

MISSIONS AND MISSIONARIES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U. S, AMONG THE CHOCTAWS 1866-1907"

By Natalie Morrison Denison

Another of the outstanding missionaries of this period was John Jeremiah Read. He did more work among the Chickasaws than among the Choctaws. However, he should be mentioned here, for he had charge of Spencer Academy from 1877 to 1882.³⁴ Mr. Read was born in Hinds County, Mississippi, January 13, 1943. His elementary education was received in a private academy. The Civil War interrupted his education, and he served four years in the Confederate Army. Though his health was impaired to a great extent in these years, it was during this time that he was converted and decided to enter the ministry.³⁵

after attending the Presbyterian College of Mississippi and Columbia Seminary, he worked at Port Gibson, Mississippi. Before he was ordained there, a call came from the First Presbyterian Church at Houston, Texas, which he accepted. Here he remained until 1876, doing a wonderful work.³⁶

As his health began to fail, his physician advised a higher altitude. A call came for him to take charge of Spencer Academy, a Choctaw national school under the care of the Presbyterian Committee of Foreign Missions. This school was located in the southeastern part of Indian Territory in a mountainous section. As Mr. Read had always wanted to be a missionary, he accepted. With his wife and baby the trip to Spencer was made; the last forty miles of the trip was made in a wagon. School was opened on January 1, 1877.³⁷ The climate was far from healthy. In a short time an epidemic of pneumonia broke out in the school. Many persons died among whom was Mr. and Mrs. Read's small daughter. But Mr. Read did not give up, and continued his labors for five years. Many Choctaw boys received instruction under him. One of these was Silas Bacon, who was later Superintendent of Goodland Indian Orphanage.³⁸ The school progressed, for in 1880 John Tufts, United States Indian Agent, reported it in "a flourishing condition." There were sixty male students attending the school at that time. According to Mr. Tufts the Choctaws kept a careful check on their schools, -for "those who manage their financial and educational interests attend strictly to their duties."³⁹

In 1882 the Southern Presbyterian Church relinquished Spencer Academy. The Choctaw Mission asked the Board of Home Missions to establish an orphan school for boys and girls at old Spencer. However, the old buildings could not be made suitable for permanent use, so the idea was given up. In 1883 new buildings were erected on a site seven miles north of the present town of Soper, in Choctaw County. Mr. Read was offered the Superintendency of the school in its new location, but refused. So the Reverend O. P. Stark came from Texas to take charge of the school, and died there within three years. The school operated until 1896, when the building burned. Mr. Read asked Indian Presbytery to locate him for service in the Chickasaw Nation. Where he was stationed there were no schools or churches. Working faithfully among the Chickasaws, he did a wonderful work. He was Stated Clerk of Indian Presbytery for fourteen years. He served as a trustee of Calvin Institute at Durant, Oklahoma, and Austin College at Sherman, Texas. He was attending a meeting of the Board of Austin College, when he died of pneumonia on February 4, 1898. He was buried near Wapanucka in the garden of his old home. His funeral sermon was preached by the Reverend N. T. Lloyd, who chose the text, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."⁴¹ The work of this missionary was indeed blessed, for it bore rich fruit.

33 Ibid.

34 William B. Morrison, "Rev. J. J. Read," Oklahoma Trails, pp. 171-172

35 Ibid, p. 171.

36 The Red Man's Trail, op. cit., p. 78.

37 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

ibid., p. 172

A Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1880), p. 96. Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People by Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1929),

Vol. I, p. 224; "Wheelock Academy," in The Oklahoma School Magazine for April

1, 1932, published by Government boarding schools in Oklahoma (Printed at Chilocco

Indian Agricultural School), p. 7; "Rev. J. J. Red," Oklahoma Trails, op.

cit., p. 172; Mrs. J. P. Gibbons, "Goodland Indian Orphanage," Oklahoma Trails, p. 122.
41 Oklahoma Trails, op. cit., p. 173.

In 1889 the Indian work was transferred from the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions to the Executive Committee of Home Missions. This last named committee still conducts the work at the expense of six thousand dollars per year.⁸³ Some of the mission schools supported by the committee were conducted by heroic women workers. Mrs. Lila P. Read at Wapanucka carried on the work with a small school. At Chishoktak Miss Anna J. Paxson had a boarding school and day school. It was located near Bennington, but Miss Paxson rarely ever saw a white face. The Hotchkins had schools at Caddo and Durant. So the work was carried on, reaching many Indian and white children in isolated places.⁸⁴