

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAY 2 1975  
DATE ENTERED MAY 21 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Spencer Academy (first site)

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

c. 10 m. N of

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fort Towson *vic.*

— VICINITY OF Spencerville

No. 3

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Oklahoma

40

Choctaw

023

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED, partly	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Lloyd Hawkins

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Fort Towson

VICINITY OF

STATE

Oklahoma

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Choctaw County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Hugo

STATE

Oklahoma

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Oklahoma Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1958

—FEDERAL  STATE —COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Oklahoma Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Spencer Academy opened February 1, 1844. The official report of the commissioner of Indian affairs for that year notes that the buildings first erected were of hewn pine logs with shingle roofs. There was a storehouse, a smokehouse (with room for ten tons of bacon), houses for a farmer and some workmen, a 12 x 15-foot springhouse paved with stones, a servants' house, and a dormitory - Jones Hall.

The school was visited in 1847 by one P. P. Brown. He stayed a week and has left the following account: "As you approach the Institution from the south the first building met with is a good sized stable and shed, about 200 yards from the dwelling houses. Entering the large yard on the north side of the farm, before you stand two large two-story frame buildings painted white. Pitchlynn Hall is on the right, is occupied on the lower floor by Rev. Mr. Ramsey, the Superintendent, and one of the teachers; the upper story by part of the boys.

"Jones Hall is on the left, is occupied by the principal teacher, with another portion of the pupils. Passing into the square formed by the buildings, on the extreme left, you see the school house; it is built of logs, one story high, divided into one large school room and two small recitation rooms. On the north side of the square fronting to the south, stands Armstrong Hall, of the same size and form as the other; occupied on the lower floor by the primary teacher, and the Institution carpenter; on the second floor by the remainder of the boys, principally the smaller ones.

"On the right or east side of the square, is a two story building, occupied by the steward and family, and some female helpers. In the rear of this, the dining room attached to which is the kitchen, bakery, and 'Ton Fuller' [ta-fu-la, food made of crushed corn] room. To the east of Pitchlynn Hall, and a little back, stand the store room, smoke house, and a lodging room for hired help. The three halls have large piazzas extending the whole length, which renders them very pleasant and agreeable."

The buildings suffered from lack of maintenance during the Civil War years. They were reconditioned for the re-opening of the school in 1871. By 1882, however, the buildings had again deteriorated to the point that a special Choctaw committee declared them unfit for continued use and "New" Spencer Academy was authorized for construction on another site. On September 8, 1885, the buildings at "Old" Spencer were sold at public auction by order of the Choctaw General Council. In the late 1930s three of the two-story log buildings were still standing. The spring was still flowing, too. But even the cemetery, several hundred yards to the west, was unfenced and uncared for, some of its grave markers already cracked and broken.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1844 - 1881

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Choctaws had a healthy respect for education that their removal to Indian Territory in the 1830s did not destroy. And they continued to send some of their youth to schools east of the Mississippi. But the results of this training in a distant, alien milieu were not always ideal and tribal leaders soon set out to build an educational system of their own in their new homeland. Official action by the Choctaw Council in November 1842 laid the groundwork for this system. Spencer Academy for boys was the first school authorized by this legislation.

Spencer opened February 1, 1844. (It was named for John Spencer, secretary of War from 1841 to 1843, who donated a 250-pound bell to the institution.) In 1846, after trying without notable success to exercise direct control over the school, the Choctaws turned over management responsibilities to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Alexander Reid became the superintendent finally in mid-1849. He stayed for twenty years and is largely responsible for the solid reputation Spencer acquired and for the influence it had on the Choctaw Nation and many of its leaders. Although he strongly opposed slavery -- this among a people that owned slaves and as superintendent of an institution that depended for its well-being on slavery (the Choctaws themselves performed few menial tasks) -- Reid held Spencer together during the trying pre-Civil War years.

There is a curious, but not insignificant, sidebar story to evolve from this trying era. Negroes were an intricate part of academy life at Spencer. And two of them, Wallace and Minerva Willis, often sang for the students and missionaries deeply spiritual songs reflecting the Negro's keen awareness of hardships in the present and his abiding faith in a glorious future. Reid responded to these songs, jotting them down, remembering them. And in 1871, after he had left Spencer, he taught them to the Fisk University Jubilee Singers . . . songs like "Steal Away to Jesus," "The Angels Are Coming," "I'm a Rolling, I'm a Rolling," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" . . . perhaps the best known of them all. They were sung before Queen Victoria and around the world. Reid -- in part at least to still his anti-slavery conscience? -- had made his unique contribution to American folk music.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Baird, W. David, "Spencer Academy, Choctaw Nation, 1842-1900," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. 45 (1967), pp. 25-43  
 Foreman, Grant, The Five Civilized Tribes, University of Oklahoma Press, 1934, pp. 70-68  
 Reed, Ora Eddleman, "The Robe Family - Missionaires," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. 26 (1948), pp. 301-312

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre in each site

UTM REFERENCES Cemetery

School

Site 1	A	1,5	2,8,2	3,8,5	3,7,8,0	18,3,5	Site 2	B	1,5	2,8,2	6,3,0	3,7,8,0	7,1,5
		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING					ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
	C							D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Kent Ruth, Deputy

ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

Historical Building

CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

DATE

February 1975

TELEPHONE

405-884-5456

STATE

Oklahoma

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*[Signature]*

TITLE

SPO

DATE

29 Apr 75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*[Signature]*

DATE

MAY 21 1975

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

5/20/75

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Spencer Academy (first site)

Reid did much more than just manage Spencer. He traveled widely throughout the Nation, living among the Choctaws to get better acquainted with them and, when the opportunity arose, to evangelize them. The summer of 1851 he rode some 1500 miles, gave as many as 50 talks, contacted over 3000 people. But the approaching war was dividing Indian Territory, as it was the rest of the nation. The academy was finally closed in May 1861. Although Reid and his family remained, Spencer did not function as an education institution again until 1870. Although Reid did not re-open it, he stayed on long enough to make sure that it would be rebuilt and the school re-established.

In 1863 Spencer's dormitories were pressed into service as a Confederate hospital. For a time Confederate General Douglas H. Cooper maintained his headquarters there. Throughout the war its facilities sheltered many of the homeless among the Choctaws. The rebuilt Spencer opened, finally, in 1871. Like similar institutions throughout Indian Territory, however, it had difficulty building back to anything approaching its pre-war position. Teachers were difficult to recruit and this kept enrollment relatively low. Discipline deteriorated; morale declined. In 1881 Spencer Academy closed for good. ("New" Spencer opened in 1882 at a new location and, though besieged by a series of devastating fires, served the Nation until 1900.)

How successful was Spencer? Only subjective judgments can be given. From the viewpoint of the missionaries success was rather limited. Though the goal at Spencer had always been to give the students both an intellectual and a spiritual education, the number of conversions were disappointing. Rarely did more than a tenth of the students ever become formal Christians.

By and large, however, the Choctaws themselves were pleased with the school, proud of its results. They were not greatly perturbed when teachers complained the Choctaw boys were not as proficient in the English language as they should be. Tribal leaders felt Spencer demonstrated its worth in other ways. And even a partial listing of Choctaw leaders who gained part or all of their education at Spencer would tend to bear them out. They include Principal Chiefs B. J. Smallwood, Jefferson Gardner, Allen Wright, Jackson McCurtain, and Gilbert Dukes; Judge Charles Vinson and Treasurer of the Nation William Wilson; educators Peter Hudson and Simon Dwight; Dr. E. N. Wright, the Rev. Frank Hall Wright, and many others.

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W. David Baird sums it up this way: "Thus Spencer Academy stands as an important educational institution among the Choctaws. The tribe was pleased with the school's efforts and generally satisfied with the results. Most agreed with John Hobart Heald, a well-educated Indian trader, that Spencer Academy was 'equal to any of the good old schools of New England.' To the Choctaws it was a moral and intellectual fountain providing sustenance to a people hungry for civilization."

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Today the remaining buildings are gone, only marked (and that somewhat indistinctly) by scattered foundation stones. According to Archeologist Douglas D. Scott, however, the grounds do not appear to be suffering much from pothunting or other destruction. But the burying ground, though now partially fenced, is in poor shape and shows evidence of much more digging, some of it quite recently. National Register protection is thus urgently needed to preserve what little remains of this once important Choctaw school. . . .Site of the school campus with its scattered stones is immediately north of the modern residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Hawkins, the present owners, which gives it some protection from so-called treasure hunters. It is part of a native grass pasture and the ground is unbroken. The large historical marker (see picture) is near the dead-end access road to the Hawkins' residence, perhaps 150 feet to the south-west of it. Neither is located on the school site itself for which National Register status is requested.