

Our story of Rev. J. Leighton Read's mission work among the Indians, begins with that of his father, the superlative Christian, Rev. John Jeremiah Read.

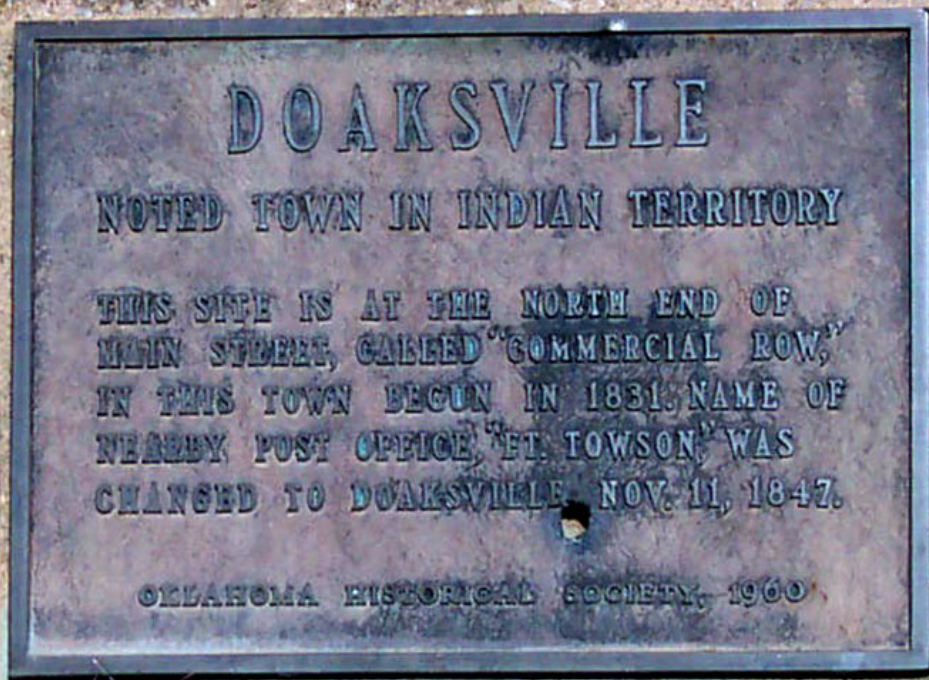
From the narrative contained in William Morrison's book, "The Red Man's Trail," (pp. 78-80), we read the following: "...John Jeremiah Read, was highly regarded among the Chickasaw Nation. Mr. Read was born in Mississippi in 1843. He received a good elementary education in a private academy, but his college work was interrupted by the Civil War, during which he gave four years of service in behalf of his native state. During the war, Mr. Read was converted and felt called to enter the gospel ministry. He entered Oakland College, then the Presbyterian College of Mississippi. After completing the course at Columbia Seminary, he accepted work at Port Gibson, Mississippi, but in a short time, received an urgent call to the First Presbyterian Church at Houston, Texas, which he felt impelled to accept. Here he served for five years with such success, that the membership of this church was doubled and a large indebtedness on its property wiped out. By the fall of 1876, Mr. Read's health had become seriously impaired and was advised by physicians to seek higher altitude."



The Red Man's Trail by William B. Morrison, Ltd.D.

History Department, Southeastern State Teachers College, Durant, OK.
Presbyterian Committee on Publication, Richmond, Virginia, 1932.

"About this time a call came to assume charge of Spencer Academy, then a Choctaw national school for boys under the care of the Presbyterian Committee of Foreign Missions."



“This school was located in the mountainous section of the Choctaw Nation in the eastern portion of the Indian Territory. It offered a hard field of labor for a strong man, but Mr. Read, who had long wanted to be a missionary, accepted the call. Accompanied by his young wife and baby, he made his way to the Territory and opened the school at Spencer in January, 1877.”

“The location of the school was far from the sort of climate needed by Mr. Read, but he remained here for five years, at which time the Choctaws decided to move the site of the Academy. Through offered the superintendency of the school in its new location, Mr. Read decided to devote himself to preaching the gospel among the Chickasaws.”

Rev. John Jeremiah Read (Rev. J. Leighton Read’s father) served as Superintendent of Spencer Academy, near Doaksville, Oklahoma, 1876-1881 (Rev. J. Leighton Read grew up there)

OLD SPENCER ACADEMY
OPENED HERE IN JANUARY 1844

This noted school for Choctaw boys, established by the Choctaw Council, was named for John C. Spencer, U.S. Secretary of War. Subjects through High School were taught. The first graduates went to eastern colleges in 1848. Large buildings were erected in a quadrangle here including Jones Hall, Pitchlynn Hall, Armstrong Hall, a school building and dining hall, with houses for employees, storehouses and barns adjacent.

It was here at Old Spencer Academy that "Steal Away to Jesus," "Roll Jordan Roll," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," spirituals now sung throughout America, were composed by the old Negro, Uncle Wallace who first sang them with his wife, Aunt Minerva to the delight of all who heard them. The two old slaves were hired out by their owner to work for th. Rev. Alexander Reid, Superintendent of Spencer Academy 1851-61.

OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 959



**Early photo of Doakville,
probably dating to the mid-19th century
(Source: Oklahoma Historical Society**

**Doakville is the oldest
community in the Choctaw
Nation**



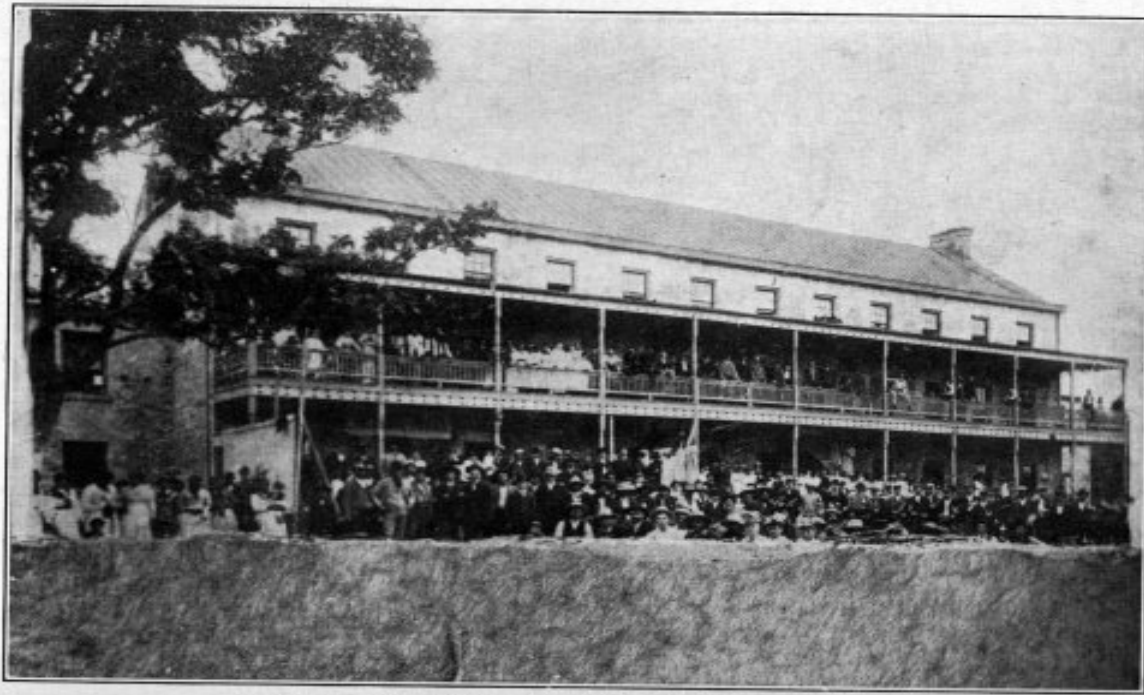
Indian boys playing near Spencer Academy, Doaksville



WAPANUCKA INSTITUTE TODAY

Rev. John Jeremiah Read went into full time evangelistic work among the Chickasaw Indians, and settled near the Wapanucka Academy, pictured above.

“Leaving their first-born child in a lonely grave among the Kiamichi Hills, Mr. and Mrs. Read made their way across the almost trackless Indian country to the Chickasaw Nation. The demoralization so prevalent after the war had swept over these people, and the missionaries had been dismissed from their schools.”
“There were no schools in the section of country assigned to Mr. Read, and his first preaching service was held under a large elm tree. His headquarters near Button Springs, now the town of Wapanucka, was 25 miles from the railroad which had been built through the Territory ten years before.”



COMMENCEMENT AT WAPANUCKA INSTITUTE, 1885

“Within three years, the work of this man bore rich fruit. Not only had he organized churches, but had been successful in the erection of no fewer than four church buildings, giving of his limited means in every case and actually laboring with his hands in the construction of most of them. He later organized churches at Double Springs, Bethel, and Colbert. A number of the churches founded by Mr. Read primarily for the Indians have later developed into permanent and successful organizations in Durant and Indian Presbyteries. It is interesting to note that from one of these little churches founded as an Indian mission, there have come three white ministers. One is a missionary to China, one a missionary to the Comanches and Apaches in western Oklahoma, and the other a prominent Presbyterian preacher in an important Southern city.”



Photograph of Wapanucka Academy, Chickasaw Schools File, Holisso Research Center, Chickasaw Cultural Center, Sulphur, Oklahoma

The Wapanucka Academy - Rear View or West View

“Mr. Read was a man of great zeal and tireless activity. In those days of no roads and travel largely by horseback, he covered from 400-500 miles a month. He was an indefatigable personal worker, and no individual, red, white, or black, was passed by if he saw an opportunity to speak a word for Christ.

“A favorite saying of this devout man was the word of Christ: “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.”

“Much of his labor was performed under conditions of ill health that would have kept other men in bed.”



“For 14 years, Mr. Read was Stated Clerk of Indian Presbytery and during his later years was also a trustee of Calvin Institute at Durant, and Austin College at Sherman, Texas.”

“While in attendance upon a meeting of the Board of Austin College, he fell a victim to pneumonia and passed away at Sherman, February 4, 1898. His remains were taken back to the Indian country and lie interred in the garden of the old home near Wapanucka. His widow, Lila Porter Read, was a faithful and noble example of the self-denying missionary wife.”



This photo of Wapanucka Academy, was taken in the 1930s by researchers for the National Historic Register. Today, the academy consists of nothing more than a few pieces of rubble in a remote farmer's field.