# Yakni Achukma, "The School with a Soul"

# A History of the Goodland Indian Orphanage

*By Ruby Wile**

She had just turned twelve; a tiny wisp of a girl, her long dark pigtails swayed back and forth as the gray truck bounced its way over the hilly terrain of southeastern Oklahoma. August 1, 1927, had dawned early, one of those typical midsummer days when the sun wakes up with a heated vengeance and does not stop glaring until late in the evening. Ten-year-old Thomas LaCroix sat holding on to Julius, Jr., aged eight, and Christina smiled at her brothers reassuringly. They crouched together in the back of the

truck, four small Choctaw children huddled around a large trunk that contained all their belongings. Red dust swirled about their heads, melding with beads of sweat across their foreheads and making talk impossible, but as they passed the small town of Hugo, Christina felt a rush of excitement. When the truck made its turn onto a long gravel entranceway, she tightened her grip on five-year-old Jack. A new life awaited the small LaCroix family underneath an archway that proudly proclaimed, "Goodland Indian Orphanage."[1]

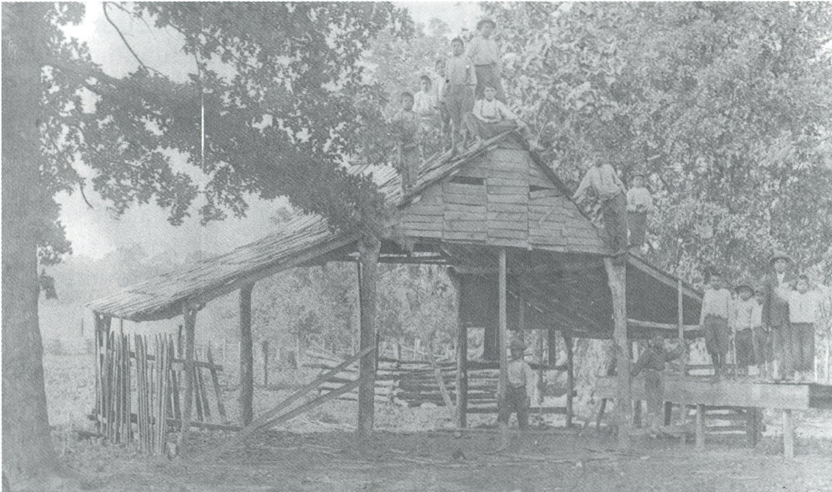
Those children, as well as all the others who entered Goodland, could not have known at the time how important and unique the orphanage was for its day. In an era when the commissioner of Indian affairs, Thomas J. Morgan, had called Native Americans "a people who are . . . a constant menace to their neighbors, a hindrance to civilization and a clog on our progress . . . a race of barbarians and semi-savages," this quiet school in rural Oklahoma provided Native American children with education, shelter, and nourishment along with the love and respect they deserved.[2]

On April 15, 2000, the Goodland Presbyterian Children's Home celebrated its 150th anniversary by noting the significant legacy of contributions it has made to the lives of thousands of Indian children. As an outgrowth of the Goodland Mission established in 1850, it bears the distinction of being one of the oldest Protestant homes for children and the oldest Presbyterian church in continuous existence in the state of Oklahoma. As late as 1960 Goodland remained the only Indian orphanage directed by the Presbyterian Church.[3]

Goodland's real significance, however, rests in qualities other than these distinctions. Unlike several other Indian boarding schools whose only apparent goals were forced assimilation and the complete eradication of Indian culture, Goodland took the unique position of welcoming all tribes, working diligently to blend each child's indigenous beliefs with the new teachings of his white neighbors. Although assimilation was indeed part of the school's intent, the basic idea that motivated five generations of Presbyterians was to help the Indian children learn to function in a Christian world while maintaining a strong degree of reverence for their native culture. They accomplished that goal through love, education, and physical labor. All children who passed beneath the stone archway were valued and kindly treated. Dr. Aaron Dry, a 1939 graduate, related that "the work ethic, respect and responsibilities learned were probably more important than what . . . they learned in the classroom."[4]

The remarkable story of Goodland began in 1789 when Secretary of War Henry Knox wrote to George Washington asking him for men of excellent moral character to live with the Indians with the express goals of educating them and converting them to Christianity.[5] Presbyterian minister Cyrus Kingsbury stepped forward in 1818 to volunteer his services first to the Cherokees by opening the Brainerd Mission School and then to the Choctaw reservations of Mississippi.[6] Despite an injury sustained as a youth, earning him the Choctaw name "Limping Wolf," Kingsbury maintained a vigilant watch over his missions. Riding from post to post like a statesman, he handled the many problems that arose with great skill and devotion.[7] In later years Kingsbury served on the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a Presbyterian and Congregational organization, and received an endorsement from Pres. James Madison who visited Kingsbury's mission in Mississippi promising supplies for building schools.[8]

In the early nineteenth century the American government began debating the forced removal of Indian tribes from their ancestral lands to new homes in Indian Territory, a journey that came to be called "The Trail of Tears." Most Indians were opposed to the move, but a few argued that their tribe would never be secure as long as they were under white influence. In 1829 Pres. Andrew Jackson declared his plan for Indian removal, and after 1830 the exodus be-



*In the early years, most of Goodland's outbuildings were constructed of hand-hewn logs and rough lumber (opposite). Between 1894 and 1909 the boys lived in this log dormitory (above) (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society, No 19250, opposite; Taken from Sammy D. Hogue,* The Goodland Indian Orphanage: A Story of Christian Missions *[Goodland, Choctaw Nation: Goodland Indian Orphanage, 1940], above).*

gan. Each tribe went to a specified location west of the Mississippi River.[9]

The United States finalized negotiations for removal of the Choctaw tribe in 1830 with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The Choctaws ceded their possessions east of the Mississippi River and agreed to move at government expense to lands within Indian Territory.[10] The actual removal began in the fall of 1831 with groups of 500 to 1,500 people under the charge of contractors. They traveled through bitter January cold, most of them bare-footed, begging for corn from farmers, and burying their dead along the way. Brutal conditions and diseases claimed nearly 10 percent of those who began the journey, but by 1835 the majority of the tribe had settled along the banks of the Arkansas and Red Rivers. Kingsbury, then forty-nine years old and in frail health, permanently closed down the Mississippi missions and followed his adopted people westward into Indian Territory.

In February, 1836, ninety-one years before Christina and her brothers traveled south on Highway 271, Kingsbury and his re-

maining band of Choctaw Indians followed a similar route into what is now southeastern Oklahoma on the final leg of their torturous journey. Known to his faithful followers by that time as the "Apostle to the Choctaws," he observed the abundant springs, plentiful timber, and lush farmland of the area and named their new home "Yakni Achukma," meaning Land Good.[11] Such sentiments were echoed by others, including one of the earliest teachers at Goodland who stated, "When I first saw [Goodland], it seemed as if it must have dropped from the clouds into the heart of the forest."[12]

Kingsbury quickly established the Goodland Mission with help from his Presbyterian minister friends Ebenezer Hotchkin, Alfred Wright, known as "the beloved physician," C. C. Copeland, and Cyrus Byington, a preacher who became notorious throughout the South for his long-winded "haystack prayer meetings."[13] The men went on to build other missions at Wheelock, Stockbridge, Goodwater, and Pine Ridge. Kingsbury continued his work with the Choctaws for another thirty-five years until his death on June 27, 1870, at the age of eighty-four.[14] Recovering from the trials of their journey, the Choctaws began to prosper in their new surroundings. Essentially an agricultural people, they established extensive cotton plantations, orchards, and cornfields.[15]

In the meantime the ABCFM voted in 1848 to send Mr. and Mrs. John Lathrop to Goodland Mission as its first missionaries to the Indians.[16] Building on the foundation conceived by Kingsbury, the Lathrops began a program to erect a parsonage and church seven miles north of the Red River near the town of Hugo. But the work proved too strenuous for them, and after only two years they resigned. The board then appointed Rev. Oliver Porter Stark and his wife to the post.[17]

Educated in theology at Princeton University, Oliver Stark had been serving as superintendent of the Old Spencer Academy for Indian Boys near Fort Towson, Choctaw Nation, when the Presbyterians approached him with the idea of beginning a boarding school for the Choctaws. After much consideration, Stark and his wife finally agreed to the move, but they were quickly overwhelmed with the amount of work that needed to be done. They spent days clearing the land for a garden, an orchard, and a farm. They planted trees, dug wells, taught the Indians to farm, and endured the beginnings of the Civil War during their tenure there, all the while making the modest sum of $600 a year.[18]

During the week Stark rode his horse on a fifty-mile circuit dispensing both medical and spiritual aid to neighbors. Desiring to

preach to the Choctaws in their native tongue, he mastered the Choctaw language in a remarkably short three years. Stark's wife immediately began teaching four young Indian children in the side room of their log cabin. It took Stark only twenty-four months to procure funds to build a log cabin, and in 1852 the Goodland Presbyterian Church met for the first time in its new place of worship, a seven-room, one and one-half story building.

*Sharing a picnic at Goodland in the early years were (seated, left to right) Mary Semple Hotchkin and Philena Thacher Hotchkin and (standing) Mrs. John Kingsbury (Courtesy Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Library).*

Although Stark took enormous pride in his new congregation, he openly expressed concern about the emotional state of the Indian children who lived nearby. He was especially concerned about the separations of husbands and wives and the disastrous effects upon their children. He said, "They are left uncared for, with no homes, to wander about and grow up addicted to the worst of vices."[19] He later added that the Indians' only hope lay in education, with the church supplying both material and spiritual salvation.[20]

While the building took shape, Mrs. Stark's enrollment continued to expand until she finally had to move her forty pupils into the church. In 1854, however, she died while giving birth to her fourth child. Less than two weeks later her infant daughter also died, leaving Stark the task of raising three children and running the school. Later that year help arrived from New York in the form of Miss Harriett McCormick. She became the new teacher and two years later the new Mrs. Stark. She and Oliver would eventually have an additional eight children to add to the growing enrollment at Goodland School.

The graciousness and hospitality of the Presbyterian newcomers greatly impressed the Indians who lived nearby. When Kingsbury began his first ABCFM mission at Brainerd, he asked the War Department for additional support, stating that Indians were just as

deserving of an education as whites. Francis Paul Prucha, a leading authority on Indian policies, quoted Kingsbury's philosophy of offering the benefits of education to Native Americans:

> I considered it to be the grand object of the present undertaking . . . to impart to them that knowledge which is calculated to make them useful citizens, and pious Christians. In order to do this, it appeared necessary to instruct them in the various branches of common English education, to form them to habits of industry, and to give them competent knowledge of the economy of civilized life.[21]

When the Choctaws learned of the school, many of them moved their homes closer so they could send their children to school and even joined them on Sundays for church. Most of them insisted on education and literacy for their children as vital tools for survival in the white man's world. They saw the school as an opportunity for their dispersed families to associate with children from their own tribe. There was "an eagerness with which the Indians of the Five Tribes requested schools in their country . . . as a means of defending—not destroying—their nationality."[22]

Some Indians believed in the preservation of their identity, land, and resources. They also saw education as their only chance to survive in a white-dominated society. Other families simply needed the food and clothing the schools provided.[23] The persistence of the church and the Indians themselves helped the missionary school retain its hold on Indian education.[24] Any resistance quickly vanished when the Indians learned that the government contributed more than half the monies needed to maintain the school. Historian W. B. Morrison stated: "The chieftains decided to give . . . better support in every way. One old chieftain expressed the sentiments of his people when he said, 'The Choctaws are ignorant; they know when day comes and when night comes. That's all they know. We expect to die in our old habit, but we want our children to do better.'"[25]

The methods of the school were typical of most missionary efforts during the nineteenth century. The children stayed for the entire year, with a short vacation during the summer. They were under the supervision and instruction of the missionaries, educated in English and in their own language, and expected to learn daily scriptures and catechisms. Everything the child needed was furnished, and in return he submitted to discipline and devoted a certain part of each day to school maintenance.[26]

Students read the New Testament, studied arithmetic, geography, and writing, and spent hours memorizing the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. By the end of the 1850s attendance averaged

twenty students, and the prospects for the future seemed remarkably encouraging.[27] Goodland and its missionaries became both home and family to the children, and Oliver Stark continued to preach that those who lived in destitution could, with a little exertion and hard labor, improve their lives considerably.

During the 1850s the intense reformation spirit that had started in the East several years earlier stretched its zealous fingers into the pastoral hills of the Choctaw Nation. As the issues of women's rights, temperance, and abolition of slavery spread with religious passion across the heartland of America, evangelical reformers intensified their efforts to educate and civilize those less fortunate. Missionaries envisioned a world where all men were equal regardless of color, race, or gender, where the cleansing hand of Christianity obliterated crime, and where churches overflowed with benevolent worshipers. As the decade came to an end, a great social and moral revolution had begun to spread among the tribes, and optimism for the eventual total acculturation of the Native American reached new heights.[28]

The quiet life of the school changed abruptly when the Civil War began. In 1861 two companies of Choctaw troops trained for service with the Confederate army on the grounds at Goodland. The principal chief of the Choctaws, Capt. Ben Smallwood, drilled his Second Regiment there, while schoolchildren watched in awe, their noses pressed close to the windowpanes.[29] Composed solely of fullblood Choctaws, the Second Regiment was known as the Company of Threes, because three sons from each of at least five different families were members of the troop.[30]

Stark's church then had more than 200 parishioners, and including the students at the new Presbyterian school in Bokchito, thirty-five miles northwest of Goodland, the school boasted seventy pupils. However, because of his New York background, Stark feared that people would believe he was an abolitionist and a northern sympathizer. For the good of the mission, Stark moved his family to Paris, Texas, where he established the Lamar Female Seminary.[31] Before he left Goodland, he wrote about the Choctaws: "There is an increased desire for improvement, arising from a conviction . . . of their inferiority, which nothing but improvement of morals, intelligence and an increased spirit of industry can improve."[32] Stark was later reassigned to the New Spencer Academy for Indian Boys located four miles north of Soper, Choctaw Nation, where he remained until his death in March, 1884.

With the onset of the Civil War and the departure of the Starks, the mission and school faced perilous times. Presbyterians and Indians worked side by side to continue the Saturday and Sabbath schools, with residents of the community paying the teachers' salaries. But there were problems. Because of the severe poverty of the people, attendance dropped considerably as families struggled to maintain their farms. Many of the children knew no language except Choctaw, and the teachers were not always properly qualified. But the people were eager to learn and, when the war ended in 1865, the elders of the church selected new teachers, pledging tribal funds to pay for their meager salaries.[33] The Choctaws were determined that their children would be educated, and provisions for compulsory attendance were added to the annals of the Choctaw Nation.[34]

In 1869 Pres. Ulysses S. Grant wrote that the single major objective of the Indian education system was "the civilization and ultimate citizenship of the American Indian."[35] Beginning with his inaugural address, Grant attempted to install his "Peace Policy" as

*Boys typically learned skills related to farming and stock-raising (above), while girls (opposite) learned the domestic arts (Courtesy Goodland Presbyterian Children's Home unless noted).*

the vehicle for cooperation between the government and the churches. Grant's program contained four agendas: the appointment of a fullblood Seneca Indian, Ely S. Parker, as commissioner of Indian affairs; church control of agents on reservations; creation of the Board of Indian Commissioners; and an expanded and intensified program of federal aid for education and missions.[36] Historian Frederick E. Hoxie reaffirmed that the education of Native Americans was a top priority of the federal authorities. Treaties with individual tribes often contained pledges to the "Great Father," the most extraordinary pledge being the 1868 Peace Commission's promise of a schoolhouse and teacher for every thirty children.

Boarding schools began to appear all across the United States. In 1872 George Grant, a minister from Nova Scotia, wrote of his travels:

> As the Indian has no chance of [continued] existence except by conforming to civilized ways, the sooner that the Government or the Christian people awake to the necessity of establishing schools among every tribe the better. Little can be done with the old, and it may take two, three or more generations before the old habits of a people are changed; but, by always taking hold of the young, the work can be done.[37]

In 1878 Gen. Richard H. Pratt established the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. A staunch assimilationist, Pratt's school became the standard by which other boarding schools were measured. Unlike the principles that guided Goodland from its inception, the boarding school policies in that era often were less kind. The Indian children were expected to adopt the Euro-American lifestyle and become self-sufficient farmers in the tradition of their white benefactors. In order to strip away their inherited culture, Pratt took as his motto, "Kill the Indian, save the Man." The school at Carlisle required Indian children to exchange their tribal clothing for uniforms and to have their long hair cut into more acceptable hairstyles. To further break the ties that bound them to their ancestors, each child received a new name, ostensibly one that teachers found more pronounceable, and administrators banned their native languages. The new physical environment was designed to remind the students of their lesser status among white society.[38]

Forced assimilation soon became the basis for federal policy with the passage of the Dawes Act in February, 1887.[39] Americans were on the move westward, the frontier era had ended, and new attitude toward the Indian peoples reflected the change. As wards of the United States, each tribal member received 160 acres. Government leaders believed that an allotment would instill pride in land ownership, presumably a basic value for all Americans.[40] The forced assimilation of America's Indians and their children began in earnest, but the policies of gradual acculturation established at Goodland continued unchanged.

In 1890 the school assumed a new mission for orphans and began an era of expansion and growth. Rev. Joseph Parker Gibbons, a Presbyterian minister from South Carolina, became pastor of the Goodland Presbyterian Church, an office he would hold for the next twenty-eight years while being paid the modest salary of fifty dollars per month.[41] Mr. and Mrs. Bartwell McCann, both fullblood Choctaws, became the teachers/interpreters, and in 1894 the first log cabin dormitory reached completion. Miss Carrie Gooding, who later married Basil LeFlore, the inaugural governor of the Choctaw Nation, welcomed the first Indian orphans, sixteen young boys. One of the first orphans accepted was a young man named Silas Leonard Bacon, who later became superintendent of the orphanage.

Finances dictated that the dormitory be simple—one large room with a stick and mud chimney and a loft for sleeping, with one side serving as a kitchen and dining room. Each week one of the mem-

bers of the congregation drove a wagon from house to house asking for contributions of meat, lard, flour, potatoes, sugar, molasses, and oil.[42] Everyone in the community did their best to help. Basil LeFlore's home soon became one of several that housed anywhere from eight to ten orphans at any given time.[43]

Several various Choctaw organizations also used Goodland as a meeting place. Many of the Indians brought their slaves with them from Mississippi, but it was 1866 before treaties required tribes to provide education for the children of their former slaves.[44] While the freedmen were outspoken about their desires for schooling, they were both unwilling and unable to help financially. In August, 1894, the *Annual Report to the Commission of the Five Civilized Tribes* recorded a meeting of the Choctaw Colored Citizens' Association that took place at Goodland. They presented a prepared statement of principles regarding land ownership to the commission.[45] However, their pleas to secure an equal share of the Choctaw estate fell on deaf ears.

The future of the small school looked promising until 1898 when disaster struck. McCann and his co-worker died within a few months of each other, and several years of poor crops led to depleted storehouses. Rev. and Mrs. Gibbons fought to keep the day school operational, but the elders of the church closed the dormitories at the end of the school year in May, 1898. Finally in 1901 several determined elders obtained a contract from the Choctaw Council to reopen the orphanage. The council provided six dollars per month per child for each of the forty pupils enrolled at the time. Council members then appointed Silas Bacon as superintendent of the school, and he began an aggressive move to improve and enlarge the community by adding four dormitories, a bathhouse, and a pump house. Six years later the ABCFM voted to build a new home for the Bacons to replace the log house where they lived.

Over the next few years the orphanage grew steadily. Indians from the Choctaw tribe gave land to the school, and in 1908 the school boasted seventy-five acres. The Choctaw Council gave Bacon $3,500 to build an auditorium, and in 1918 church members donated enough money to build a dormitory for girls. But after twenty-two years, Bacon had to resign in 1921 because of tuberculosis-related health problems. Before he left, Bacon spoke of the struggles he encountered when he first took office:

> This is the way our little school gets start. It start like it was one orphan itself, just like childrens living in it was orphan. Not change much yet in any way, still looks like orphan yet . . . Think I might be too

*The student body gathered for a patriotic program in front of the school about the time the LaCroix family entered Goodland in 1927 (p. 410). The LaCroix children (left), in 1930 after they had lived at Goodland for three years, spent their summers with their father and new stepmother. Christina was then fifteen years old. Julius (second row, left) was eleven, Thomas (second row, right) thirteen, Jack (front row, left) eight, and Gene (front row, right) five (Courtesy OHS, No. 10967, p. 410; courtesy Christina LaCroix Crews, left).*

> much shame to beg for myself; but when I see them little Indian childrens hungry and cold, seem like I not too shame to beg for them [*sic*].[46]

In 1923 the Indian Presbytery transferred control of the orphanage to the Synod of Oklahoma Presbyterian Church. Although then under different leadership, the philosophy of the school remained the same. Children continued to arrive on a weekly basis, some delivered by their parents who then returned home, while others simply showed up at the door alone and abandoned. One small boy arrived by train in nearby Hugo with a note pinned to his clothing instructing the conductor to take him to Goodland. His only possessions were stuffed into a small paper bag.[47]

A new superintendent, Samuel Bailey Spring, took over Bacon's construction projects, adding two more dormitories, a schoolroom for the high school students, and two cottages. Two hundred fifty children representing ten tribes lived in the orphanage. When debts mounted, Spring, a fullblood Choctaw born near Goodland, went to "the rich Indians" to ask for donations.[48] It was that industrious

new superintendent who stood waiting patiently on the front steps of the orphanage when the LaCroix family arrived on a hot August day in 1927.

Julius LaCroix, the children's father, lived on a small acreage between Antlers and Rattan, about twenty miles north of Goodland. When his wife Ruth developed tuberculosis, he had no choice but to put his four oldest children in an orphanage. Because Ruth was one-half Choctaw, he thought of Goodland. Matrons made room in the already overflowing dormitories for the LaCroix children, directing Christina to the middle girls' dormitory and Julius and Jack to the little boys' and Thomas to the big boys' dormitories. When Mrs. LaCroix died nine months later, three-year-old Gene joined his brothers and sister, living with one of the house parents. Every Sunday Julius LaCroix traveled by train to Hugo, then walked the additional four miles to Goodland to see his family.

By the time the LaCroix children arrived, the school had six dormitories, each one divided by age and gender. Although love and respect permeated the classroom, a strict schedule regulated the day's activities. Each day began at 5:45 A.M. with the tolling of the bell to wake the students. They had fifteen minutes to get dressed, make their beds, and tidy the room before breakfast. When the bell rang again, they marched single file to Bacon Hall, the large brick building named for Silas Bacon, where all meals were served.[49]

*Students at Goodland rang the bell to mark their schedules and activities.*

Marching was a common practice at boarding schools in the 1920s. Children marched to meals, to class, and sometimes in their spare time just to keep out of mischief. In the Goodland dining hall the children sat in groups of twelve with a matron walking around the dining room observing manners. The older girls were responsible for bringing food to the tables and keeping the bowls filled. The next bell rang and a student began playing the piano as they marched out single file, boys in one line and girls in another. Most schools and orphan-

ages used bell-ringing as signals for various activities. At the Cherokee Female Seminary near Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, the girls waited at their tables for the bell that told them to sit, then rose to the bell and left the room in the same mannerly fashion in which they entered.[50] After meals at Goodland, the older girls brought in massive tubs of water; the younger girls washed the dishes, while the older ones dried them and cleaned the floors.

An assembly that included Bible study, prayers, and singing followed breakfast. School began at 8:30 A.M. In her award-winning

*Student activities at Goodland often included elements of their native traditions.*

book about life at the Indian boarding school near present Chilocco, Oklahoma, historian Tsianina Lomawaima states that "Indian education flowed far beyond academic or vocational boundaries, soaking the child's growing up in the cleansing bath of Christian labor."[51] The general education policy was to teach academics for the first half of the day. The classes were not planned to meet any specific Indian problems or needs; they were the same courses offered to the public school students, only less intensive because of the time involved. The other half of the day found the boys engaged in

agricultural trades while the girls learned home economics. Home economics involved work details, a form of manual labor for the support of the school that the children found more enjoyable than the classroom.[52]

Jack LaCroix recalled the hours spent tending the sweet-potato beds. After the plow turned over the furrow in the middle of the row, one boy poked a hole in the ground with a stick and the next boy pressed a sweet-potato slip into it. He also remembered planting, shelling, and consuming tons of black-eyed peas, and today eats

*In 1957 a group of Goodland's youngest students met actor Tim McCoy.*

them only to mark the new year.[53] The boys headed off to milk the cows, work on the farm, clean up the litter in the yard, chop and gather firewood, or help with the hogs. Girls learned the essentials of home life: sewing, washing, canning, and cooking. Saturdays meant ironing, and that skill became a challenge for the older girls who wanted to do a good job when they ironed their boyfriend's shirts.[54]

Goodland proved unique in nearly every respect, but one of the most important was the manner in which officials handled discipline. Many boarding schools were harsh, and some, such as the Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma, were especially

severe, chastising the children for the slightest infraction.[55] For example, if caught speaking in their native tongue, children at Riverside were forced to put lye on their toothbrushes, and boys were occasionally made to wear a ball and chain or dress in female clothing. But at Goodland punishment was limited to the bullring, an area staked out in a circle where children who misbehaved walked while contemplating their bad behavior or lack of studying. Julius devoted many hours to walking and reciting the catechism, and his brothers took their turns there as well.[56] If a child accrued more hours per week than he had time to walk, the excess time would be held over until the next Saturday. Consistent but loving reprimands were usually enough to keep most children out of trouble.

As was typical of most boarding schools, a military attitude prevailed, and some mornings found the boys doing calisthenics in the yard before the bell tolled for breakfast. When in the classroom, the boys and girls sat beside each other, but in church a higher set of standards prevailed. Girls sat on the right side of the building with boys on the left. A sentry stood watch should sleepy heads nod off, and although the girls were generally tickled with a feather, the boys received a sharp tap on the head.[57] Sundays and Wednesday evenings were devoted to Bible studies. Bedtime included devotions and prayer groups. The Presbyterians believed that religion was an important factor in molding the lives of the small children.

The official language of the school remained English, but the children were never punished for speaking their native tongue. In fact, the parents were very insistent that their children learn the white man's language. When one six-year-old girl arrived at Goodland, she began her first lesson in English, but she was often heard on campus speaking in her native tongue as an older child interpreted for her.[58] The instructors taught beaded work, and the music director organized a band whose members wore authentic deerskin costumes. The teachers especially encouraged music, and graduates today can still sing "The Goodland Song," written by the first honor graduate of the class of 1939, Ted Key. Its chorus says, "Goodland, our dreamland, home, home. We know no place as dear as thee."[59]

Christina later remembered the watermelon socials at the beginning of every school year, while others recalled Saturday nights spent outside on the lawn watching movies.[60] Jack recalled singing for pennies when visitors came to Goodland, fishing for crawdads, and students having their heads shaved to get rid of the lice problem.[61] Dorothy Fincher, director of religious education for the Synod of the Oklahoma Presbyterian Church, visited the campus in No-

vember, 1928, and wrote: "[I saw] bright, smiling faces, children singing as they cross[ed] the campus, the excitement of football games and . . . long jaunts through the woods to hunt hickory nuts and [to] roast wieners. Everywhere the hum of activity but with it all a deep underlying peace and contentment which adds the joy to life."[62]

The financial crash of 1929 brought about a severe change for the school and orphanage. To add to the problem, in April, 1930, Samuel Bailey Spring died, leaving the board of directors with the question of whether to find a suitable replacement or to close the doors. The orphanage buildings were in sad need of repair, farm production alone could not feed the 250 children, and debts had mounted to more than $30,000.[63]

The future looked bleak when Rev. E. D. Miller strode onto the campus. Miller, a Philadelphia lawyer, quickly took charge, heading first to Washington, D.C., to meet with Oklahoma senator Elmer Thomas to renew the contract for the school. He then began an aggressive remodeling program that included planting orchards, reviving the dying gardens, repairing walkways, and initiating tennis and football programs. Once a month Miller gathered the children in assembly and announced each child's chore for the next month. In addition each dormitory accepted the responsibility for one day's work in the garden per week. They terraced and irrigated the farmland, increased poultry and dairy herds, and as the months went by, they watched the debt slowly decrease. Six years later Miller proudly announced that the final bill had been paid.[64]

In late 1930 another important change took place. Goodland Orphanage School was consolidated with the rural public school of Goodland, District 13. That meant that the teachers' salaries would then be paid with state funds. Christina and her brothers enjoyed the friendship of the non-Indian children who sat beside them in the classrooms. By 1932 the high school had been fully accredited, and when Christina graduated she enrolled in college.[65]

Starting in 1933 four more buildings were added to the campus, including a barn, auditorium/gymnasium, grade-school building, and shop. Funding came from special gifts, grants, school funds, and the Works Progress Administration, part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression. Gifts of land and money continued to trickle in, and the property then measured 390 acres. Daniel F. Wade, a fullblood Choctaw known to his friends as "the Christian cowboy," donated money for a hospital in 1933.[66]

By 1940 the school boasted more than 250 students ranging from kindergarten to high school, plus seventy community students who attended the day school. Track meets, glee clubs, football teams, and drama presentations kept the pupils busy in the off-hours. Boarding schools were often the introductory settings for relationships that lasted into adulthood.[67] The LaCroix brothers remembered the football games played in a pasture behind the dormitories, having to chase the cows off the lot between plays, and "never quite knowing what we might step in."[68]

World War II exploded onto the tiny campus in southeastern Oklahoma in 1941. A. V. Crews remembered standing beside the flagpole when a radio newscaster announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. In an interview with the *Daily Oklahoman*, he recalled that no one knew anything about Honolulu, but they rushed to the school to unroll the maps and locate the island.[69] Young men from Goodland who served in the war wrote letters home telling of the hardships, one of them saying, "We shall do our best to end this war, so that all of you will be glad to say . . . 'That boy is from Goodland.'"[70]

*Like many preteens in the 1950s, these girls look at what appears to be an "autograph hound" signed by their classmates.*

*These young men hang clothing in their room in the boys' dormitory that showed signs of deteriorating conditions by the 1950s.*

During the years between 1941 and 1945, time and overcrowding began to take their toll on the school. In 1946 Oscar Alexander Gardner and his wife became superintendents of the orphanage. Unfortunately the once-prosperous farm operation was losing money, the water supply looked precarious, health problems abounded, and contributions were at an all-time low. Gardner also inherited a debt of $13,000 along with buildings that were old and inadequate. In addition, he discovered that the disgruntled staff had been taking food home while the children were going hungry. Gardner decided to reduce the farming project, and he began a vigorous campaign to acquire donations from churches and individuals. His hard work paid off, and before he retired in 1957 he had raised more than $200,000.[71]

In 1950 nine tribes were represented at Goodland, including 177 Choctaws, 17 Chickasaws, 2 Cherokees, 6 Creeks, 2 Seminoles, 6 Apaches, 5 Sac and Foxes, 1 Kickapoo, and 1 Arapaho, plus 47 white children.[72] But the next decade saw a drop in attendance and enrollment as more and more families moved to larger cities, and the number of new students dwindled into the teens.

The name of the orphanage changed in 1960 and the high school students were sent to a local school in nearby Grant, Oklahoma. Only the elementary school remained operational. As the Goodland Presbyterian Children's Home, it began for the first time not only to teach, but also to house non-Indian children. Ten years later another change took place. From 1970 to 1989 Goodland housed state children and juvenile delinquents. The goals and practices remained the same, but the policies that had been in place for more than 100 years changed with the times. In 1988 David Dearinger became the new director of the home, and while instigating a stricter, highly structured program, he also returned to traditional methods that were geared more to children with special problems.[73] The military-styled program evolved into a home-styled program for boys aged six to eighteen.

In 1993 the Department of Human Services notified the home that it would no longer contract for residential care. Although the cancellation costs the school approximately $70,000 in revenue each year, Dearinger is adamant that the policy established by the Presbyterian churches remain the same until the Presbyterians direct him to change it.[74] Students today attend church, study the Bible, and have daily devotions on a voluntary basis, but they live in cottages with house parents rather than in segregated dormitories.

In 1987 the *Daily Oklahoman* suggested to its readers that Oklahoma needed a proper memorial to the early-day missionaries who established churches and schools among the various Indian tribes. To dramatize the important role that churches played in getting the Indians established in their new homes, community leaders sought national historic site status for the Goodland Indian Orphanage.[75] Although the initial effort failed, devoted Goodland graduates continue the struggle to make the church at the Goodland Orphanage an Oklahoma Historic Landmark.

Tsianina Lomawaima argues that Native Americans who attended boarding schools are "living archives, storehouses of memories and experiences," which raises the question: what happened to the children who graduated and left Goodland?[76] Dr. Benjamin Franklin Belvin, class of 1933, for example, became the first Native American in United States history to earn a degree of divinity. He served as a missionary to the Kiowas, Apaches, Creeks, and Seminoles and earned the nickname of "God's Little War Horse." Woodrow Wilson, a Choctaw who lived at Goodland with his six brothers and sisters, became a second lieutenant in the navy and worked for the Atomic Energy Commission. Floyd Logan Thompson, also a

Choctaw, graduated in 1941. In World War II he flew twenty-five missions over Germany with the air force, spent fourteen months in prison camps, and earned the Distinguished Flying Cross. Dorothy Tims Turner, a graduate of the class of 1957, became a nurse for Dr. Allen Greer, a famous heart and lung specialist. Later she assisted Dr. Christiaan Barnard in his heart transplant surgeries. Stanley Mathews joined the Merchant Marine Corps when he graduated in 1942. He earned both his bachelor of science and master's degrees and retired as Choctaw County school superintendent in 1985. Dr. Aaron Dry, a 1939 graduate, earned a doctorate in education from the University of Tulsa in 1970 and enjoyed a thirty-five-year career in the public school systems. Hotona Walker Roebuck created the school of nursing at Talihina Junior College, worked in Washington, D.C., developing a specialized nursing program, and, after retiring to California, she was named that state's outstanding senior citizen.[77] When Lomawaima wrote about Native Americans as living archives, she could have been looking at the impressive record from the Goodland Orphanage.

And what of the LaCroix family? Christina received bachelor and master's degrees from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant. She married her Goodland boyfriend, Harry Crews, and taught home economics at Goodland and in public elementary schools until her retirement in 1980. Tom studied engineering and became a draftsman for a large steel corporation in Fort Worth, Texas. He retired in 1988 to spend his time gardening and passed away in November, 1999. Jack graduated from Bacone College, entered the Army Air Corps, and became a salesman for Wilson and Company in Oklahoma City. He has since retired and lives in Enid. Julius graduated from the University of Oklahoma Medical School and was a respected general practitioner in Hugo until his retirement in 1990. The youngest, Gene, joined the merchant marines and traveled the world. When he decided to settle in the states, he attended the New Orleans Academy of Art and, now retired, spends many hours doing volunteer artist work.

In David Wallace Adams' book, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*, he stated that most boarding schools were "established for the sole purpose of severing the child's cultural and psychological connection to his native heritage."[78] He asserted that the "white threat came in many forms . . . and in the end, it came in the form of schools."[79] Adams may be correct in his judgment of some Indian boarding schools, but that assessment does not hold true of all

schools. Sonciray Bonnell stated in her dissertation that alumni of the Chemawa Boarding School in Oregon still hold that school in high regard despite negative stereotypes.[80] That attitude is especially accurate for Goodland Indian Orphanage. Letters, interviews, and testimonials all affirm the loving spirit that pervaded the school. By integrating schooling with the identity of the Indian people, the Goodland student learned to adapt to life in a white man's world in a warm and loving environment and became stronger both educationally and culturally because of it.

At the 150th anniversary celebration, classmates gathered for pictures, laughed at balding heads, and reminisced about events from their childhood. Four generations of LaCroix graduates drove once more through the archway of the orphanage, their vehicles loaded down with scrapbooks and grandchildren. Smiles and hugs awaited them, just as they did almost fifty-three years earlier. Christina looked around lovingly at the familiar cheerful faces. "To this day," she said, "I always feel closer to anyone from Goodland. We were family."[81] Dry agrees: "We were taught to love each other and serve our country. I wouldn't trade my Goodland memories for anything. It was the best experience of my life."[82] Perhaps former Goodland student and historian Muriel H. Wright said it best many years ago when she wrote that Goodland truly was a "school with a soul."[83]

## ENDNOTES

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1 Christina LaCroix Crews, interview by author, January 18, 2000.

2 Elizabeth Hope Styron, "Native American Education: Documents from the 19th Century," retrieved January 20, 2000, available from http:/www.duke.edu/%7Eehs1 / education; INTERNET.

3 Brenda Wilson, "Goodland Home," retrieved January 20, 2000, available from http:/www.lou44@choctawnation.com; INTERNET. Although other churches were established in what is now Oklahoma prior to 1835, Goodland was the first Presbyterian Church established in the state.

4 Aaron Dry, telephone interview by author, March 28, 2000.

5 Robert H. Keller, Jr., *American Protestantism and United States Indian Policy, 1869–1882* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 5.

6 W. B. Morrison, "Diary of Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 3 (June, 1925): 153.

7 W. B. Morrison, "The Choctaw Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 4 (June, 1926): 172.

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[9] Albert L. Hurtado and Peter Iverson, eds., *Major Problems in American Indian History* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 235.
[10] Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (1932; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 28.
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[12] Ibid., 17.
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[23] Ibid.
[24] Margaret Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination, 1928–1973* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 85.
[25] Morrison, "Choctaw Mission," 173.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Hogue, *Goodland Indian Orphanage*, 24.
[28] Prucha, *Great Father*, 102.
[29] Hogue, *Goodland Indian Orphanage*, 46.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 21.
[32] Ibid., 22.
[33] Ibid., 46.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Sally J. McBeth, *Ethnic Identity and the Boarding School Experience of West-Central Oklahoma American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), 104.
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[52] McBeth, *Ethnic Identity*, 220.
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[54] Crews, interview.
[55] McBeth, "Primer and the Hoe," 7.
[56] Julius LaCroix, Jr., interview by author, January 18, 2000.
[57] Crews, interview.
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[60] Crews, interview.
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[62] Dorothy Fincher, "A Field Worker Visits Goodland," *The Indian Arrow*, November, 1928.
[63] Hogue, *Goodland Indian Orphanage*, 93.
[64] Ibid., 95.
[65] Crews, interview.
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