

PH0663883 7.24.

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 27 1978

DATE ENTERED AUG 24 1978

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

* *

Oktaha School

AND/OR COMMON

Old Oktaha School

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

40 25 09

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Oktaha

VICINITY OF

No. 2

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Oklahoma

40

Muskogee

101

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED (in part)	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<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

Oktaha Historical Society (99-year lease)

STREET & NUMBER

Oktaha Avenue

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Oktaha

VICINITY OF

Oklahoma

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Muskogee County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Muskogee

Oklahoma

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Geary Based Historical Survey

DATE

1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Oktaha Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Oktaha

Oklahoma

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

As built in 1909, Oktaha School was a sturdy two-story affair of gray sandstone. A 32 x 70-foot rectangle, it had a solid balustraded porch stretching 50 feet across its west front. Porch, extended eaves, and third-story open balcony (dormer, actually) gave the not unhandsome structure a bit more the appearance of a large residence than the traditional school.

In late 1909, after less than six months of use, this building burned to its rock walls. It was rebuilt immediately, however, this time of red brick, on the still solid sandstone base, leveled to the bottom of the first floor windows. The porch balustrade of the original was retained. Stone from the burned building was also used for window cornices and other trim items on the rebuilt structure. At this time, too, a 29 x 71-foot extension - similarly constructed of red brick on a sandstone base - was added to the east. It contained an auditorium with stage and balcony.

In 1937 this auditorium space was converted into classrooms on two levels. At the same time a gymnasium was added to the northeast corner of the building. (This gym fills in the "L" of the original structure without actually becoming a part of it. It remains today under the jurisdiction of the Oktaha school system, while the original building, including converted auditorium wing, is managed under a long-time lease agreement by the Oktaha Historical Society.)

Since 1969 students have used a new building and Oktaha School has stood empty but for storage. As a result it has suffered a good bit of surface deterioration. It remains structurally sound, however, and granting the dilapidation, appears much as it has for the past 78 years. The historical society hopes to restore the exterior, use the interior much as it is for the present. In time it hopes to be able to restore the original auditorium, complete with stage and balcony, for presentation of historical plays and other programs.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	AUG 24 1978

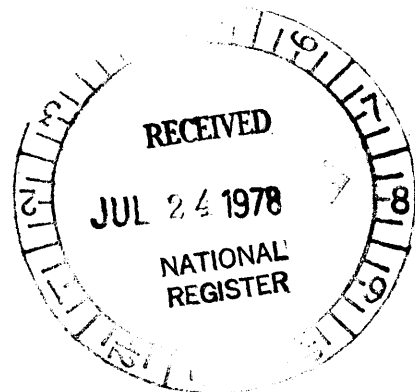
(Number all entries)

Oktaha School

Addendum: 7-1-78

As to the Oktaha "celebrities" - Willard Stone received all of his education here (and is today one of the strongest boosters of and most generous contributors to the preservation plan) . . . Morton Harrison did, so far as can be determined (records are not complete), attend Oktaha for a time . . . and Florence Evans, although her family lived in the community, did not attend, for a rather "special" reason. Like the Cherokees (to which tribe Willard Stone belonged), the Creeks had been slaveholders, which led not infrequently to mixed blood in the tribe. As Oklahoma at this time had "Jim Crow" segregation laws, and Florence Evans was believed to have some black blood, she was sent to the nearby Eufaula Indian Boarding School.

As to the "resources" - the local society has some fifty members and a rather healthy bank account. It has a definite preservation plan, a grant from the state legislature, and a pledge of continued support from local political figures. Willard Stone has indicated he will increase his support of the project. Some of this support is obviously "iffy," but the local group would seem to be at least beyond the talking stage.



9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Miscellaneous materials collected by the Oktaha Historical Society and the Oklahoma Historical Society

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	5	2	7	6	7	5	0	3	9	3	9	5	7	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING							

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Kent Ruth, Deputy

ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

Historical Building

CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

DATE

January 1978

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Harry L. Doupre M.D.

DATE

7-14-78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST:

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/24/78

DATE

8-18-78

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
___PREHISTORIC	___ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	___COMMUNITY PLANNING	___LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	___RELIGION
___1400-1499	___ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	___CONSERVATION	___LAW	___SCIENCE
___1500-1599	___AGRICULTURE	___ECONOMICS	___LITERATURE	___SCULPTURE
___1600-1699	___ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	___MILITARY	___SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
___1700-1799	___ART	___ENGINEERING	___MUSIC	___THEATER
___1800-1899	___COMMERCE	___EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	___PHILOSOPHY	___TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	___COMMUNICATIONS	___INDUSTRY	___POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	___OTHER (SPECIFY)
		___INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1910 to present BUILDER/ARCHITECT not known

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Oktaha School was perhaps a bit more impressive in appearance than the average small town Oklahoma school of its day. But its historical significance today lies clearly in three other areas; in its role in the community it served for 60 years, in the successful lives it helped to mold, and in the important historical events played out on its doorstep.

Oktaha began as an M-K-T depot in 1871, but it did not get its post office until 1900. And it was 1903 before it was incorporated. It boomed briefly then, during which period it built its still quite attractive school. And though the town gradually dwindled after that, the school, expanded in 1937, continued to serve the community in the many and varied ways known only to small towns. From before statehood through four wars and the Great Depression it educated three generations of the community. Now the town has swung almost full circle. Within the city limits is not a single commercial establishment - just the substantial ruins of the one-time bank and trading company building - and only the post office and school system remain.

Oktaha School has helped mold - and inspire? - its share of successful Oktahans. Any listing of these would include famed wood sculptor Willard Stone. Of Cherokee heritage, he won his first art contest with a bar of soap ... the carving of a greyhound chasing a rabbit. (Wildlife - and Indian subjects - have featured the bulk of his work ever since.) From Oktaha he moved on to Bacone College in nearby Muskogee, then to Tulsa's world famous Gilcrease Museum, where he was artist-in-residence for a number of years. Inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1970, Stone is now known - and shown - throughout the country.

Another noteworthy Oktaha product is the late Morton Harrison, inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame the year before Stone. Active in state government for many years, he is perhaps best known as chairman of the State Planning and Resources Board, in which capacity he was instrumental in developing the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore and keeping in Oklahoma the famed Gilcrease collection.

A third Oktaha native whose accomplishments the proposed museum would memorialize is Florence Evans. Of Cherokee-Creek heritage, she showed considerable natural talent in music as a girl and soon caught the attention of Alice Robertson, prominent Creek Nation educator (and later Oklahoma's first Congresswoman). Miss Robertson arranged for her to study piano in Denver, where her voice was discovered. Her voice teacher eventually arranged for an audition with Charles Wakefield Cadman, then one of America's best known composers, particularly of Indian songs. Cadman and Miss Evans soon became a team.

As Tsianina Blackstone, the Cherokee Princess, Miss Evans dressed in a white buckskin costume with beaded moccasins, wore her long black hair in traditional braids.

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Oktaha School

She and Cadman performed at the Metropolitan Opera House, in the Hollywood Bowl, and across the United States and Europe. After touring Europe during World War I with the American Expeditionary Forces, she was the first woman to be made a member of the American Legion. In 1923 the Secretary of the Interior appointed her to a special committee to investigate and improve Indian conditions. Now in her 80s, Miss Evans lives in California.

Yet another celebrity to grow up in the Oktaha area is Escoc LaRue, stage name for Albert Escoc, a Creek Indian. As a ballet dancer and ice skating star, LeRue spent 55 years in show business, performing in Europe and South American as well as across this continent, working with such stars as Clark Gable, Jimmy Stewart, George Raft, Pat O'Brien, and others. He now lives in nearby Muskogee.

Finally, of course, there is the area of significance that includes the historic events unfolding on the Oktaha School doorstep. Primary among these is the Civil War Battle of Honey Springs, fought on July 17, 1863, and considered to be the most important of 89 Civil War battles fought in Indian Territory. The confrontation here involved 3,000 federal troops and 6,000 Confederates and, as a decisive victory for the Union forces, is sometimes referred to as the Gettysburg of military action in what is now Oklahoma. Honey Springs was the final massed Confederate stand against the Union in Indian Territory. Of primary significance, too, Honey Springs was the first Union victory in which freed Negro slaves were used as an all black cavalry unit and thus allowed to prove their worth as fighting men.

Honey Springs Battlefield Park, a 2900-acre preserve, is gradually taking shape under direction of the Oklahoma Historical Society immediately to the south of Oktaha. The park's northern boundary is within a mile of the school itself. Historians believe that after the first encounter with the Confederate outpost the Union troops ate and rested for about an hour at a site just east of the school before proceeding to attack the main body of Confederate troops. . . .The Honey Springs battle and its significance will be an integral part of the museum proposed by the Oktaha Historical Society for the old school (see below).

History was coursing past the site of Oktaha School long before even the Oktaha depot appeared in 1871, with arrival of the Texas-bound Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad. For this pioneering railway, first to cross present Oklahoma, was merely following the famed Texas Trail, ruts of which can still be seen north and south of Oktaha. This trail, a logical extension of the Osage Trace, an Indian trail from Kansas in use long before the arrival of the first white men, connected the various frontier military outposts from Fort Scott (Kansas) south through Forts Gibson and Washita (Oklahoma) into Texas. It was a busy affair, carrying explorers, troops, settlers, herds of cattle, adventurers, freight wagon trains, and other traffic until the coming of the railroad.

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Oktaha School

One final item of historic interest concerns the name Oktaha itself. It comes from that of the well known Creek chief, Ok-tars-sars-Harjo, better known by his adopted name of Sands. A full blood, he distinguished himself while fighting for the Union during the Civil War. He is perhaps best known, however, for his role in the so-called Sands Rebellion of 1870-1872. Principal chief of the Creek Nation during the closing months of the Civil War, Sands was a candidate in the first election held under the new 1867 constitution. Defeat by the Rev. Samuel Checote disappointed and angered Sands and for a time he actively opposed the Creek government. This opposition culminated in a brief (and happily bloodless) attempt to overthrow the government in Okmulgee by force.

* * *

The Oktaha Historical Society has ambitious use plans for the Oktaha School once it is rehabilitated. One of the larger classrooms is to be used as a community meeting room, another for a small public library. Yet another room will house the Honey Springs Museums, displaying battlefield artifacts as well as interpretative materials. An Oktaha Area Museum is also planned. Hopefully it will include Indian exhibits (pre-historic down to the present), an oral history section, pioneer arts and crafts displays. In time a restoration of the original auditorium (see No. 7), with balcony and stage, is contemplated. It would be used for presentation of historical plays and other programs, first to area residents and then perhaps to visitors.

"This old school," says a spokesman for the historical society, "reflects a life and time we'll never know again. If it is not preserved, it will be destroyed and with it a part of our heritage will die also." It is a plaintive, eloquent plea for understanding that perhaps only someone who has spent at least part of his life in a once-bustling, now-dying town can fully appreciate.