

POTAWATOMI DAY SCHOOLS*

By *Robert D. Ragland*

In 1864, most of the Potawatomi tribe of Indians (about 2,000 members) were living in Kansas. Some of these were blanket Indians who followed the chase. Others were enlightened in civilized ways. Of this group, some six hundred members had by 1868 received their Kansas State citizenship papers. They were known as the "Citizen Potawatomi."

On February 27, 1867, a treaty was made with the Potawatomi tribe whereby they were to select a reservation in the Indian country. The reservation selected included most of what is now Pottawatomie County and extended west to the Indian Meridian. It was a tract some thirty miles square, and approved by the Secretary of the Interior on November 9, 1870.

About a fourth of the tribe left Kansas in 1870 and 1871, and by 1872 some 1,800 members were living on the new reservation. It was found that since many of these Indians were citizens, they could not hold land in common. Therefore a law was passed on May 23, 1872 authorizing the reservation to be divided into allotments. The head of each family was to receive eighty acres.¹ These allotments started in 1875 and lasted for fifteen years.²

Most of the citizen Potawatomi first settled in the southern part of what is now Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, but later moved to different parts of the reservation as they secured their allotments.

When the Potawatomi Reservation was surveyed in 1873, a reference was made in the field notes of the surveyors to these settlements.³ Even as early as this date, traders' stores were in operation. One of these was located south of what is now Wanette, and east of the road from Shawneetown and Johnsonville. It was known as Clary's Store.⁴ This is probably the first store established in this section of Pottawatomie County.

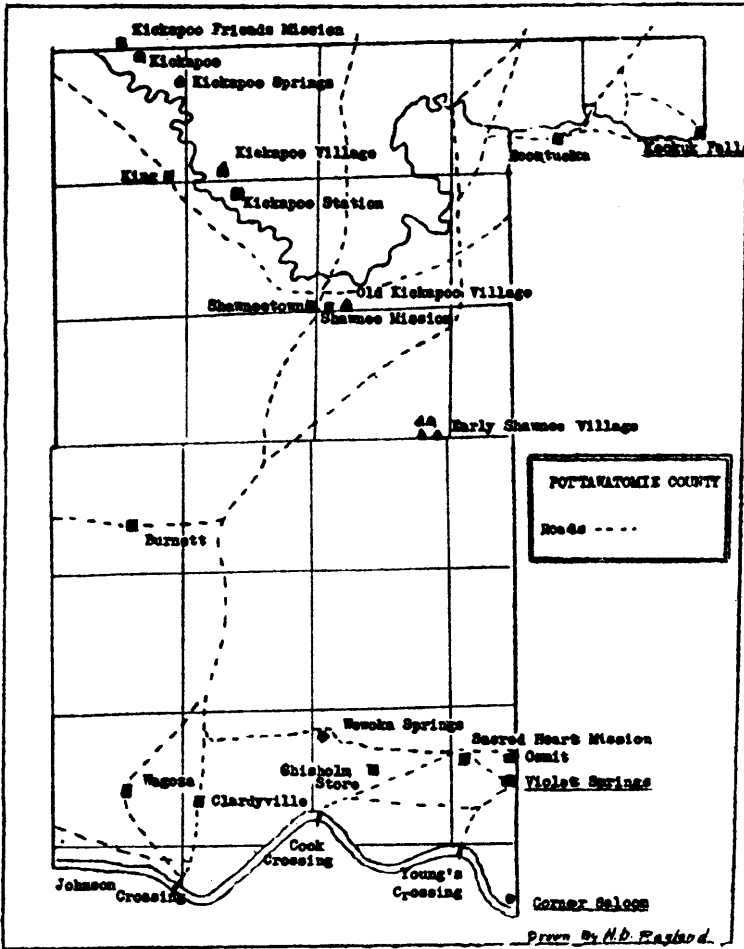
* This article is an adaptation of a paper read before the Pottawatomie County Historical Society at its meeting on June 23, 1952. The society met in the old Shawnee Friends Church south of Shawnee, Oklahoma. (The name of the county in Oklahoma is given "Pottawatomie," although the approved spelling of the name of the Indian tribe is "Potawatomi."—Ed.)

¹ Grant Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 221.

² Berlin B. Chapman, "The Pottawatomie and Absentee Shawnee Reservation," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Autumn, 1946), p. 305.

³ See the original survey township plats and field notes in the County Clerk's office, Pottawatomie County, Shawnee, Oklahoma. Only part of the plats are in this office. Others are in the Pioneer Abstract office of Shawnee, Oklahoma.

⁴ See plat for Township 5 North and Range 3 East, Section 6.



Map of Pottawatomie County showing the location of early settlements prior to 1861. Places underscored established after 1861.

Early Settlements in Pottawatomie County

Near the present townsite of Wanette was another store and post office. On February 15, 1875 a post office was located here giving the name of the place as "Isabella," with Isabella A. Clardy as postmaster.⁵ Ten days later the name of the place was changed to "Clardyville."⁶ On May 4, 1876, Brinton D. Wilson, formerly a teacher at the Pleasant Prairie school was postmaster. He had established a trader's store at the place since Clardy had moved.⁷ The new post office was called "Oberline," and Mrs. Mary Trousdale was appointed post-mistress on April 25, 1876.⁸

About five miles northwest of this place was a settlement known as Pleasant Prairie where a store, blacksmith shop, and school was established in an early day.⁹ The post office was moved from Oberline to this place on July 18, 1881 and renamed "Wagoza." John Clinton was the postmaster.¹⁰ The office was discontinued on June 9, 1884 and the mail transferred to Sacred Heart Mission.¹¹

CLARDYVILLE SCHOOL

From the very beginning, the Potawatomi were interested in educating their children. Small subscription schools were established in most of the small settlements. For the lack of funds and the scarcity of teachers, the schools were very inefficient.

Even though funds were set aside for the educational interest of the tribe, these people were unable to secure their share for a number of years after coming to their reservation. On March 23, 1875, J. E. Clardy, delegate of the Citizen of Potawatomi wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs requesting that a portion of the funds set aside by the Indian Appropriation Bill, approved June 22, 1874, for educational purpose be given to these Indians who were destitute of educational funds.¹² Agent John H. Pickering, of the Sac and Fox Agency, in a letter to Commissioner Hoag, dated June 10, 1875, acknowledged receipt of \$2,500 of the \$5,000 educational fund, for the building and support of day schools among the Potawatomi of his agency. In the letter the agent said: "I will visit

⁵ George H. Shirk, "Early Post Offices in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Summer, 1948), p. 240.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁷ From the file "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Traders," Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society (hereinafter given OHS). In a letter to agent Woodard, as of February 12, 1877, Mr. Wilson requested permission to remain in "Pottawatomie Nation" and farm since he had disposed of the store.

⁸ Shirk, *op. cit.* The office was about 100 yards south of the present Wanette cemetery.

⁹ This settlement was possibly in the center of Section 21, Township 6 North, Range 2 East of the Indian Meridian, since there is a house shown there on the original survey plat (1873), and the names of some of the early citizens of the community are listed.

¹⁰ Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² D. Delano to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," Indian Archives, OHS.

said Potawatomi as soon as practicable, select a location, decide what kind of a house will best meet their wants and forward plans and specifications immediately thereafter. I want to have every thing ready for school to open in early fall."¹³

After surveying the territory, agent Pickering, found that the best place to establish a school was at Clardyville. The site for the building was located at or near what is now the Wanette cemetery. It was about a quarter of a mile from the store. John Clinton and John W. Smith received the contract for erecting the school building. By December 18, 1875, they had completed the project at a cost of \$1,719.¹⁴ It was built of stone and often referred to as the "Stone School House." The agent employed William Brown as teacher of the school. Brown was formerly of Columbus, Kansas. He was to receive \$50 per month salary.¹⁵ In a letter requesting Brown to accept the school, the agent said:¹⁶

"I am about starting two schools among the 'citizen Potawatomi'. . . . I have employed Brinton Wilson as teacher for one of the schools. The school which I designed for thee is taught in a new stone school house, which is now being completed. . . . The funds for these schools are limited and unless additional money is obtained this winter, the schools cannot continue longer than about six months."

When Brown arrived to take over the school, he found the building not yet completed. The furniture was to be freighted from Atoka, Indian Territory. In referring to the progress of the school he wrote:¹⁷

"Inclosed please find reports from Pottawatomie Boarding School. The carpenters and plasterer are at work. The work of plastering will be commenced perhaps in two or three days by Clinton and the man who was helping the carpenter. I had perfected arrangements for two wagons to go after the furniture at Atoka and we were about hitching up to start when a man who had witnessed the scene brought the sad intelligence that the depot and warehouse at Atoka with all the contents were consumed with fire. We hope more books and furniture will be promptly ordered."

By the latter part of 1875 the families were beginning to take their allotments and were scattering to different parts of the reserva-

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Items December 18, 1875, February 18, 1876, *ibid.* The building was inspected and recommended by Antoine Bourbonnais and George Pettifer, trustees, and Wm. Brown, teacher, on December 18, 1875. Bourbonnais and Pettifer received the building from Agent Pickering on February 18, 1876. In a letter to Pickering from Brown dated January 31, 1876, reference is given that the building was located in Sec. 19, T. 6 S., R. 3 E. The plat for this township shows it to be located in the South East Quarter. The building was about 100 yards north of the present Wanette cemetery.

¹⁵ School Report, Fourth Quarter, 1875, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Pickering to Brown, October 18, 1875, *Sac & Fox*, Vol. 2, Indian Archives, OHS.

¹⁷ Brown to Pickering, December 3, 1875, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.* Brown organized the school in his home and taught it there while waiting for the building to be completed.

tion. Brown saw that a day school was out of the question. A meeting of the Citizen Potawatomi was called to consider the matter of erecting a boarding house in connection with the school. The tribe was willing to furnish all necessary supplies for such a boarding house if the building could be erected. In a letter of December 3, 1875, Brown wrote the agent that, "I shall soon have our boarding house ready. I have 41 hewed logs on the grounds and about a dozen more in the timber. The main building is to be 18 by 20 ft., two stories high—a kitchen and dining room on one side 11 ft. wide and 20 ft. long, and a porch on the other side of the same size."¹⁸

The building was to be used for eating and sleeping quarters. He went on to point out in the letter that the building would cost \$150. He had advanced \$75 from his own personal means and C. Pickett had promised the other \$75.

The Potawatomi were proud of their school after its completion. The enrollment rose from a very small number to 103 in March, 1876.¹⁹ But for some reason, the Agent was not able to secure funds for the support of the school. The Indians were poor and unable to hire teachers. Their only means of support was by farming on a small scale. However, Brown continued his work for some time hoping that money could be obtained either from the Friends Church or from the government appropriations. His hopes were in vain, for on February 16, 1876, he resigned the school for lack of funds. In referring to the plight of the Potawatomi especially with reference to their lack of educational opportunities, Agent Levi Woodard reported in 1877:²⁰

"A school-house was built for them two years ago, but owing to their limited pecuniary circumstances and scattered condition, they have been unable to hire teachers or to maintain a school, and whatever may have been their former condition, they are now objects of charity, and should have some aid for school purposes, as many of them are far advanced in the scale of civilization and anxious to have their children educated."

By the next year very few of the Indians were living near the school. For that reason, the Agent reported in 1880 that the building was still left vacant. In a letter of April 3, 1883, Agent Jacob V. Carter, of the Sac and Fox agency, requested of Commissioner Price permission to use the floor and roof of the old school building for the benefit of the Wagoza School, since the building was used only as a dance hall by the youth.²¹ E. S. Stephens in a letter to Carter, on April 26 of the same year, gives the agent permission to use all of the building for the benefit of the school.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ School Report for March 31, 1876, *ibid.*

²⁰ *Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1877, p. 106.

²¹ *Sac and Fox Letter Book*, Vol. 9, pp. 270 ff., Indian Archives, OHS.

²² "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

THE WAGOZA SCHOOL

In 1871, John Anderson moved to the southern part of what is now Pottawatomie County to a place known later as the mission farm. He served as blacksmith at this place for a number of years. The place was located some five miles northwest of present Wanette, Oklahoma. Besides the Andersons there were other families numbering about twenty-eight persons in all. Among these were the Clintons, Bourbonnais, and Johnsons. This settlement was first known as Pleasant Prairie.²³

Even before these people secured any of the money set aside for educational purposes, they had started a school. The first teacher was a horse thief who left in the night. The second was a Catholic spinster, and the third was a Morman preacher.²⁴

In a letter to Wm. Brown, Agent Pickering, of the Sac and Fox Agency stated that he had secured the services of Brinton Wilson as teacher for this school. Wm. Brown in a letter to the Agent, dated December 3, 1875 wrote: "Brinton's school commenced last 2nd day with 16 pupils, I understand, but they have only 4 or 5 old books for the whole school. I furnished them with some crayons."²⁵

Mr. Wilson was a single man and a native of Iowa. He came to the school from Kansas, and received his appointment on November 22, 1875, at a salary of \$35 per month.²⁶ There were twenty-one pupils enrolled in the school on February 1, 1876.²⁷ Mr. Wilson left the school sometime in the spring of 1876 and became engaged as a trader at Clardyville. With the exception of a brief period in 1879, the school was without a full time teacher. During this brief period, Mr. William Garner, an Indian teacher served at a salary of \$480 per year.²⁸ In his April report, Mr. Garner listed only sixteen pupils enrolled in the school.²⁹

On October 11, 1880, Mr. C. T. Wells was appointed to the school. He had formerly served as carpenter at the Shawnee Boarding School. He was a native of Ohio but came to the territory from Arkansas. During part of 1881, he served as a clerk at the Sac and Fox Agency, and from July 1, to December 31, 1882, was superintendent of Kickapoo Station.³⁰ He established a trading post in the northern part of the Kickapoo Reservation. A post office was established here in 1884 with Mr. Wells as first postmaster. The place was called Wellston,

²³ Luther B. Hill, *A History of The State of Oklahoma* (Chicago, 1909), Vol. II, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 508 f.

²⁵ "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Report of the Fourth Quarter, 1875, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," Indian Archives, OHS.

²⁷ Teacher's Report, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

²⁸ Report of Second Quarter, 1879, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.*

²⁹ School Report, April 7, 1879, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

³⁰ Reports of 1880, 1881, 1882, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.*

and later became the town of Wellston, Oklahoma.³¹ Mr. Wells was to receive \$40 per month as teacher of the school at Pleasant Prairie. By the time he took over the school, practically all the pupils of this section were in attendance the other schools having been abolished. His report for January 30, 1881, listed 100 pupils enrolled.³²

On December 10, 1881, Miss Mary Grinnell was appointed teacher of the Pleasant Prairie school at a salary of \$40 per month.³³ She was a sister-in-law of the Reverend Franklin Elliot, of the Shawnee Friends Mission, and the daughter of Rev. Jeremiah A. Grinnell, a prominent minister in the Society of Friends. She was married to the late Thomas W. Alford on September 7, 1884.³⁴

Just prior to the time Miss Grinnell took over the school, the post office at Oberline was discontinued and the mail transferred to the Pleasant Prairie settlement. The name of the new office established was "Wagoza." From then on the school was called the Wagoza School instead of Pleasant Prairie. John Clinton was appointed as the first postmaster of Wagoza July 18, 1881.³⁵

Miss Grinnell was succeeded by the late Thomas W. Alford on November 1, 1882 at a salary of \$480 per annum. He only taught one year and was transferred to the Shawnee Boarding School as principal teacher. The following description of the school house at Wagoza is given by Mr. Alford: "The school building was a log cabin about 12 X 14 feet; the cracks between the logs were filled with red clay, which shut out the cold wind. The floor was made of rough split timber, and the two windows were without glass or shutters. It stood in a thick wood of post oak timber."³⁶

By the time Mr. Alford had been appointed to the school the Citizen Potawatomi were moving to their allotments. Mr. Alford lists, in his June 30, 1883 report, only seventeen pupils enrolled.³⁷

Mr. Horace V. Easterling, a former principal teacher of the Shawnee Boarding School was the last teacher of the Wagoza School. In his report for April 5, 1884, only twelve pupils were listed.³⁸ Four of these were white children. Some of the pupils were being boarded at the place at two dollars per week. By this time, the end of the school was near. Agent I. A. Taylor, of the Sac and Fox Agency, in a letter to Commissioner Price on April 15, 1884, states that the

³¹ Hobert D. Ragland, "Some Firsts in Lincoln County," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIX, No. 4 (Winter, 1951-52), p. 421.

³² "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

³³ Report for December 1881, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.*

³⁴ Thomas Wildcat Alford, *Civilization, as Told to Florence Drake* (Norman, 1936), p. 123.

³⁵ Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

³⁶ Alford, *op. cit.*, p. 114. Mr. Alford began work as teacher of this school on November 1, 1882. See Report for 1882, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.*

³⁷ Report for 1883, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

³⁸ Report of April 5, 1884, *ibid.*

school was being abandoned for lack of pupils. The Indians were moving up near Shawneetown.³⁹ In another letter to the commissioner by Taylor, June 16, 1884, information was given that the school closed after the first quarter of that year.⁴⁰ The post office at Wagoza was also discontinued on June 9, 1884 and the mail was transferred to the Sacred Heart Mission.⁴¹

OTHER DAY SCHOOLS

In a letter to John H. Pickering, Sac and Fox Agent, from Wm. P. Brown, dated January 31, 1876, reference is made to four Potawatomi day schools.⁴² Two of these we have already discussed. The other two seem to have been in existence for only a short time. They were established in January of 1876.

One of these schools was called Oakland or the George Young school. Ella Wilson, a single woman was selected as the first teacher. She was to receive \$50 per month for her service. Miss Wilson received her appointment on January 17, 1876. Prior to this, she had served as cook at the Sac and Fox Agency, and as seamstress of the Shawnee Boarding School. The latter position was held from October 1, 1875 until January 8, 1876.⁴³ In her quarterly report for March 31, 1876, she reports thirty-four pupils enrolled.⁴⁴ This school was in existence for only about a year.

The George Pettifer school, probably located about three miles northwest of Asher, Oklahoma, was first taught by Mary M. Brown, at a salary of \$50 per month. She received her appointment on January 17, 1876.⁴⁵ Her report for February 1, lists an enrollment of twenty-one pupils.⁴⁶ This school was probably consolidated with the Clardyville School after the stone building was completed at the latter place.

Much would be lost without a reference to the Sacred Heart Mission. Even though it was not a day school, the mission did much toward educating not only the Potawatomi youth, but youth of other tribes, as citizens. This mission, located in the southeastern part of

³⁹ Taylor to Price, *Sac and Fox Letter Book*, Vol. 10, p. 90, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴¹ Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁴² Report of 1876, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

⁴³ Reports of 1874, 1876, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ Oakland School Report, 1876, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.* This school was also called The George Young School in the report of February 2, 1876. It was probably located in Section 31, Township 6 North, Range 5 East of Indian Meridian since this is where Mrs. George Young and son, George, Jr., received their land allotments.

⁴⁵ Report of 1876, "Sac & Fox-Sac and Fox Employees," *loc. cit.* This school was probably located in the northern part of Township 6 North, Range 3 East of the Indian Meridian.

⁴⁶ Report of George Pettifer's School, 1876, "Sac & Fox-Pottawatomie School," *loc. cit.*

what is now Pottawatomie County.⁴⁷ was established in 1876 by Father Isidore Robot of the Order of St. Benedict on reservation lands donated by the Potawatomi. The Mission later included the St. Mary's Convent for girls. Many boys and girls later prominent in the affairs of Oklahoma, received their early schooling at this mission.⁴⁸

After the Citizen Potawatomi had settled on their allotments, their children (those who attended school) were sent to the Shawnee Boarding School and Sacred Heart Mission. Many of these children attended the local white district schools after the reservation was opened to settlement in 1891.

Even though these Potawatomi day schools were in existence only a short time, they did much toward educating the children and youth of this region for future success. Many future successful Potawatomi could doubtless look back upon these schools with great appreciation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The Mission and school were located in the Northeast Quarter of Section 18, Township 6 North and Range 5 East of the Indian Meridian.

⁴⁸ Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide To The Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1961), p. 217.

⁴⁹ The author of this article is indebted to Mrs. Rella Looney, Archivist in the Oklahoma Historical Society, for her patient effort in helping to point out source material used in compiling this paper.—H.D.R.