HISTORICAL SKETCH OF OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

Ottawa University is the result of missionary effort by Baptists among the Ottawa Indians. This was begun while the Indians were in Canada and continued during their migration westward and after their settlement in Kansas. This work was carried on with enthusiastic devotion by Rev. John Meeker and his wife. The principal teachers among the Indians were Rev. Tecumseh Jones, an Indian graduate of Madison (now Colgate) University, and his wife, Jane Kelley Jones, a native of Maine. At that time the Ottawas were organizing a reservation about twelve miles square in Franklin County. They had organized the First Baptist Church of Ottawa, Kansas. As early as 1860 it had one hundred members.

While this missionary and educational work was being carried on among the Indians, the white Baptists of Kansas, true to the traditions of the denomination, which has always been the champion of higher education, had chartered "Roger Williams University" and were discussing a location for it. The question of location came up at a meeting of the Baptist State Convention in Atchison, 1860. Rev. J. T. Jones was present as a delegate from the First Baptist church (Indian) of Ottawa. He suggested that the white Baptists join with the Ottawa Indians in establishing a school on the reservation. The Indians had land that might serve as a basis for an endowment and the whites had money and teachers. A committee was appointed to confer with the Indians. They were found to be favorable and steps were taken to carry out the plan. Through the influence of Mr. Jones and this committee the matter was brought before Congress and an act was passed by which 20,000 acres of the reservation were set aside for the support of the institution of learning.

The same act named a Board of Trustees consisting of four Indians and two whites. The first meeting of this Board was held August 20, 1862. It authorized the sale of 6,000 acres at $1.25 per acre in order to establish the school. For the next two or three years it appears that the school was attended by a considerable number of Indian children.

In 1865 at the request of the Indians the name "Roger Williams University" was dropped and a new charter secured re-incorporating the school as Ottawa University. This charter was issued April 21, 1865, under the seal of William Tulloch, Probate Judge of Franklin County, to I. S. Kalloch, C. C. Hutchinson, John G. Pratt, J. T. Jones, James King, William Burr and Henry. These men constituted the first Board of Trustees and carried on the institution for a number of years under the dual management provided in the act of Congress granting them the land. For a variety of reasons this arrangement was not satisfactory to either of the races. In the adjustment of interests the Indians agreed to withdraw and leave the school entirely in the hands of the whites. It was agreed that the 840 acres retained by Ottawa University should be forever devoted to the purpose of education in Ottawa under the auspices of the Baptist church, that it should never be encumbered by mortgage and that the proceeds of the sale of any part of it should be used as an endowment. With this set of equities the history of Ottawa University begins. In 1873 the Board of Trustees was increased in number from six to twenty-four; in 1910 to thirty-six.

While the institution has been established, maintained and largely supported by Baptists, it is in no sense sectarian. It encourages Christian character and a manly, genuine Christian life founded upon the Bible as the sole and sufficient authority in all matters religious. It teaches that a symmetrical character must include Christianity. Its equipment is adequate and its tenets are progressive.