

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

Ottawa University began under another name. On February 27, 1860, the Kansas territorial legislature had approved a charter for Roger Williams University on the request of Baptist leaders. However, because of the start of the Civil War, little was done to get the school started.

A part Chippewa Indian, named John Tecumseh (Taui) Jones, who lived in the area and was the chief Ottawa interpreter, made the suggestion that the Ottawa Indians might endow the school with a grant of land. Enough interest existed that a meeting of certain Ottawa Indian leaders with the trustees of Roger Williams University occurred on December 5, 1860. An anonymous manuscript, dated May 24, 1869, states, "There were eight Indians and four whites present". Here, the Ottawa Indians proposed to give to the school about to be established 20,000 acres of land, and the trustees proposed to educate fifty children between the ages of four and fourteen for thirty years, and after that, to provide ten scholarships "forever".

Since the Ottawa Indians were wards of the Federal Government, the proposals previously referred to could not be carried out until Government treaties were negotiated to approve them, because the Government treaty with the Ottawa Tribe in 1831 had guaranteed "protection against all interruption or disturbance from any persons whatsoever."

The first of these treaties was dated June 24, 1863, granting 20,000 acres, as previously proposed. It is probable that the Indians were fearful that they were about to be dispossessed again as had been their experience in Michigan.

A second treaty was negotiated in 1867. Sales through college trustees did not need to be accounted for to the U. S. Government. In this agreement the University was privileged to buy an additional 7,221.21 acres at an appraised value to be sold for whatever profit

the University could make on the resale. As it turned out, the profits from this grant were considerable but the college got very little of it. In this "treaty" the Indians' children between the ages of six and eighteen years were to be "subsidized, clothed, educated and attended in sickness". No mention is made of the number of children to be thus benefited.

Before this second treaty was made, the school had been rechartered and the name was changed. The new charter was granted April 21, 1865. This charter was granted by the probate court of Franklin County, Kansas, since it was the prerogative of such courts to grant charters at this time. The petitioners named in the charter were, I. S. Kalloch, C. C. Hutchinson, John G. Pratt, J. T. Jones, James Wind, William Hurr, and Joseph King.

Why the name was changed from Roger Williams to Ottawa University is somewhat in doubt. Some references indicate that the Indians asked for the change; while others show that the change was made at Government request. Still another opinion on this matter of change of name is indicated in a letter to the Secretary of Interior in what seems to be the handwriting of Robert Atkinson, who stated the college 'reorganized under the laws of the State of Kansas, and as a mark of respect to the Ottawas, adopted the name, Ottawa University'.

The Western Home Journal of November 7, 1867, reported a meeting of the trustees which, the paper said, was "of a most encouraging character". Despite the fact that the Indian members of the board were discouraged because so little had been done in terms of an actual school program, according to the paper, plans were made for the operation of a school and for opening on December 2 of that year. As far as the Indians were concerned, "any Indian children who may be so disposed can attend it until they are better provided for". An issue of the paper in March of that year told of an Indian school of forty students with a Miss Mayhew and a Miss Luce as teachers.

On October 23, 1873, the Board of Trustees met and made a final settlement with the Ottawa Indians:

1. All Ottawa Indians, except Joseph King were to resign from the Board of Trustees,
2. All obligations to the Indians would forever cease,
3. All notes and mortgages held by the trustees concerning former Indian land was to be turned over to the Ottawa Indians.
4. The Ottawa Indians were to get approximately one-half of the original 20,000 acres back.

This did not end the University's interest and commitment to the Ottawa Indians. Today, the University continues to provide scholarships for Ottawa Indian students. Following is a description of the scholarship program and a listing of 1981 Ottawa Indian students at the University.

