oklahoma's pre-statehood institutions which were built and operated by Indians, for Indians, or on account of Indians …" The Lackey collection became one of Thomas Gilcrease's favorites due to the enjoyment he received in collaborating with the artist throughout the project.

With Gilcrease's commission in hand, Lackey traveled throughout the state. At each site he made sketches and took notes on the remains of the structures



ABOVE: Seger Indian School burning, Colony, Oklahoma, October 1971. Historical Society Photograph Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #12600

FACING, TOP AND BOTTOM: Seger's Indian School, Vinson Lackey research collection. GM 4326.10041. *Seger's Cheyenne School,* Seger Colony, near Cordell, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1371.









Dragonfly. Photograph by Robert Stevens Cross, with the permission of the Chickasaw Nation.



TOP AND IMMEDIATELY ABOVE: Chickasaw Orphan and Manual Labor School, c. 1887 (Burney Institute for Girls). Lebanon, Indian Territory, 1879. Mrs. Dettie Goldsby Pickens, music teacher, at right, Juanita Johnston Smith Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #7029; Burney Institute for Girls, founded 1859. Vinson Lackey research collection. GM 4326.10041.



Chickasaw Orphans' Home, near Lebanon, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1406.

and the terrain upon which they were situated. His source material consisted of some early photographs, but most of the oldest buildings, such as the first forts and missions, had never been photographed during the earliest years of their existence. Lackey also obtained and utilized original building plans and specifications, elevations, old architectural drawings, and any descriptive correspondence or records he came across. He searched old publications for records, maps, and photographs, and sought out the collections of individuals, historical societies, libraries, museums, and government agencies. He interviewed early settlers who lived near the structures and Indians "born in the very shadow" of the schools, missions, and churches they once attended. He measured the remains of foundations to determine dimensions and inspected any chimney stacks still standing for additional insights. He also made use of illustrations by artists sent to the area during the later territorial period by publications such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Century Magazine.*

With his meticulous attention to detail and precise draftsmanship, Lackey eventually completed 105 oil paintings for the series. All were painted on canvas board and measured either twelve by ten inches or twenty-five by twenty inches. The uniformity of size and horizontal orientation of the subjects offers today's viewers a catalogue-like experience, an effect that both Gilcrease and Lackey hoped to achieve.

Today, nearly seven decades after their completion, the Lackey Project paintings provide us with an invaluable and irreplaceable record of Indian Territory's earliest built environment. Only a fraction of the buildings documented are still in existence, and fewer still appear as when "functioning in the capacity for which . . . primarily intended." The majority have long since disappeared. But if physically altered beyond recognition, or gone completely, those that were documented as art live on thanks to Thomas Gilcrease, Vinson Lackey, and their Lackey Project.

INDIAN OKLAHOMA

In the 1940s, Thomas Gilcrease hired artist Vinson Lackey to create paintings depicting some of the most significant institutions of Indian Territory. Any discussion of these works of art requires an understanding of the history of early Oklahoma and Indian Territory. When placed within these contexts, Lackey's paintings provide important insights into the American Indian experience in Indian Territory. Most of these structures have been erased from the physical landscape, but they remain firmly rooted in our historical consciousness.

INDIAN NATIONS COME TO OKLAHOMA

The sweeping plains of Oklahoma, known by early nineteenth-century European and Euroamerican visitors as the "great Indian wilderness," provided an "open hunting ground through which passed many native peoples." Tribes who followed migratory herds across the state, such as the Osage, Plains Apache, and Comanche, often competed for control of the interior prairie. With the exception of the Quapaw and Caddo ancestors, the tribes who migrated in and out of Oklahoma neither planted crops nor established permanent settlements.

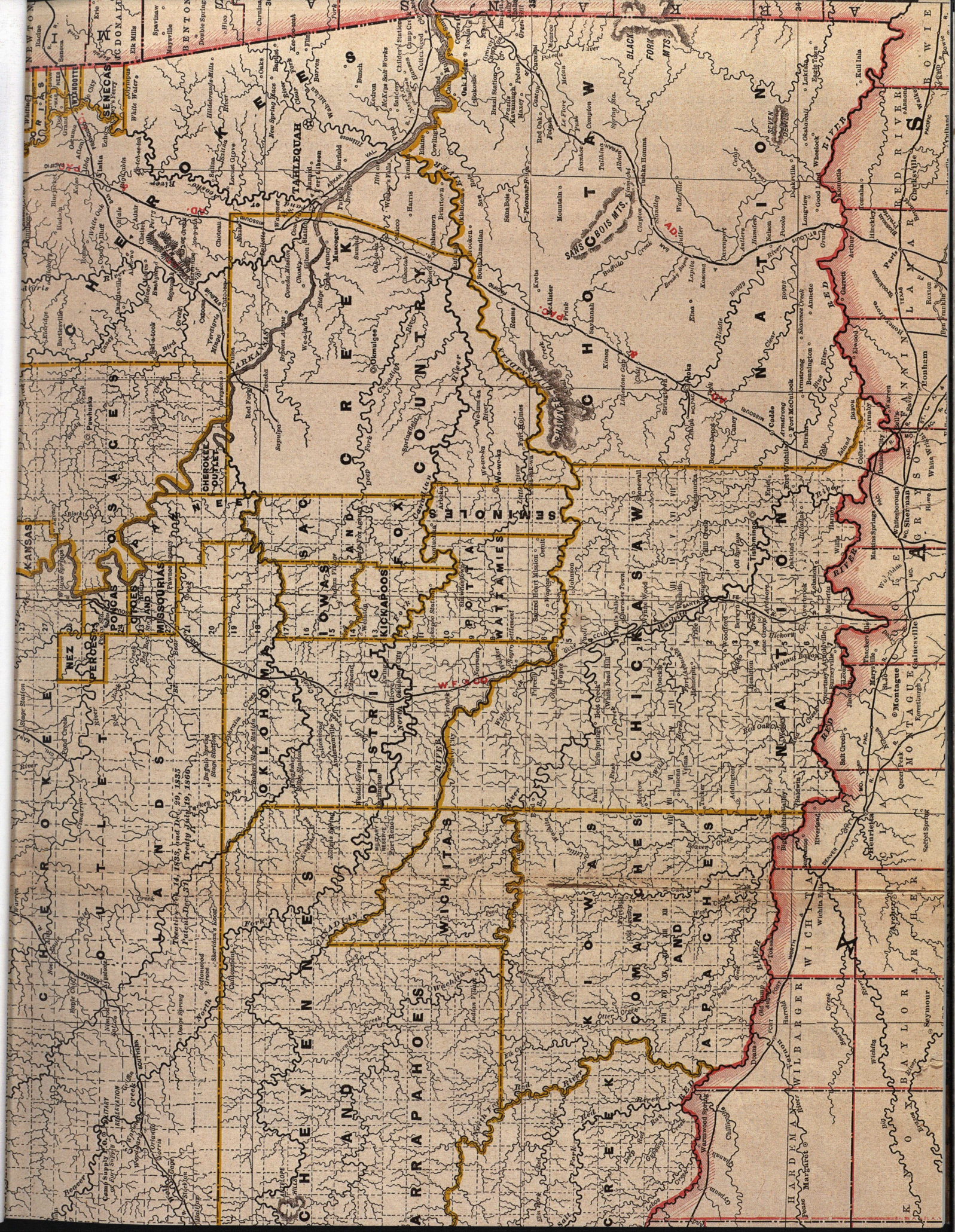
Today, there are thirty nine federally-recognized tribes in Oklahoma. Few of these tribes, however, are indigenous to the area. Although the reasons for relocation varied from tribe to tribe, federal Indian policy was the key factor driving Indian settlement in Oklahoma. The 1783 Treaty of Paris, negotiated between Great Britain and the United States, ended the revolutionary war but ultimately deprived American Indians of large tracts of territory. Tribes who had aligned with the British were forced to sign treaties relinquishing tribal land holdings. One of the great ironies of American history is that a revolution fought in the name of independence actually limited the freedom of Native peoples.

Land encroachment that began during the colonial period intensified after the Revolution as settlers flooded into Native American territory. Between 1790 and 1800, western Pennsylvania's white population jumped from around 33,000 to 95,000. These hordes of backcountry settlers put tremendous pressure on policy makers to remove the Native inhabitants, with force if necessary, in order to clear the way for white settlement. More than sixty tribes from various states either voluntarily relocated or were forcibly removed to present-day Oklahoma.

In 1834, the federal government added a statute to the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790. In addition to regulating relations and trade between Indians and

BY NATALIE PANTHER, PH.D.

PROGRAM OFFICER, HELMERICH CENTER FOR AMERICAN RESEARCH



non-Indians, the statue now identified an area west of the Mississippi and not within the states of Missouri and Louisiana, or the territory of Arkansas, and designated this land as Indian Territory. This was the vacant land to which Native American tribes would be forced to move according to treaties signed with the federal government.

Treaty making was a federal Indian policy born in colonial times and intended to solve the "Indian problem." Although treaties were formal agreements ostensibly between two sovereign nations, the federal government tended to view Native American treaties as less binding than treaties with European nations. Native American people were citizens of their tribe, residing within the borders of the United States. The executive branch, usually represented by an Indian agent, negotiated the treaties, which were then ratified by the Senate. In these agreements, tribes relinquished their rights to hunt and live on large tracts of land in exchange for trade goods and annual cash payments.

Historian Francis Prucha argues that treaty making, whether carried out by the British, colonial governments, or the United States, was intended to protect American Indian signers from the "westward-rolling juggernaut" of settlers. However, as early as 1803, President Thomas Jefferson began advocating a policy of removal, arguing privately that compelling Native Americans to assimilate within Euromerican society—meaning to engage in farming and trade—would result in indebtedness and coerce them to sell their land. For the tribes that resisted assimilation, Jefferson believed that removal was necessary to avoid war and probable extermination of indigenous peoples. Treaties were ultimately one of the most effective mechanisms used by the federal government to take possession of tribal land holdings.

Public pressure to remove Native American tribes from the Southeast rose sharply as a result of the cotton industry's expansion, the increased use of slavery, and the discovery of gold in the Southeast. The 1828 discovery of gold in Cherokee territory prompted the Georgia governor to disavow Cherokee sovereignty and declare the Cherokee Nation subject to the jurisdiction of Georgia. Just two years later, on 22 February 1830, Tennessee's senator Hugh White used his position on the Committee of Indian Affairs to introduce a bill that provided for the removal of all American Indians living in any state or territory west of the Mississippi River.

The bill was fiercely debated in the Senate and House. Its strongest support came from southerners who stood to reap the economic rewards of removal, while most Christian missionaries and northern statesmen, including Congressmen Davy Crocket and Daniel Webster, vehemently opposed the measure. The House of Representatives voted 102 to 97 to pass the Indian Removal Act, which President Andrew Jackson signed on 28 May 1830.

While Cherokee chief John Ross and others fought against removal, a handful of prominent slave-owning Cherokees, without tribal consent, signed the Treaty of New Echota, selling all the tribal land holdings in the Southeast in exchange for annual remuneration and acreage west of the Mississippi River. Voluntary migrations and treaties such as the Treaty of New Echota had settled portions of tribes in the area west of the Mississippi that eventually became Indian Territory, including the Seneca, Quapaw, Osage, Shawnee, Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee. "Old settler" factions of Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee established tribal governments in Indian Territory. These factions were later joined by the remaining 60,000 members of the great southern nations, who were brutally forced to leave their ancestral homeland, along with most material possessions, and journey to Indian Territory along the Trail of Tears, during which a quarter of the population died from exposure and exhaustion. In the following decades, these nations would be joined by other tribes.

MISSIONS AND SCHOOLS

Much of the Indian policy of the nineteenth century, including missionary work, had colonial precedents. The desire to Christianize and civilize American Indians that began in colonial times influenced policy formation for much of the nineteenth century. The terms *civilization* and *assimilation* could be used interchangeably, as they





Old St. Mary's First Pupils. The school was operated by the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament from 1880 to 1884 and the Sisters of Mercy 1884 to 1947. After a January 15, 1901 fire the school was rebuilt a quarter mile south of the original site. Frederick S. Barde Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #2226.

Sacred Heart Mission, near Asher, Vincent Lackey. GM 0127.1414.



Wheelock Mission, near Millerton, Vincent Lackey. GM 0127.1391. Wheelock was established in 1832 by Rev. Alfred Wright, who elected to move with the Choctaws when they were relocated from Mississippi to the Indian Territory.



The Wheelock student body with R.C. Robe and teachers on porch, late 1880s, Muriel Wright Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #15194.

both suggest the process of taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the dominant society. One of the first federal Indian policies related to civilization was the Indian Civilization Act of 1819:

> "be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America . . . that for the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes, adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits of arts and civilization, the President of the United States [will authorize] that the means of instruction can be introduced with their own consent to employ capable persons of good moral character to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic . . . And be it further enacted that the annual sum of ten thousand dollars be . . . appropriated for the purpose of carrying into effect the provisions of the act."

In other words, the federal government would provide financial incentives to benevolent societies to realize the concept of civilization among American Indians. Although missionary activity among tribes began in the colonial period, it increased dramatically as a result of this legislation. In 1817, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the first foreign mission agency, authorized Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries to open schools among southeastern Indian Nations.



Hillside, Osage Mission, near Skiatook, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1387.

Bolstered by additional funding from the federal government's Indian Civilization Fund Act, which granted $10,000 annually to denominations who pledged to educate and civilize Indians, the ABCFM played a major role in the assimilation effort.

While southeastern tribes allowed missionaries from Moravian, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches into their Nations, tribal leaders made clear that the missionaries had to center their attention on educating children in English literacy. They believed that learning the English language would give them a stronger position in negotiations with neighboring Euro-Americans. American Indians began to view mission education as a way to cross cultural barriers, often to serve their own ends. In the words of historian William McLoughlin, "when the Cherokees decided to admit permanent mission stations in their Nation, they did so because they expected the missionaries to teach their children to read and write and to provide them with other useful information in their effort to cope with a rapidly changing social order."

The ABCFM and other organizations established schools and missions among tribes in the Southeast, and when factions of these tribes began migrating west, the missionaries traveled with them. Under the direction of the ABCFM and with funding from the United States government, Dwight Mission was the first to serve the Cherokee west of the Mississippi River. Originally located in Arkansas Territory, in 1828 the mission, along with its founder, Reverend Gideon Blackburn, moved to a site thirty miles east of Fort Gibson, in Oklahoma. Dwight Mission educated hundreds of Cherokee children who, according to historian O. B. Campbell, "greatly influenced the way of life in the Nation." According to Vinson Lackey, Dwight has the longest history of any mission in Oklahoma. His painting of Dwight was inspired by an "old photo made perhaps by some soldier during the latter part of the Civil War."



This view, reversed because of the daguerreotype process, includes several buildings constructed in 1840. Dwight Mission, daguerreotype, April 1843. Tintype Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #697.

FACING: *Dwight Mission,* near Marble City, 1820, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1434. Dwight began in 1820 in Arkansas and was moved to Indian Territory in 1829. Lackey shows it here as it appeared in an old photo made perhaps by a Civil War soldier. Dwight had the longest history of any Oklahoma misson; it was destroyed by fire during the Civil War.



On 27 September 1830, the Choctaw Nation signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek with the United States, exchanging all their homeland in Mississippi for annuity payments, lands west of the Mississippi, and the promise that there would be no future land encroachments. Missionaries who had been working among the Choctaw in the Southeast removed with the tribe to the West. Under the direction of the ABCFM, Reverend John Lathrop and his wife established the Goodland Mission for the Choctaw near present-day Hugo, Oklahoma, to continue civilization efforts among the Choctaw. Shortly after Goodland's creation, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Porter Stark replaced the Lathrops and oversaw the expansion of the mission and school. Several notable missionaries worked at Goodland Indian School, including Cyrus Kingbury and Cyrus Byington.

The crisis of removal slowed neither Native Americans nor missionaries in their drive to educate youths. Missionaries and tribal leaders alike emphasized the importance of education among American Indian children. Unlike missionaries, however, tribes viewed education as a tool of negotiation and survival in the face of great social and cultural change. According to historian Rennard Strickland, "in addition to the large number of mission schools each of the tribes operated its own national school system." By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Choctaw had 170 common schools. The Cherokee had 110 primary schools along with two advanced academies. On 26 November 1846, the Cherokee National Council established two high schools, one for boys and one for girls, which could more accurately be considered tribal colleges.

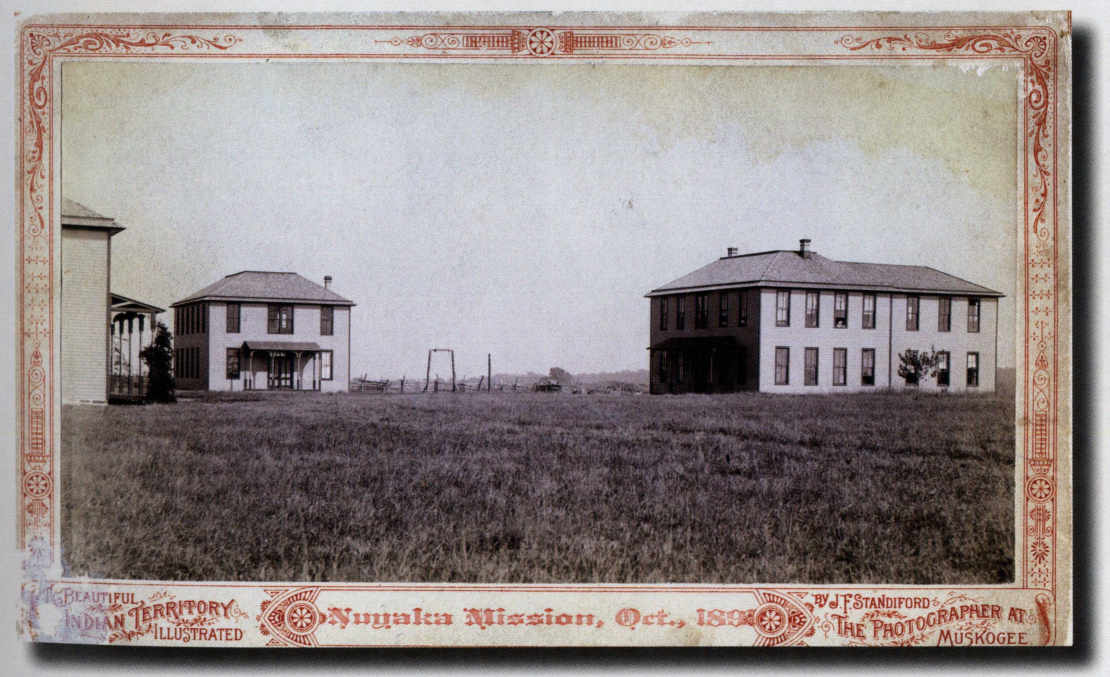


Three children outside Mekasukey Academy, Seminole. Roy J. Morgan Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #21504-AL-1-13-R-1.

Mekasukey Academy, Seminole, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1447.







Nuyaka Boarding School, near Okmulgee, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1405.

Nuyaka Mission, October 1891, by J. F. Standford, "The photographer at Muskogee. Beautiful Indian Territory Illustrated." Left to right are Adams Chapel, the school, and the boys' dormitory. Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #5838.

Girls at the Euchee Mission Boarding School, built near Sapulpa, Oklahoma, in 1894 "to educate American Indian children." This would have been a reference photograph used by Lackey in painting the image below. GM 4326.10040.

Euchee Boarding School, near Sapulpa, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1419.





Sac and Fox Indian Boarding School and Mission, 1875. Sac and Fox Agency Indian Territory, photograph by Jack Hiller. Dr. C. W. Kirk Collection. Inscribed with the legend "Sac & Fox Indian Boarding & Mission School 1875 at Sac & Fox Agency Indian Territory." Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #8814-2.

Sac and Fox Boarding School, near Stroud, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1394. The school, built in 1872 and operated by Quakers, was the alma mater of Olympic athlete Jim Thorpe.





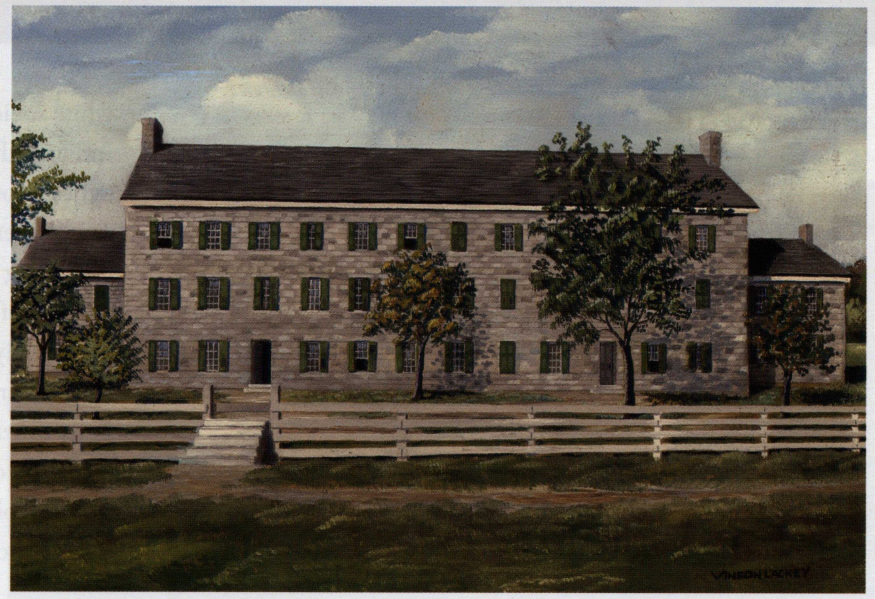




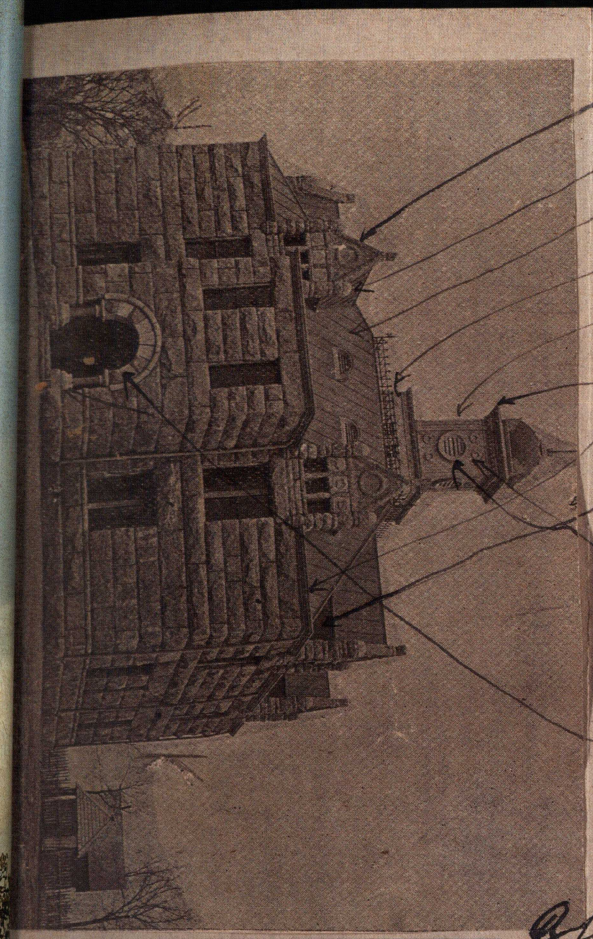


TOP AND BOTTOM: *Tullahassee Mission, Creek,* near Muskogee, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1439; *Wapanucka Academy,* near Bromide, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1427.

FACING, TOP AND BOTTOM: O*ld Mormon Mill,* near Spavinaw, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1352; *Mouille's Salt Works,* Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1425. The old mill on Spavinaw Creek was built before 1855 and bought in that year by a group of Mormons, who operated it until they departed for Utah in 1860. Mouille's salt works, near the mouth of Brush Creek, west of Grand River, was in use before the Louisiana Purchase, though it is not known who brought the first kettles there. It was prolific, producing a gallon of salt for eight gallons of water. It was abandoned in the 1880s with the coming of rail transportation.







are these gables also of red granite?
No Sheet metal (gray)

what color are these balls? red granite

what color is the roof? Galvenized shhet Iron

Is this part also red granite? yes

What is the cupola made of, and what color?
wood covered with galvenized sheet iron (gray)

What color are the cornices?
Galvenized sheet iron

What are the side walls of the gables made of, and what color? Sheet iron Gray

Are these round rings wreaths, or just round and smooth like a doughnut? Wreaths

Are all the stones in the arch red granite? What color are the bases of the two columns? yes gray granite

Also — Is the building of the old Harley Institute for Boys still standing? No





ESTABLISHING TRIBAL CAPITALS IN INDIAN TERRITORY

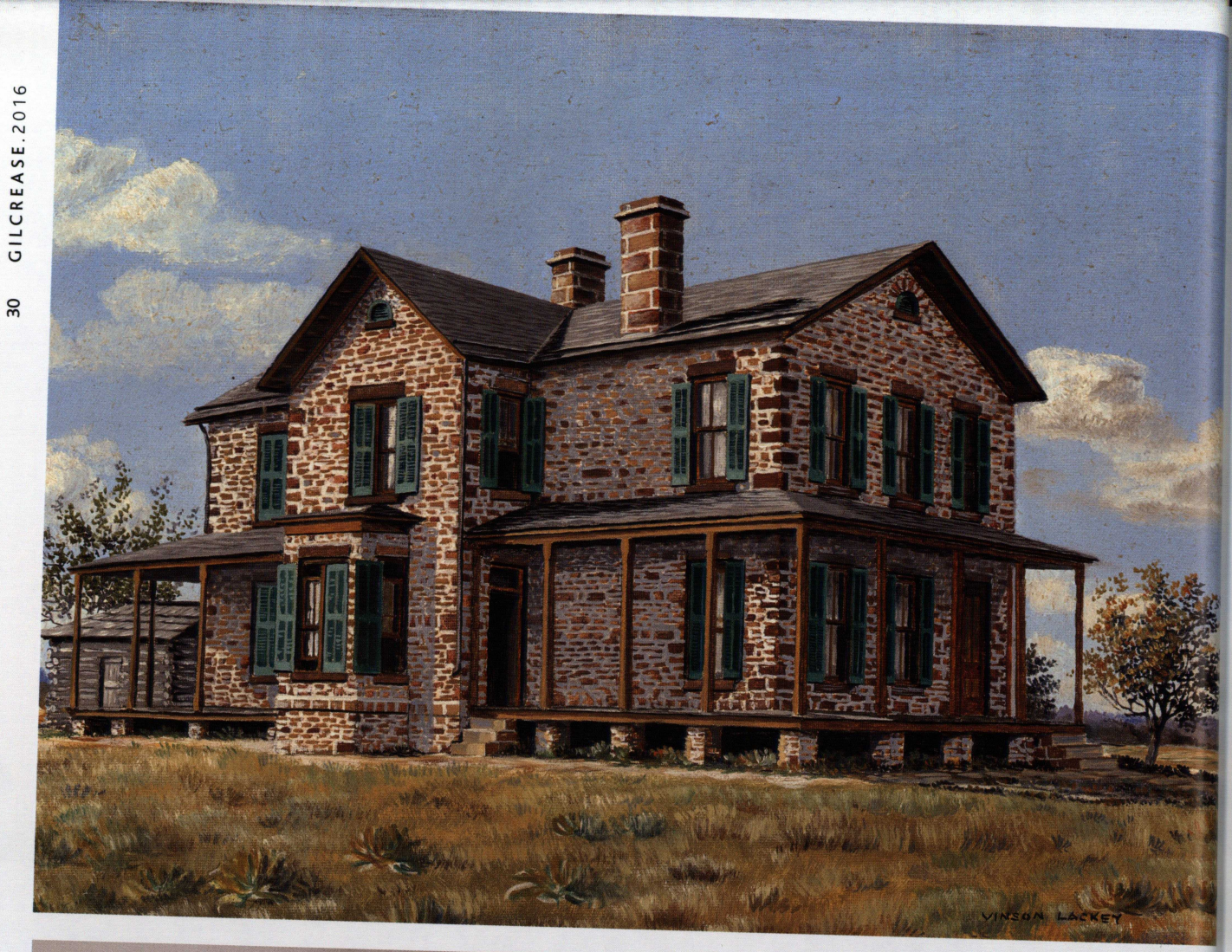
To the uninformed outside observer, some Native American tribes were attempting to assimilate within mainstream American society when they adopted centralized forms of government. As tribal historians, most notably William McLoughlin, have pointed out, tribes practiced "accommodation," or the act of making adjustments to meet the demands of new circumstances. Historian Rennard Strickland puts it another way: "the Five Civilized Tribes borrowed what suited them from white society while retaining much of their distinctively Indian culture." Four out of five of the so-called civilized tribes wrote and adopted written constitutions and created centralized governments as more effective means of dealing with the United States.

One of the first tasks of tribes who had either voluntarily migrated or been forcibly removed to Indian Territory was to reestablish the center of tribal government. The Cherokee established Tahlequah as their seat of government in 1839, and it was here that the Cherokee council first met to reestablish the laws, constitution, and government. The original two-story

FACING: *Chickasaw Council House,* Tishomingo, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1451.

ABOVE AND TOP: Chickasaw Capitol, 2016. Photo by Robert Stevens Cross; Lackey's research notes for his painting. GM 5327.1310.

RIGHT: The Chickasaw Capitol Building, Tishomingo, Indian Territory, photograph by Grant Foreman in the field with the Dawes Commission, c. 1900, Grant Foreman Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #8470.14.





Seminole Agency, Muskogee, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1390. The government built this stone structure to house the Seminole Agency in Muskogee in 1874. It was in use fairly briefly, until the Five Tribes Consolidated Agency was established.

Old Seminole Agency. GM 4326.10036.

log building was destroyed by General Stand Watie's troops during the Civil War, and in 1869 a brick building replaced the original.

For the Chickasaw, one of the last tribes to come to Indian Territory on the Trail of Tears, the Treaty of Doaksville in 1837 called for the settlement of the tribe among the Choctaw in Indian Territory. In 1856, in order to establish tribal sovereignty, the Chickasaw separated from the Choctaw and established their capital at Tishomingo in south-central Oklahoma. The building in Vinson Lackey's Capitol of Chickasaw Nation was built in 1897–98, replacing the two-story original structure.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 was one of the first acts of Congress, had asserted its treaty-making policy and stipulated that all interactions between Indians and non-Indians were under federal control. Soon thereafter, Indian agencies were created to oversee and regulate trade between Native American nations and the United States. The second Trade and Intercourse Act of 1793 created the position of the Indian agent, to be appointed by the president and to temporarily reside among Indians. This person was authorized to interact with tribes on the behalf of the government and was responsible for implementing federal Indian policy, including acculturation to mainstream American values and norms. Ideally, the Indian agent would prevent or solve conflicts between American Indians and settlers, report violations of intercourse laws to superintendents, and assist in commercial trade between Indians and non-Indians (agents could both create and revoke trading licenses). In 1824, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was created as a division within the War Department to oversee and supervise Indian agencies. Throughout Indian Territory, Indian agencies were spaces in which all kinds of business was conducted, including the payment of treaty annuities, overseeing oil lease auctions, and building and operating schools.

In 1874, the Pawnee agency had the task of finding a new location for the tribe. The Pawnee had long been in conflict with most Plains tribes. After a treaty with the United States in 1833, however, the Pawnee relinquished their weapons, renounced warfare, and agreed to become farmers in exchange for protection from the federal government. This new way of life created dependency, which combined with population loss from disease, left the Pawnee vulnerable to attacks from Sioux war parties. In 1874, the tribe began a two-year removal to Indian Territory. The Pawnee Indian agent selected a new reservation for the tribe in the Cherokee Outlet. As Lackey explains, the Pawnee agency oversaw business transactions and served the Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe, and Tonkawa. The Pawnee agency also established the Pawnee boarding school in 1885 in accordance with a newly-developing federal Indian policy of assimilation through education, specifically boarding schools.

CLASS DISPARITY

Some tribes generated a tremendous amount of wealth during and after removal, much of which was concentrated in the hands of a relatively few tribal members, usually of mixed Native and white ancestry. Business activity included the operation of salt works, trading posts, and grist mills. As Rennard Strickland explains, "some Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles shipped merchandise on steamboats up the Arkansas River and then loaded it on horses and headed out on the prairies to trade with the hunter Indians."

The accumulation of wealth for some individuals was illustrated by the lavish and elegant nature of their homes. In the Cherokee Nation, the home of Chief John Ross was a beautiful columned antebellum mansion called Rose Cottage. Ross's son-in-law, George Murrell, owned the most elaborate residence in the Nation. The opulence of these homes as compared to the more common one-room cabins, like Sequoyah's, underscores the disparity of wealth among the Cherokee.



Cherokee Council House, Tahlequah, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1452.

Recent photos by Robert Stevens Cross of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek Capitols (left to right).





TOWARD STATEHOOD AND SOVEREIGNTY

The American Civil War had devastating consequences for tribes in Indian Territory, especially the Creek and Cherokee who, much like the border states, divided over which side to align with and went to war among themselves. Between the end of the Civil War and 1889, Indian Territory went through a period of intense change as many Plains and Woodland tribes moved permanently to the region. The Peoria, Modoc, Ottawa, Shawnee, and Wyandot moved to the northeast corner of the territory; the Osage, Kaw, Pawnee, Tonkawa, Ponca, Otoe, Sac and Fox, Iowa, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi migrated to central areas; the Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, Wichita, Caddo, Cheyenne, and Arapaho settled in the western portion of the territory.

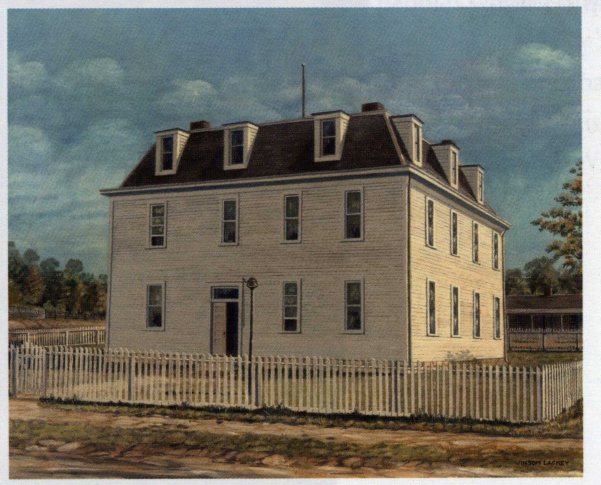
One of the most important issues facing tribal leaders in the late nineteenth century was the threat of allotment. Tribes worked tirelessly to block the various and relentless efforts on the part of the federal government, railroad companies, white settlers, and ranchers to wrest control of Indian land and resources. Less than ten years after Congress passed the 1887 Allotment Act (which initially did not apply to the Five Tribes), the Dawes Commission began making overtures to the tribes, attempting to induce them to divide their land in severalty and become American citizens. Most resisted allotment. Some even refused to sign up on the rolls and receive their parcel of land. To fracture the tribal land base, they believed, would ultimately weaken tribal political independence.

The Curtis Act of 1898 (the amendment to the Dawes Act, which included the Five Tribes in the allotment process) was one of the most obvious and egregious threats to tribal self-determination. The Curtis Act dissolved tribal courts completely, surveyed tribal land, and required that rolls be prepared to break up tribal lands and give the head of each family a 160-acre plot. In a final strike against tribal sovereignty, the Curtis Act stipulated that the federal government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, would appoint tribal chiefs.

In 1905, citizens of Indian Territory worked to achieve statehood as the state of Sequoyah, which would be distinct from the state of Oklahoma. In 1906, however, Theodore Roosevelt signed into law the Oklahoma Enabling Act, which allowed citizens in both Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory to elect delegates to a state constitutional convention and then enter the Union as one state. When Oklahoma became a state in November 1907, Indian Territory ceased to exist.

Vinson Lackey's paintings are a vital source for historians who wish to analyze and understand the American Indian experience in Indian Territory. Because most of these early institutions are no longer in existence, Lackey's paintings serve as a visual record of Indian Territory history. It was good fortune that Thomas Gilcrease commissioned this invaluable collection.





Seminole Council House, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1453.



Goodland Indian Orphans School, Goodland, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1369.



Goodland graduates. Courtesy of Terri Baker.

School Days

BY TERRI BAKER, PH.D.

RETIRED PROFESSOR, ETHNOHISTORIAN, SCHOLAR OF NATIVE AMERICA

Christian mission schools, tribal schools, and federal schools dot the landscape of Oklahoma, once Indian Territory. Christian mission schools developed following the 1819 passage of the Civilization Fund Act. Indigenous people were to put away tribal lifeways and adopt the behaviors of white society; federal funds subsidized the Christian missions in this effort.

Tribal boarding schools such as the National Cherokee Female and Male Seminaries were established by the tribes for tribal members. A Cherokee student who was among the 300 some girls at the Female Seminary in 1882-83 describes herself and her classmates as "boarding students . . . The cost of board and tuition was $25.00 per month. We paid one half of this and the Cherokee Nation paid one half."[1]

Federal boarding schools followed the military model of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879 by Captain Richard Henry Pratt. Students lined up punctually for structured exercise and to recieve assigned work details. Their hair was cut, uniforms replaced their tribal clothing, tribal behaviors (including of use of tribal languages) were forbidden, and white foods replaced traditional tribal foods. Rule breaking was met with physical punishment. During summer months, students were placed with white farmers to work and learn about farming. Federal boarding schools focused on creating working-class citizens to serve as domestics and laborers. White educational structure prevailed in all of the schools, tribal lifeways diminished, language fluency suffered, much intertribal marriage occurred, but something of tribal identity persisted. For Native Americans, survival was the order of the day.

My mother, who attended Goodland Academy and Indian Orphanage during the 1920s, granted me several personal interviews that offer details of the students' lives. Some of her memories, lightly edited for clarity, appear in this essay. Mother entered Goodland in 1922 and stayed seven years, going home to her people during the summer months and for a week at Christmastime. She attended Goodland because her Choctaw father mortgaged his allotment to the bank and then left his wife and their three children without income and without access to education. While her experience is specific to her, many families lost their allotments through nonpayment of taxes, fraud, unwise marriages, to guardians—the list is long.

I asked her about the background of students attending the schools.

"There was a lot of children there who were orphaned," she said. "Their grandparents had them. They thought it best they be put in Goodland, where they could have supervision and be educated . . . I guess you could say in the white people's world. So they would know how to survive."[2]

Survival was at risk because the loss of tribal land through allotment had destabilized indigenous society and severely weakened means of livelihood. While



Waiting for church ser
c. 1920s.
Goodland
Orphanage
Collection,
courtesy of
the Oklaho
Historical S
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heads of families and individuals received allotments of acreage, tribal land held in common—used, for example, for schools—was declared surplus and sold, sometimes to the state of Oklahoma, as was the case with the National Cherokee Female Seminary (now the home campus of Northeastern State University). Families broke up and scattered, in part because allotments among family members were often widely separated. Between 1890 and 1910, approximately two thousand non-Indian immigrants entered the Twin Territories each year.[3] Tribal people needed to learn to survive in a changing and often dangerous world.

Many former boarding school students say that the experience was different for everybody. Sometimes the experience was good, sometimes dreadful. Some students were kidnapped and taken to boarding schools when their parents were away. Some parents willingly put their children in boarding schools. Over the years, students arrived by foot, horse, wagon, train, bus, and automobile. Some authorities were abusive bullies, some authorities were kind. Punishments ranged from physical beatings to working off demerits for a specific time.

Indigenous people had always educated their children. Men taught boys and women taught girls the skills they would need as adults. So why were American Indian children in white boarding schools? Because Euro-Americans wanted indigenous people to assimilate into the mainstream and disappear as tribal groups. Education was less physically violent and less expensive than warfare.

Beginning after the Removal Act of 1830, the Civilization Fund Act supported the establishment of a large number of Christian mission boarding schools in what is now eastern Oklahoma. Tribes affected included groups known by historians as the Five Civilized Tribes: Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminole.

The Presbyterian effort exemplifies the influence of such missionary work. Reverend Alfred Wright migrated with the Choctaw on the Trail of Tears, established a mission in 1832–33, and founded the Presbyterian Church at Wheelock in 1846. By 1853, when he died, the church had 570 members. By 1861, the Presbyterians were responsible for six day schools and for six boarding schools that had a total of eight hundred students.[4]

Spencer Academy, opened in 1844 in Choctaw Nation, was one of those schools. So was Goodland Academy and Orphanage, established on the grounds of Goodland Mission (founded 1848).

Oklahoma's Indian Pioneer Papers, WPA interviews from 1938, document the work of slaves in the operation of some of the mission schools. A Choctaw freedwoman spoke about Old Spencer Academy before the Civil War. Old Spencer was located about ten miles northwest of Doaksville, near Fort Towson.

"In addition to my work around the school, I washed and ironed clothes for the teachers. I helped the seamstress too. They made all of the boys' clothes, and they sure dressed them nicely. They made their little jackets of gray jeans and lined them so they would be warm for winter."

The full interview details chores the boys performed, the structure of the work day, and the Christian prayers of the school.[5] The details are much like those of Goodland in the 1920s. After the Civil War, the freed slave said that she returned to work for her former owners.

As time passed, the graduates of these schools became the citizens that populate any area—educators, community and church leaders, housewives, blacksmiths, farmers, attorneys, merchants, bankers, soldiers. Several Code Talkers attended boarding schools, but managed to retain their tribal languages. In many communities, tribal women formed women's clubs much like white women's social clubs. While the graduates survived in the white world, they retained as much of their tribal identity as possible. Often the tribal language was saved in hymns, or through family practice.

Mother told this story about one of her friends who attended Goodland: "It's a terrible thing that children have to be away from their parents, but it gave you an independence . . . you learn to look after yourself when you have to and we had little ones who were almost too small to be there. We had one boy, I can't remember if he was four, five, or six, a taxi cab drove up and left him at the gate and went on back to town. But everybody helped him. And he lives in Durant now. He is a very good friend of ours. He's just a wonderful person."

During her years at Goodland, Mother lived in the Little Girls' Dormitory along with thirty or thirty-five other girls:

"We were all upstairs in a big hall. It had little rooms leading off. . . . It had a big center where we met, and that's where the matron would come up every night and we'd all congregate, on the floor, and we'd have our evening prayers. And, then we'd all go into our individual rooms. [There were] two of us to a room."

Mother remained friends with some of her Goodland schoolmates. One often spent Christmas with us, traveling from Denver. The little boy who arrived in a taxi attended our family funerals. Mother's roommate at Goodland became the junior high school secretary in our hometown.



Goodland, Choctaw Indians Orphans School, Frederick S. Barde Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #19383.162.1

Mother said that all the classes at Goodland were taught in English. She described the details of her day:

"Our matron would come around and she'd ring a bell and we all got up and dressed. And we all went up to what we called 'The Main Building,' which had a sidewalk that was quite long. Everybody lined up on that sidewalk and we did exercise for maybe twenty or thirty minutes. Then we went in for breakfast and had prayer again. And then from breakfast, we went back to our rooms and prepared ourselves for school . . . . From there, we went to an assembly, and our superintendent spoke to us for just a few minutes, and then everybody was dismissed to go to classes . . . . We had nice biscuits, every morning . . . . A lot of times we had hot bacon grease and we would mix that with our cereal or biscuits. We very rarely had butter . . . . The seven years I went there, I think, every day at noon we had red beans, maybe that's why I like them so well today.

"We had a [cattle] herd and we had fresh food [vegetables], and they had their own hogs. They taught the boys how to take care of all that. And the girls had to work in the laundry building. I was considered too small to work in the laundry, but the last year I went there I was assigned to fold clothes. Everybody's name was marked on their clothing, and you had to be awfully careful when you folded a garment—you knew whose name was on there and what building it went to.

"[We all had] little iron beds, kind of like what we'd call a cot today, but it's the kind that the legs would fold under. We were all allowed to have our footlockers, our little trunks, whatever, in our room. And we had a little closet. And when you went back to your room after breakfast, if your cover was thrown back off the bed, you knew that Saturday you had what we called a demerit and you walked a bull ring for ever how many hours they gave you for not doing your bed right."

She described the buildings: "We had what was called "The Little Girl's Building," that I was in, and then the next building was for teenagers, and then . . . the main building where the older girls stayed. That's where the superintendent had his office, and we had a little store there that sold candies. It was open at the same time every day, just for a few minutes. And they had a reception room and a piano. And the laundry was between two of these buildings . . . . [it] had huge tables, [where] the ones who were detailed to fold clothes had to fold them. Reverend Fireball, our preacher, and Mrs. Fireball lived . . . a little ways from our building."

Friends of the author's mother, Geraldine Hull McKinney, photographed by her during her days at Goodland. Courtesy of Terri Baker.



Goodland Mission Student Body, 1924–25. Photograph by Conrad D. Hardt (of Hugo, Oklahoma), W. P. Campbell Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #3729. An arrow points out Geraldine Hull McKinney, second row of standing students, center right.

Mother's brother ran away, as did many children. "Well, he decided he just was going home to Grandpa . . . At the time Grandpa lived ten miles east of Caddo, in the country, and that's who Lodi had always lived with. So he took off [but] they caught him before he ever got to the highway. He didn't get more than three or four miles."

Mother spoke of staying with a cousin in Durant several summers when the students who had relatives went home. "Some summers I stayed with a fullblood cousin who lived in a house off First Street in Durant. Her house had two bedrooms, so I had a room. She was very kind, but there were strict rules about what I could and could not do. You see, Cousin Delphine was a bootlegger, but I was not supposed to know. Cousin kept her jars of wildcat covered with dishtowels in the kitchen, and she didn't want me to mess with the bootleg product. Mounds and mounds of lumpy dishtowels covered every surface in Cousin's kitchen. Customers would come to the back steps, and she would sell the jars out the back door. Times were hard. She was very kind to me. I never let on that I knew what she did for a living. We never talked about it."[6]

I first heard this story as an adult immediately after Cousin Bootlegger's funeral while Mother and I waited for the funeral procession to form.

Mother also spoke of one or two summers when she



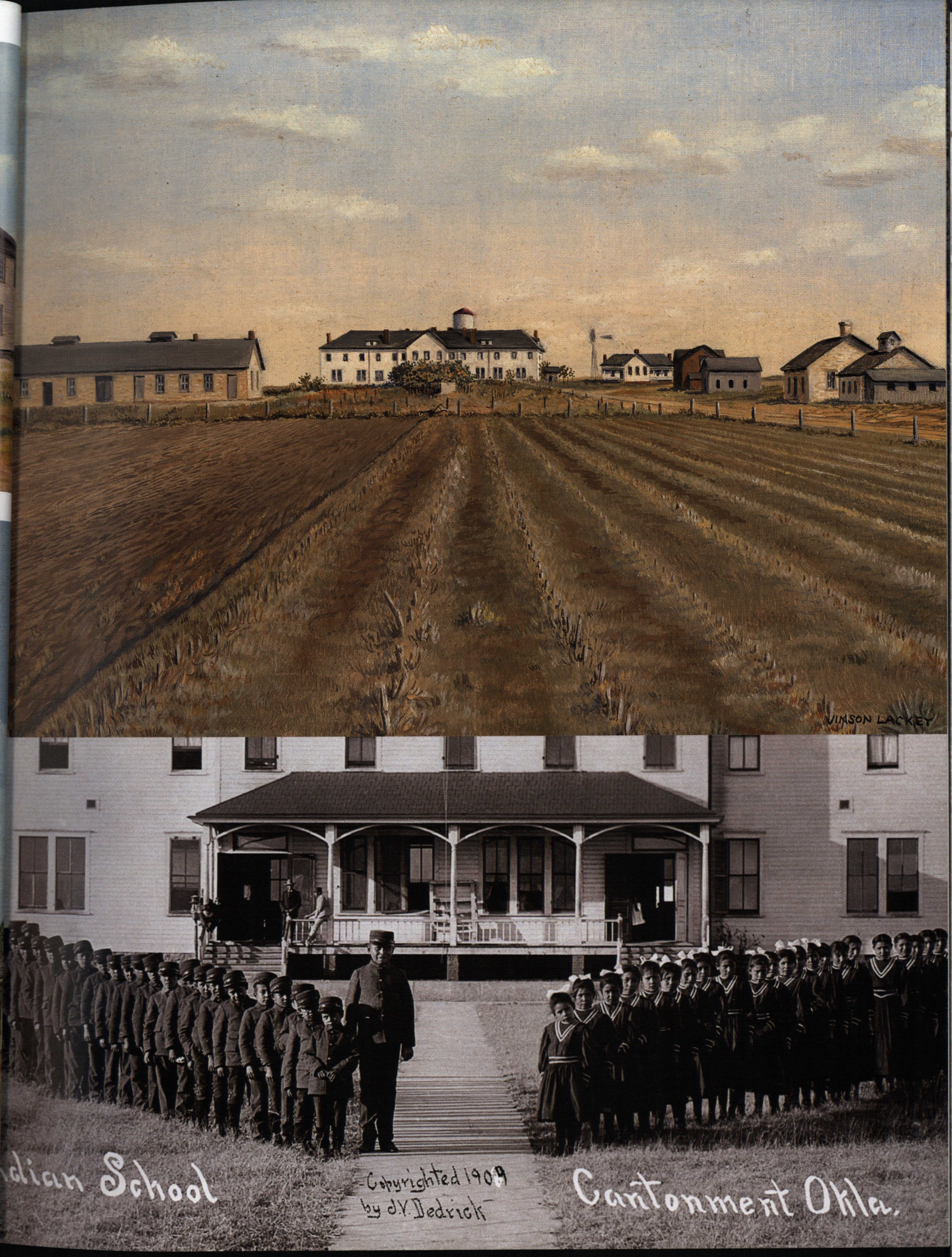
RIGHT: *Kiowa School at Washita,* Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1393. Above is a photo Lackey consulted.

FACING, TOP AND BOTTOM: *Cheyenne School,* Cantonment, near Canton, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1411; Indian School Cantonment, Okla. 1909, photograph by J.V. Dedrick, Taloga, Oklahoma, H.H. Henston Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #8124

BELOW: *New Hope Female Seminary,* near Spiro, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1403.







and her sister stayed with their mother in Durant: "We did the housework and the cooking and the washing and ironing and did all the chores for Mama. We had been taught that at Goodland. And that is something I have never regretted, going to Goodland, because they did teach us how to do and what to do and so it didn't hurt me. In fact, I have friends who had been quite a success in life, so I'm sure, Goodland, we all thought was a wonderful school."

I asked her what happened when students became ill at Goodland. She said, "You didn't get sick. If you got sick they took you away and you didn't come back." At Goodland there was no medical care. The students were taken to Talihina to the TB institution. After the 1970s, the Choctaw Nation bought that property and built a $27 million debt-free hospital for American Indians in cooperation with the Indian Health Care Service. The Chickasaws supplied medical equipment. Mother served on the Choctaw Board that oversaw that project.

Eventually my grandmother remarried and brought mother home. "The first year I was at Goodland, I guess I cried every night I was there. And then the second year, you begin to taper off, not that you didn't want to go home or you didn't want to see your folks, but you had your friends. And the last year I went to school at Goodland, I … I just couldn't wait to get back. And then when I went home, the last summer, my mother told me that she thought that she and Daddy had made arrangements for me to live with them. And, of course, then I cried, because I couldn't go back to Goodland."

Mother would see some of her Goodland friends in Tuskahoma during the Choctaw Holiday, which occurs during the Labor Day weekend, and on visits to the Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Talihina, where some of her Goodland friends worked. Like her friends, she had been eligible to attend Goodland because she was Choctaw: "My father, Papa Hull, was listed on the Dawes Commission. He had a roll number, and all these years I have used it. Like you, you use my daddy's roll number."

Near the end of one of the interviews, she said, "I enjoyed it [the interview]. Brings back old memories." Mother talked very little about her years at boarding school when I was young, but as I became an adult, I learned more. She was never obviously bitter. Sadness, but not bitterness—the schools often resulted in bittersweet memories.

Boarding schools are remembered in the paintings of Vinson Lackey. We do not see people in his images but he showed them as they had been in operation, and we can imagine them filled with lives young and old, with the busy clash and harmony of disparate cultures. The paintings show dignified, sometimes visionary, structures. In ways they are like the memories of the now passing generation who once inhabited them, recalled in scattered detail and tinted with time. The enormous influence of the schools still flows through the lives of their descendants as American Indian people and as Americans.

1 Indian Pioneer Papers of Oklahoma, Special Collections Division, John Vaughn Library, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, OK. Vol 12: pp 426-27. This collection is held in hard copy by the Oklahoma Historical Society and is available in microfilm in a number of institutions. For research purposes, the indexed version on microfilm is most useful.

2 Goodland Academy and Indian Orphanage interview with Geraldine Hull McKinney, 1990, collection of the author.

3 H. Wayne and Ann Hodges Morgan, *Oklahoma: A History*, Norton Press, New York, New York, 1984, p 59.

4 Robert Elliott Flickinger, *The Choctaw Freedmen and the Story of Oak Hill Industrial Academy*, Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen, Pittsburgh, PA, 1914, pp 16-17. This book contains extensive historical information, specific names of missionaries, 100 engravings, and reports on outcomes for money expended for both Native American and Freedmen missions.

5 Indian Pioneer Papers of Oklahoma,Vol 31: pp 41-47.

6 Mother's entire story of living with the bootlegger has appeared in an essay titled "Cherries in Wildcat" in the *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, April 9, 2012 (online) and within an essay titled "Habits Old as the Oklahoma Hills" in *Green Country Anthology*, a publication to benefit the organization Save the Illinois River (STIR).





Boys at New Spencer. Old Spencer Academy opened in 1844 near Fort Towson as a school for Choctaw boys. It served as a military hospital during the Civil War, then returned to use as a school until being replaced by New Spencer, built near Soper, Choctaw County, in 1883. New Spencer continued as a boys' school until it burned in 1896. GM 4326.10033.

New Spencer Academy, near Soper, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1353.





TOP: Dormitory at Otoe Indian Boarding School, postcard printed c. 1910–18. Mrs. W. E. Van Cleve Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #7815

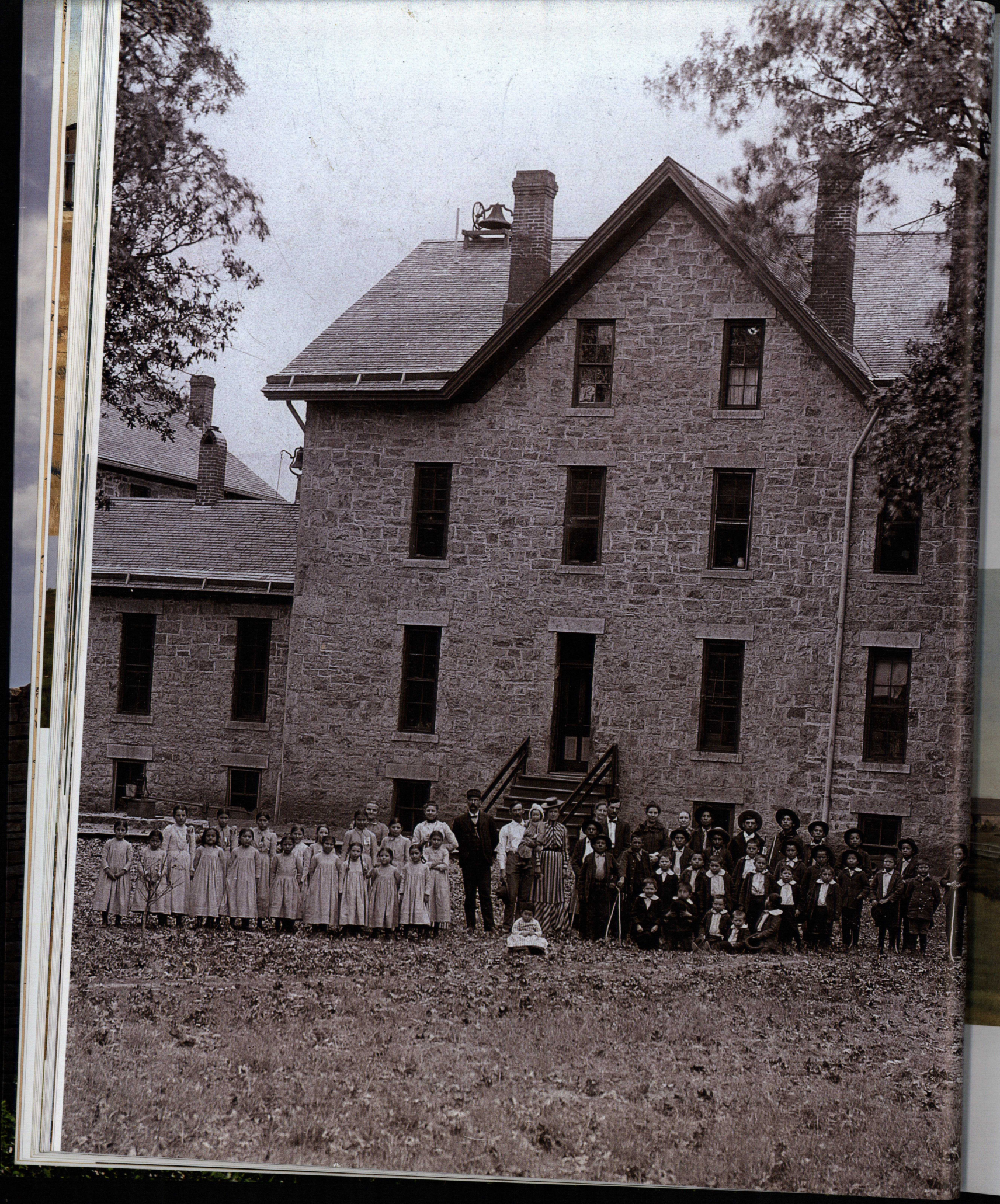
BOTTOM: *Otoe Boarding School,* near Ponca City, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1455.





Eufaula Boarding School, Creek, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1446.

The Creek Nation built this boarding school for girls in 1892 just north of the new town of Eufaula, which had sprung up along the railroad. It was called Eufaula High School and offered "more advanced courses." It was later taken over by the Indian Department to operate as a government boarding school. GM 4326.10031.









LEFT AND ABOVE: *First Cheyenne School, Caddo Springs*, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1381. Reference photo at Gilcrease. GM 4326.3791.

TOP: *Kaw Boarding School,* Washunga, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1404.

FACING: The Kaw Indian School Dormitory, Washunga in Kay County, near Beaver Creek, photograph by G.W. Parsons, Pawhuska, Oklahoma Territory, 1902, O.A. Mitscher Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #1766.

THE CONCHO MURALS. The Cheyenne and Arapaho, separate tribes joined by an alliance, were forcibly relocated from the Northern Plains to Indian Territory in the late 1800s. With the blessing of the Cheyenne-Arapaho executive council, artist Steven Grounds (Navajo and Euchee) conjured faces from the tribal past on the broken walls of the long-closed Concho Indian Boarding School.

Chief Black Kettle of the Northern Cheyenne regards the viewer from Grounds's stone "canvas." Black Kettle attempted peaceable negotiation with the U. S. government but was shot and killed by Custer's 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Washita River. A contemporary figure is Native advocate Suzan Shown Harjo, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014. Some faces were inspired by old photographs from tribal archives, and others by contemporary portraits made by Grounds's frequent collaborator, photographer Benjamin Oscar. Transcending time, the faces look out quietly from the ruins of the old boarding school on White Antelope Road in Concho, Oklahoma. Photos by Robert Stevens Cross.



CANTONMENTS AND FORTS

Out to the Three Forks of the Arkansas, down to the Red River Valley and northwestward to the far reaches of the Canadian went the tough little garrison—green shirted and buckskinned Rangers; leather-hatted and high-booted Dragoon; Old Infantry in peaked blue Kepis and white pantaloons; New Infantry in stuffy blue with many buttons; scarlet-chevroned and mule-wise Artillery, and bow-legged, yellow kerchiefed Cavalry—and more Cavalry —and still more jingling, clanking Cavalry.

— VINCENT LACKEY, *PREFACE TO THE FORTS OF OKLAHOMA*

THE MAXIM "a picture is worth a thousand words" is particularly fitting when considering the Lackey Project; visual records preserve reality in a way nothing else can. To provide a very personal account of the power of the picture, imagine for a moment that you, like my thirteen-year-old-self back in the summer of 1971, are attending your first weeklong Boy Scout adventure at Camp Sasakwa. During the first day's roll call you learn that there will be a two-day hike—twelve miles each way with an overnight bivouac—to historic Fort Holmes. Our destination is a site two miles above the point where the Little River empties its flow into the South Canadian, just a few miles south of present-day Holdenville. To encourage participation, it is explained that Fort Holmes was one of the earliest military outposts in what would eventually be the state of Oklahoma.

This Indian Territory fort was established in June of 1834 at the end of the military road that reached back to Fort Gibson, the first military post constructed in the Territory, in 1824. Fort Holmes was the forward base of operations for the Dodge-Leavenworth Expedition, whose mission was to make contact with the Kiowa, Comanche, and other tribes on the Southern Plains who were harassing Santa Fe traders and frustrating government efforts to safely settle the relocated eastern tribes in Indian Territory.

As youngsters who grew up watching Hollywood Westerns, our heads were filled with visions of John Wayne and Henry Fonda defending Fort Apache. This opportunity to visit a fort was too good to pass up. And if we needed any further incentive for participating in this grand adventure, there were two really great patches waiting for those who successfully completed the hike: a Fort Holmes Trail patch with an Indian tomahawk and army musket crossed behind a fort watchtower and a BSA Historic Trails Award leather patch. Like all Scouts, we loved to collect patches. We could not sign up fast enough!

For most of the hike we trekked within the sandy bed of the Canadian River. This required crossing that meandering ribbon of water countless times throughout the day while holding forty-pound packs high above our heads, always under a blistering-hot mid-July sun. With visions of that heroic fort on the Indian Frontier providing energy and motivation, we pressed on despite the creeping fatigue that tested the limits of our youthful endurance and enthusiasm. By late afternoon our ragged and exhausted little troop finally reached the fort site.

And what a disappointment! The fort did not look anything like the one on the promised patch. Instead of the classic stockade from our favorite Western movies, we saw only a few rocky remains of the foundations those long-ago troopers had worked so hard to build through a scorching Oklahoma summer 137 years earlier. The Fort Holmes constructed in our Hollywood-besotted minds throughout the long hike fell to pieces that hot July afternoon.

What I only vaguely began to understand that night as I lay on the very ground under the same brilliant stars those now-forgotten soldiers had seen so many years before, was that most of our built environment does not survive. So many structures like Fort Holmes

BY MARK DOLPH

ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF HISTORY, GILCREASE MUSEUM



Boy Scouts of America patches earned by Mark Dolph in 1971 while attending Camp Sasakwa and completing the Fort Holmes Historic Trails hike.

FACING: Fort Reno, Oklahoma Territory. GM 4327.1107B.



were abandoned once they had served their initial purposes. Maybe they fell victim to fire and burned to the ground. Or perhaps they were "deconstructed," their materials hauled away to build some other structure. But far more likely, through neglect and lack of care and maintenance, they slowly decayed to the point that all that remains for us in the present are the few remnants of their past existence. Remnants like those foundation stones at Fort Holmes endure as the only evidence of a once essential existence.

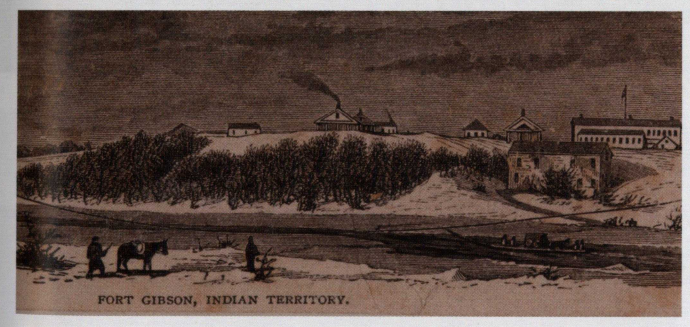
So what did the newly completed, fully operational Fort Holmes look like back in 1834, sitting atop a bluff with its commanding view of the Canadian and Little River Valleys? I can only speculate. Forty-five years after hiking to the site I am still trying to reconstruct the fort in my mind's eye. And it is this lack of success these many years later that provides me with a great appreciation for what the Lackey Project means to those who value Oklahoma's past and lament its physical disappearance.

In the case of Fort Holmes, Vinson Lackey did not paint its likeness. I've concluded that, despite his efforts in researching the available archives at the War Department, he could not find enough surviving evidence to include the fort in his pictures of Oklahoma's past.

But Lackey did paint other forts, which were disappearing from the Oklahoma landscape even as he began the Lackey Project in 1945. His success in preserving the visage of these historically important structures of Indian Territory is our legacy today.

VINSON LACKEY'S poetic opening to his *Preface to The Forts of Oklahoma* is as an apt reminder of the United States Army's far-flung presence in Indian Territory. His historical narratives, paintings, and personal observations of fourteen pre-statehood forts was an important contribution to the much larger Lackey Project commissioned by Thomas Gilcrease in 1945. The project would require nearly four years to complete and would take Lackey, much like the U. S. Army in the previous century, throughout the state of Oklahoma as he reconnoitered the sites he would later paint for the project.



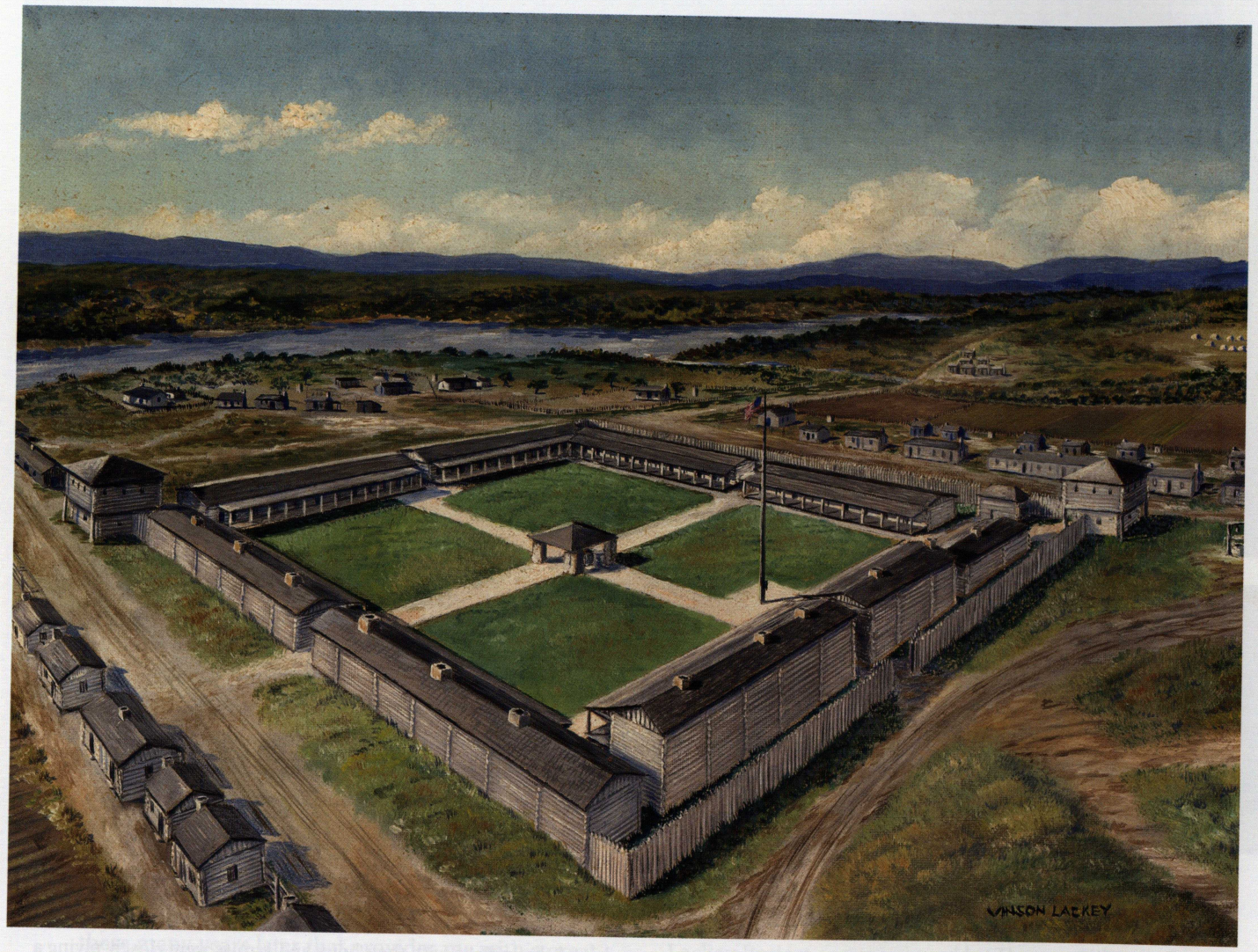


Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, in a magazine engraving published c. 1880s. GM 4326.1570.

The 1st Regiment of the United States Dragoons with Several Indian Hunters & Guides Meeting a Herd of Buffaloes in Texas, George Catlin. GM 0176.2157. Col. Henry Dodge's command of 450 men was the most powerful force ever sent onto the southern plains by the United States when they marched from Fort Gibson on 15 June 1834. Artist George Catlin described his role with the Dodge-Leavenworth Expedition, which passed through Fort Holmes as the army marched southwest, as one of "accompanying the dragoons for scientific purposes." The troops suffered from the extreme heat that summer. Many, including Catlin, experienced serious illnesses due to both the heat and scarcity of good water; a quarter of the command would perish before returning to Fort Gibson. In his *Letters and Notes,* Catlin wrote that "when the regiment were on the march, and the Indians with their bows and arrows were closely plying a band of these affrighted animals, they made a bolt through the line of the dragoons, and a complete breach, through which the whole herd passed, upsetting horses and riders in the most amusing manner, and receiving such shots as came from those guns and pistols were aimed, and not fired off into empty air."

(Here and elsewhere in this essay, captions are drawn from Lackey's *Short Histories of the Early Institutions of Indian Territory.*)

Lackey and Gilcrease understood the important role the American military played in constructing the earliest built environment in Indian Territory. The first forts, such as Fort Gibson (April 1824) and Fort Towson (May 1824), were established as part of a protective bulwark that ran from Minnesota in the north to the Red River on the nation's southern border. The Indian Territory forts were built to safeguard the westernmost settlements against attacks from hostile Plains Indians and possible incursions from Mexico to the south. These and later forts were also assigned the mission of supervising the Indians of the Southeast during and after their forced relocation to Indian Territory over the Trail of Tears. Like all the other structures memorialized in the Lackey Project, the forts were "built and operated by Indians, for Indians, or on account of Indians" in the Territory.



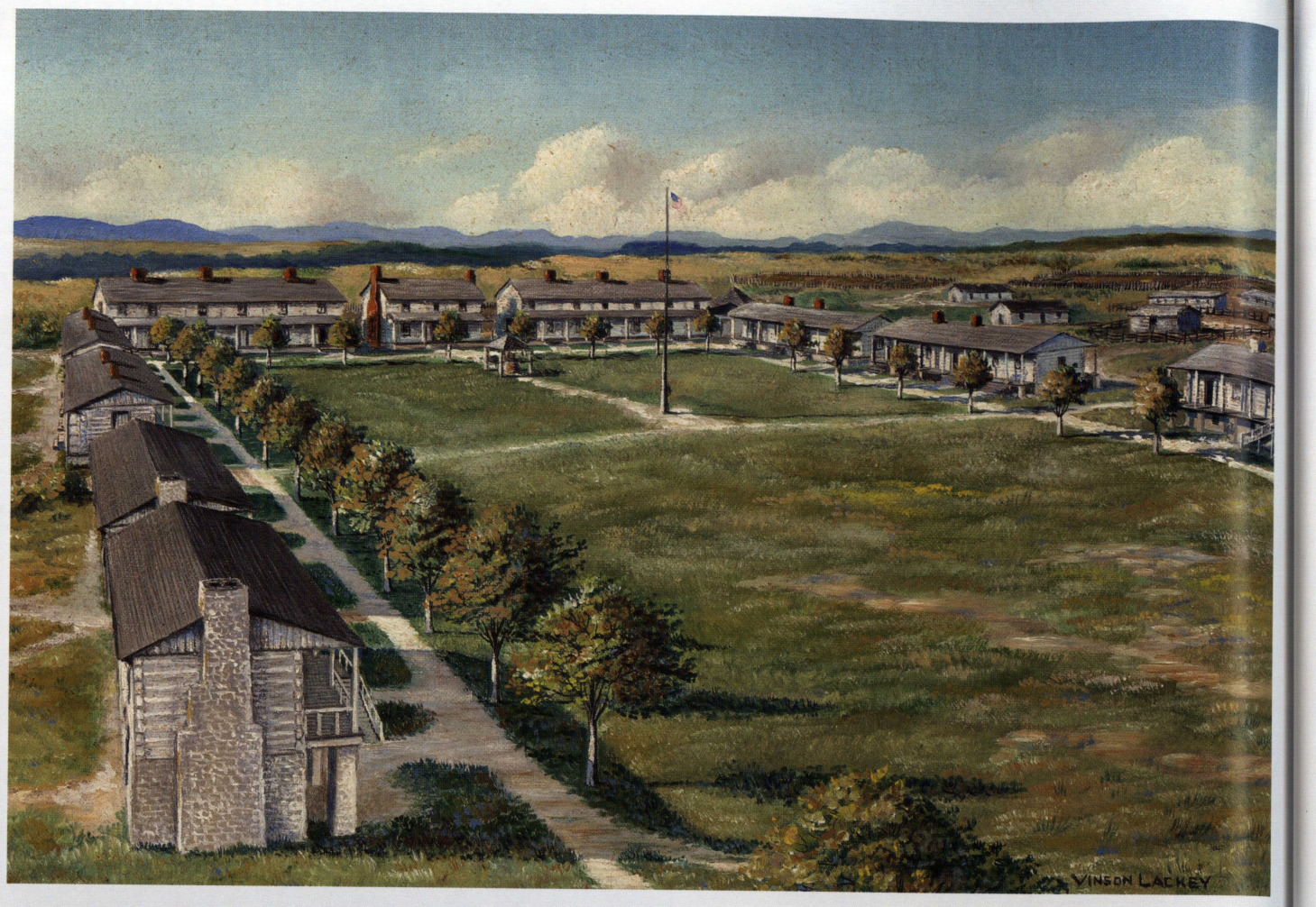
Cantonment Gibson, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1421. Lackey's *Short Histories of the Early Institutions of Indian Territory* records Fort Gibson as the first military post in present Oklahoma. Founded by Col. Matthew Arbuckle in 1824 near the mouth of Grand River, it was the station of many officers famous in the history of the United States, one of the most colorful of all western forts, and the "cradle" of the First Cavalry. It was initially called Cantonment Gibson. The word *cantonment,* from the French for *corner* or *district,* designates a living space where an army may encamp for long periods. A fort, or fortified enclosure, is built for defense.



Fort Supply, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1354.



Attack at Dawn, Charles Schreyvogel. GM 0127.1255. Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led the 7th U.S. Cavalry out from Fort Supply on 23 November 1868, to the Washita River Valley, where 6,000 Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa had established a winter camp. Traveling through snow and under the cover of night, Custer's command reached the encampment of Chief Black Kettle's Cheyenne shortly after midnight on November 27. Four battalions surrounded the unsuspecting Indians. At first light, Custer led his battalion straight into the village, while the other battalions attacked from the northeast and southwest. Few Cheyenne managed to escape the deadly attack.





Fort Towson, near Hugo, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1398. Fort Towson was founded in 1824 by Major Alexander Cummings near the mouth of Gates Creek, a tributary of the Red River, shortly after the establishment of Fort Gibson. It was built to check lawlessness and possible intertribal Indian warfare along the southern boundary of the Territory. With a line of able commandants and officers, it helped to stabilize lawless conditions along the United States–Mexican border and performed a widely diversified series of functions until it was finally abandoned in 1854.

FACING: *Fort Wayne,* near Watts, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1445. Capt. John Stuart and Company C., Seventh Infantry, established Fort Wayne in October 1838 near present-day Watts in Adair County. The site was low and unhealthy, and many men, including Capt. Stuart, died. Early next spring, Lt. Col. Richard B. Mason took over, with some elements of the First Dragoons, and moved the establishment to a point four and a half miles southwest of Maysville, Arkansas, across the line in Indian Territory. It reached only the stage of construction shown in Lackey's painting before its strategic importance was questioned by the War Department. It was ordered abandoned in the summer of 1842. Later the post was used as a meeting place by the Ridge, or Treaty, Party of the Cherokee Nation, and in 1861 Col. Stand Watie organized the First Regiment of Cherokee Mounted Volunteers here for Confederate service. Occupied by Confederate troops, the post fell to federal forces in the battle of Fort Wayne on October 22, 1862.

The fourteen territorial forts presented in the Lackey Project represent only about thirteen percent of the 105 paintings encompassed in the total project. But they may have been Lackey's favorite subjects, based on a close reading of his *The Forts of Oklahoma.* Perhaps this was due in part to his own military service in the First World War, for one senses Lackey's genuine kinship with the men who patrolled the vast domains of Indian Territory. But the forts presented more challenges than most of the other ninety-one institutions did. There were no extant photographs of the earliest forts, and, because of their dates of construction, few people with firsthand memories to draw upon in the late 1940s.

Lackey overcame these hurdles with extensive research and investigations. He employed plans, elevations, specifications, and sketches sent to the War Department by fort quartermasters responsible for the forts' construction. He also secured drawings and plans through the Office of the Chief of U.S. Army Engineers, the Adjutant General's Office, the Surgeon General's Office, and the War Records Division of the National Archives. To further document the military's presence in Indian Territory in the years after the Civil War, Lackey made use of nineteenth-century illustrations of the forts sent from the frontier by artists such as Frederic Remington for reproduction in popular periodicals of the day such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Century Magazine.*

Of the fourteen forts documented by Lackey, six exist today with some or all of their original structures rehabilitated or reconstructed as historic sites. Fort Sill continues to function as an active military installation. But the other eight have long since been lost to the depredations of time. To "visit" these mostly forgotten forts today we must look to Lackey's paintings.



Fort Sill, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1418. At the former site of a Wichita village, on a hill near Medicine Bluff, Col. B H. Grierson started a hut camp for Gen. Sheridan's troops in the winter of 1868. Gen. Sheridan, arriving on 8 January 1869, drove a stake some 300 yards southeast of the campsite Col. Grierson had chosen and ordered a permanent post built here to be called Fort Sill. The stone buildings shown, known in later years as the "Old Stone Post," were built largely by the African-American troopers of the Tenth Cavalry, while Custer's Seventh Cavalry was patrolling the surrounding area. Fort Sill became one of the most important military posts of the frontier, for its strategic location made it most effective in Indian relations. About the time of statehood, and later, it was in grave danger of abandonment, but at the outbreak of World War I the program of expansion began which, continuing through World War II, has made Fort Sill today one of the most important forts in the United States, and Oklahoma's only remaining military post.





Cantonment, near Canton,Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1368. The Northern Cheyennes, who had been brought down from Wyoming and Montana, were never reconciled to settlement on a southern reservation and would not pitch their camps close to Fort Reno or Fort Supply. In order to properly ration and police them a post called Cantonment was built by Col. Richard I. Dodge with troops from the Twenty-third Infantry about halfway between Forts Reno and Supply. In official papers it was never called anything except "Cantonment on the North Canadian, Indian Territory." Abandoned in 1883, it later served two years as a base for Mennonite missionary activities, then as a sub-agency. Later a Cheyenne school was built on the site, and it, too, was abandoned in the late 1920s.

If the forts of Oklahoma were Lackey's favorite subjects in the project, then Fort Coffee quite likely held the highest rank of the fourteen, "occupying the most picturesque site of all Oklahoma forts." An illustration of the fort was featured on the cover of *The Forts of Oklahoma,* and was the first fort discussed despite being out of the chronological sequence used for the other thirteen. Lackey described the condition of the site he found in the late 1940s "on a high bluff overlooking the Arkansas just north of Spiro" where he "sadly surveyed the rotting remains of a miserable little century-old log cabin which had at last given up the ghost and literally fallen down around the shoulders of its last squatter occupants."

Nothing remains of the third army post constructed in Indian Territory. But what was established in April 1834 was once a sizable post, commanded in Lackey's words by "one of the finest young officers who ever came out into the western wilderness" at a fort "with a history so unique, and with functions so diversified and unusual as to make it worthy of more than the passing mention it usually gets when the story of Oklahoma is being told."

What made the site significant to the Army was its location high atop a sheer bluff rising one hundred feet above a horseshoe bend in the Arkansas River. This strategic vantage point, offering unobstructed views of traffic traveling up and down the river, made it the natural location for Company C of the Seventh Infantry, under the command of Captain John Stuart, to place the structure. Stuart's mission was both to protect the relocated Choctaws and to stop the flow of alcohol into Indian Territory. This duty to curb the sale of illegal liquor to the Indians had originally been assigned to Fort Gibson, which maintained a regular patrol on the river downstream to Fort Smith. During his tour of the area in 1832, Washington Irving witnessed one of the fort's patrols searching for banned alcohol. As Lackey described in his narrative of Fort Coffee, Irving watched as a patrol boat "sneaked quietly down the broad bosom of the river in search of illicit liquor dealings. He noted dryly in his journal that it was painted a brilliant red!" Such a highly visible signal was all the warning a keel boat master needed to lay low and out of sight in order to avoid the costly confiscation of their prohibited cargos.

This less-than-aggressive enforcement led to the construction of Fort Coffee. As depicted in the painting, which is based on Lackey's study of Stuart's ground plans, sketches, and reports, the fort was built from roughly hewn logs. One-story barracks were arranged around three sides of a 100-by-100-feet square and connected by pickets about ten feet high. The west, or front, side was occupied by only one small building used as a magazine.

Lackey's painting also reveals a loose cluster of buildings located around the fort, situated outside the south and west perimeter of the stockade. These included the commander's home just south of the fort and the sutler's house and store on the rough road running southwestward down to the boat landing on the Arkansas River. A group of commissary storehouses "straggled" off down the slope to the west and south. Down the hill from the fort's main gate was a cabin that housed a hand-driven grist mill. Placed on the more level ground to the east of the fort were gardens to provide the soldiers with fresh seasonal vegetables, the parade grounds, and post cemetery. For Lackey, the fort's "really romantic touch was the guardhouse, built out on the very brink of a small promontory, with only a narrow neck of land connecting it with the main bluff. It was of sturdy logs, with a log watch tower which commanded a view of the river for several miles in each direction, and which had a flag pole of its own."

Stuart's official reports reflect his satisfaction with Fort Coffee's location as well as the effective manner in which he commanded it. His comment that the post was "high and dry" in all respects was a twofold self-congratulatory pat on the back. The first was to the fact that Fort Coffee's site would never suffer damage from the frequent floods that plagued Fort Smith. The second was a nod to his specific mission. Stuart noted that when at Fort Smith, "half my men were drunk about every day," but his new post saw "hardly a drunken soldier during the first two weeks" of operation.

By September 1834 the garrison was a fit place to live, with the troops ready to begin their mission of halting the flow of liquor into Indian Territory. Regular patrols were sent up, down, and across the river in search of illegal activity. River traffic of the period was considerable. The fort's log showed fifty-two boats on the river during a two-month period before Captain Stuart's post was fully operational. On 15 March 1835, an order was issued that required all boats traveling upriver "to touch at the fort for inspection." Trustworthy traders with unblemished reputations were allowed to sign statements attesting that they carried no liquor, but all other keel and steam boats were boarded and searched. Any suspicious cargo was subject to scrutiny: barrels were bored for inspection, crates were opened and examined, and all passengers and boat hands were required to have passports signed by the War Department or other appropriate officials. As a sign that Stuart took his interdiction responsibilities seriously, "he had a saucy little brass six-pounder mounted in



The bluff above the Arkansas River where Fort Coffee was established, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #196.8.1
At right, ruins of an original building at Fort Coffee, c. 1914, Muriel Wright Collection, courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, #19153.

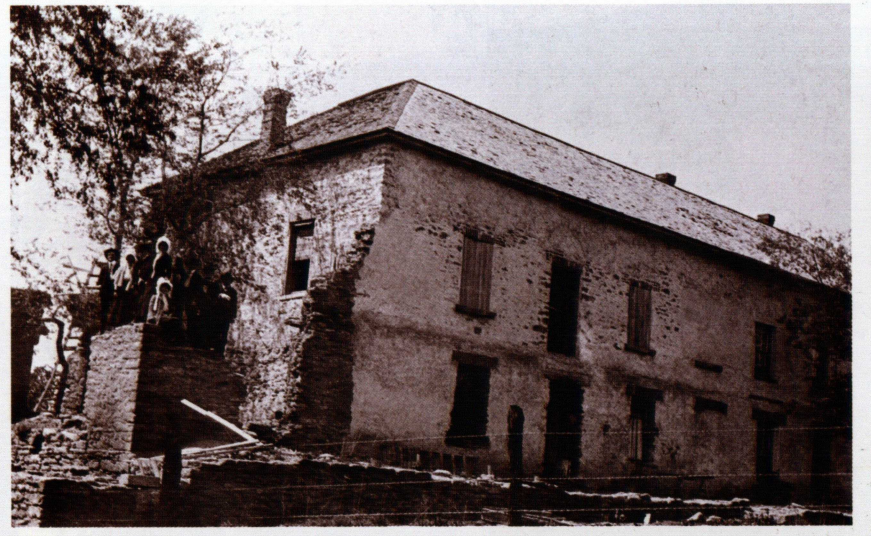






Fort Coffee, near Spiro, Vinson Lackey. GM 0127.1375. Occupying the most picturesque site of all Oklahoma Forts, Old Fort Coffee sat atop Swallow Rock, just north of present Spiro on the banks of the Arkansas River. Founded in 1834 by Capt. John Stuart to police river traffic (particulary the whisky trade), it was abandoned four years later. The old structures, with some new additions, became a Choctaw academy and mission school. During the Civil War, the buildings were used as barracks by Choctaw Confederate soldiers. The site was torched by raiding federal troops in 1863. The only building that survived served as a farmhouse until about 1940, when it finally fell into ruins.

Rutha C. Lackey and Tulsa historian Fannie Misch, late 1940s. Fannie Misch (in the background) holds the completed painting of Fort Gibson, with that of Fort Coffee visible in the bookcase. Mrs. Lackey makes reference to Lackey's book *The Chouteaus and the Founding of Salina, Oklahoma's First White Settlement, 1796.*





LEFT AND ABOVE: Fort Washita west barracks viewed by tourists before the structure burned in 1917. GM 4326.10042; the hull of the burned barracks outside Durant, 2016. Photograph by Robert Stevens Cross.

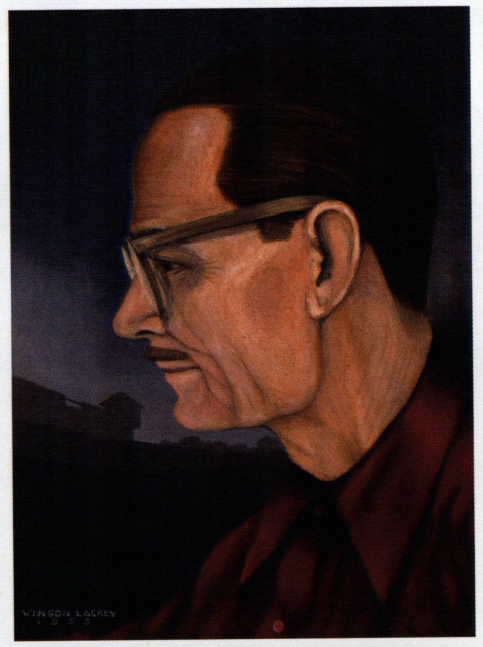
the guard house, commanding the river." Boats that didn't move toward the dock for inspection were given a reminder with a blank charge, or two if the first was ignored. For those that refused to stop after the second shot, came a third request accompanied by a six-pound cannonball.

The fort's patrol activity continued until fall of 1838, when Stuart was ordered to abandon the fort and move his command north to a site on the Illinois River, where he established Fort Wayne. Arkansas had entered the Union as the twenty-fifth state in 1836, which eventually led to the decision to reestablish Fort Smith as a military post. With liquor interdiction patrols working between the western edge of the United States at Fort Smith and Fort Gibson further upstream in Indian Territory, the "cocky little garrison of Coffee" became unnecessary.

Fort Coffee saw a host of new occupants and activities once the property and buildings were abandoned by the federal government and turned over to the Choctaw Nation. In 1843, the Choctaws allowed the Methodist Church to operate the facility, where the church established Fort Coffee Academy, a school for Choctaw boys. A two-story building was soon added, and by 1845 more than a hundred students were in attendance. Later that year the church split over the institution of slavery. The anti-slavery faculty left the school and returned north, while those with southern sympathies operated the school until it closed with the outbreak of the Civil War. A regiment of Confederate Choctaws used the old fort as barracks during the war, abandoning it in 1863 when federal forces moved in and burned all but one of the buildings.

Vinson Lackey concluded his history of Fort Coffee with this epilogue: "Thus passed Oklahoma's fortress of high purpose. A picturesque bluff—a U.S. Army post —a mission school—a Confederate barracks—a Federal bonfire—a picturesque bluff."

Without the Lackey Project, Fort Coffee, like so many of the buildings detailed in the *Early Institutions of Indian Territory,* would be little more than mostly-forgotten footnotes in the history of Oklahoma. Thanks to the vision of Thomas Gilcrease and multi-faceted talents of Vinson Lackey, we in the twenty-first century can more fully understand and appreciate those "sturdy little stockades that crumbled and the buildings that toppled and all sank back into the earth from which they had risen."



Self portrait,
Vinson Lackey.
GM 0127.1449.

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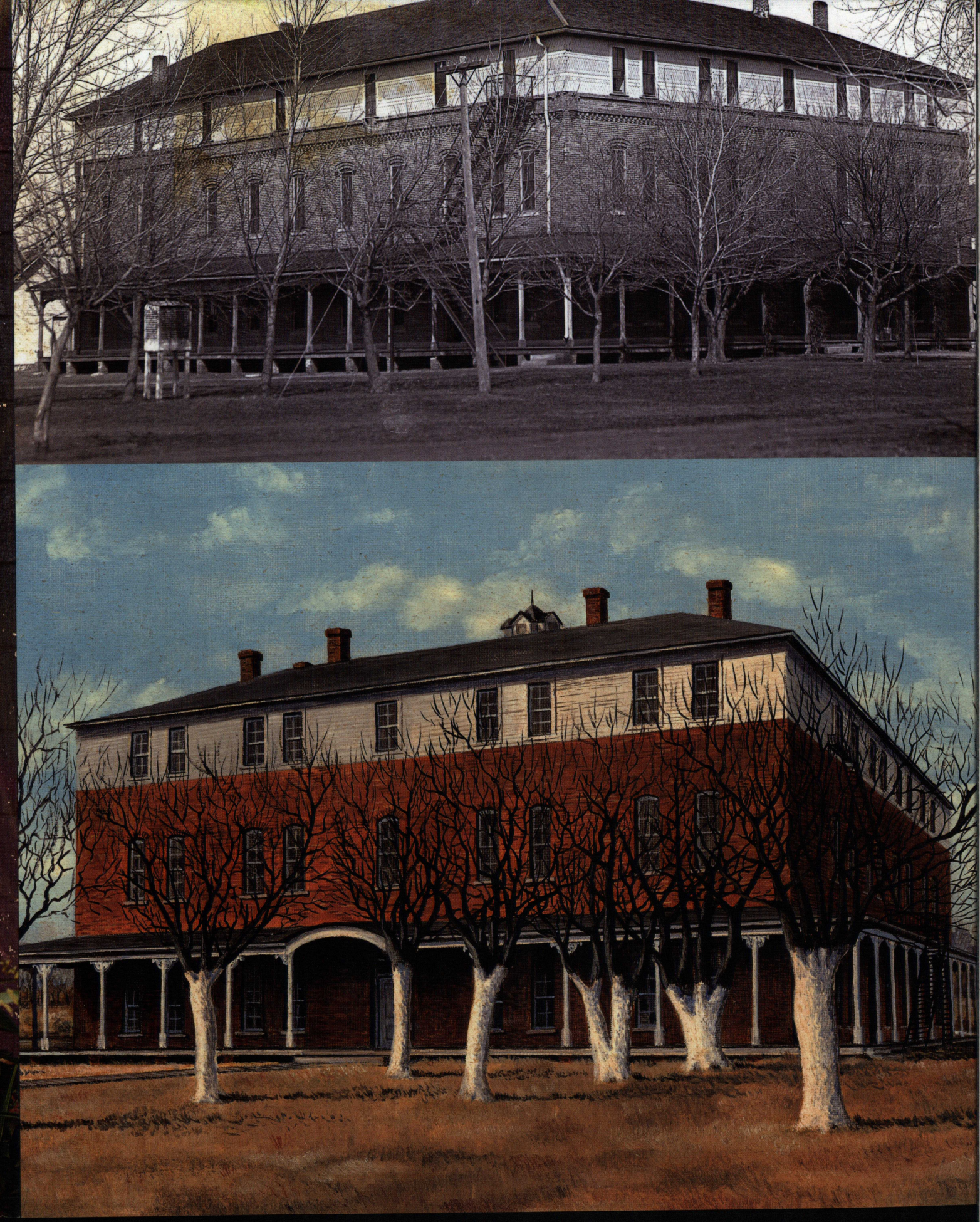









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