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Social, Religious, and Educational Buildings of Western Oklahoma

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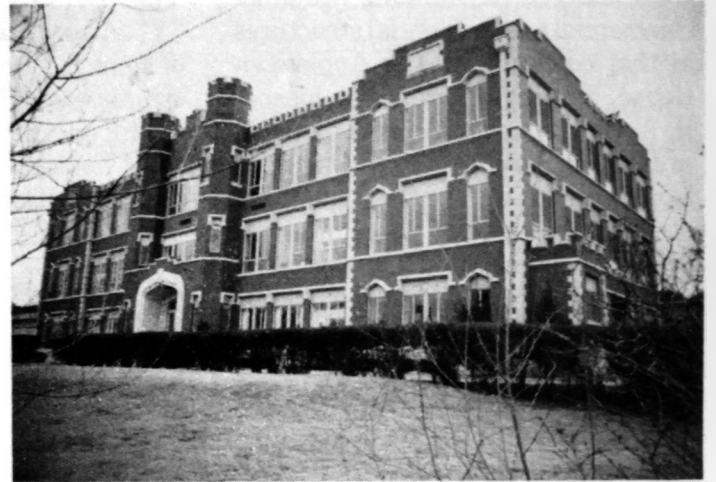
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The Lawton Carnegie Library



The Science and Art Building at Northwestern Oklahoma State University

SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS, AND OF WESTERN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: SAKCHAI LAIVADHANA

In most early Oklahoma towns the progress of the community could be tracked by the appearance of certain symbols--store, bank, standard streets, the election officials, and commencement of public services. However, independent of these efforts there would also appear other key elements of the growth of the town. These are the churches, fraternal, and educational buildings created by and for the town's citizens.

Often one or more of these are the first permanent buildings within the town. Their presence sometimes even acted as anchors for the continuing development of the town. Sometimes too, they are the last recognizable remnants of a town effort, marking the location of dreams spent.

These types of buildings reflect the basic hopes and needs of the people establishing the towns. The churches and fraternal lodges provided the spiritual and social needs of the settlers; the educational facilities

reflected the hope of success for the generations to come.

Due to their capacity and location, these buildings often served for activities beyond their expected purpose when built. Whether for public meetings to discuss matters of community importance, as shelter for the unexpected, but all too frequent emergencies, or as to host events connected with those happier times of celebration and party, these facilities might often provide the only suitable shelter.

Because of their effect upon the day-to-day and long-term development of the towns in which they are located, some of these buildings have been recognized as being historically significant and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

One of the most readily recognized sources of a beginning community's strength is its churches. Usually the first and sometimes the only long-term and permanent building within new areas of

settlement, churches often became the focal points of much civic action and development within a community.

The First Presbyterian Church of Beaver, the Menneville Mennonite Church and the Walters First United Methodist Church are good examples of the role played by churches in the establishment and growth of early communities.

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN Church of Beaver was built by its congregation in 1887 under the direction of Reverend R. M. Overstreet. The construction was financed both by local donations and with aid from the church's missionary board in New York City. Materials used were wagon freighted from across "No Man's Land," by Frank Laughlin from Dodge City, Kansas and took four days over the then roadless countryside. Today the appearance of the ninety-seven-year-old wooden building is much the same as when the original construction was com-



Czech Hall in Canadian County



The Apache State Bank building

EDUCATIONAL BUILDINGS OKLAHOMA

by John R. Hill

pleted. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

ANOTHER WOODEN CHURCH building that reflects the development of early churches in the state is the Menneville Mennonite Church. Dedicated on Christmas Day 1894, some three years after the congregation formed, the ninety-year church is perhaps the oldest such building related to the Mennonite faith in Oklahoma.

The Mennonites who formed this church were a part of the missionary efforts at Darlington, which was the first such work among the Plains tribes of Western Oklahoma. The families were of Swiss, German, and German-Russian origin and occupied land in the Cheyenne and Arapaho lands after opening in April, 1892. The church remained in service until 1959, when the membership had grown so few in number that the church was disbanded. The building

was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

THE CONGREGATION OF the Walters First United Methodist Church formed in 1902 and constructed its first church upon the site of the present building which was built in 1917. Reverend B. M. Nelson oversaw the construction of this brick structure. The church exhibits major elements of the Romanesque Revival style in its archivolt windows, octagonal central dome, and gabled roof. The building is a well-known landmark in the central part of the Cotton County seat. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

Among those early settlers in the area of what became Oklahoma were many who had been members of social and fraternal organizations previously. Others, who were members of the many ethnic groups coming to the state, found such organizations to be one method of sustaining their ethnic

traditions.

CZECH HALL, HOME OF THE Jan Zizka Lodge No. 67 of the Zapadni Caske-Bratske Jadnety, set near the earlier site of "Bohemian Hall" was commonly called by this name until the 1940's when it became better known as Czech Hall. The Z.C.B.J. is a fraternal and self-help organization established in the 1890's with this particular lodge being chartered in 1899.

The present wood frame meeting house was built in 1925 and is located about two miles south of Yukon. The building has had additions through the years as need arose for more meeting and recreational space. The Hall has served many activities such as gymnastics, plays, and weekly dances which it still hosts.

Today Czech Hall is a viable link for the descendants of the territorial period, Czech-Bohemian immigrants. It serves as a focal point for the preservation of those traditions and

customs of this ethnic group while at the same time exposing these unique aspects to other segments of the state's population.

Buildings constructed by the International Order of Odd Fellows generally follow a multi-use type of design which benefited the organization in several ways. Typically, the upper floor is designed as a meeting hall for the membership while the lower floor is for commercial rental to businesses. This provides an ongoing source of income for the social organization as well as the protection of the building being occupied on a daily basis.

The I.O.O.F. buildings in Cherokee, Aline, Carmen, and Buffalo, though built over a period of time ranging from 1902 to 1931, all followed this basic design plan.

THE BUFFALO I.O.O.F. BUILT in 1917 has housed a newspaper office since its construction and continues this long-term association today as it is now occupied by the HARPER COUNTY JOURNAL, one of only two newspapers in the county.

One of the few remaining masonry structures in Buffalo (once known as "stone city" due to its strict fire-prevention ordinances), it exhibits the characteristics of a style common to rural Oklahoma known as "plains commercial." This style has a wide range of appearances in buildings but is identified by clean, straight lines, devoid of large scale decorative features, and usually two-story brick buildings.

This particular building served in many instances as a meeting hall and social gathering place for the county and is perhaps the most significant landmark in the town. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

AMONG THE THREE I.O.O.F. buildings in Alfalfa County, the Cherokee Lodge is the newest, built in 1931. The L-shaped, plains commercial structure sits on one of the first two business lots sold in Cherokee. The building is rather unique as part of the commercial space was specifically designed to accommodate and is still

used as a mortuary. The remainder of the commercial space has been used for a cafe, legal offices, and currently for insurance and real estate sales. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

THE I.O.O.F. BUILDING IN Aline is the second I.O.O.F. building constructed in this town. Built in 1930, it is located across the street from the site of the first building. The street-level storefront features three recessed entrances but is also typical of the plains commercial style. As with the Cherokee lodge building, the I.O.O.F. chapter has disbanded; the building is no longer used for meetings. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

THE CARMEN LODGE IS THE last I.O.O.F. chapter active in Alfalfa County and since it was constructed in 1902, it is also the oldest. This building is yet another variation of the Plains Commercial style. Carmen is also the location of the I.O.O.F. which served as a home for orphaned children until WWII. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

An important aspect reflecting the continuing development of a community is the public educational buildings constructed. This development in Western Oklahoma is represented by three National Register buildings located on the Central State, Southwestern, and Northwestern University campuses.

THE FIRST OF THESE THREE, Old North Tower in Edmond, is the first building erected for publically supported, higher education in Oklahoma Territory, being the oldest such building in the state. Started in the summer of 1892, the building seated its first classes on January 2, 1893.

Originally designated as the Territorial Normal School, Old North served as the location of the first teacher-training classes to help meet the needs of growing territorial and later state populations. Still in active use today, the building was one of the first Oklahoma buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places

being so designated in 1971.

THE SCIENCE HALL ON THE Northwestern State University campus at Alva, is a design of the noted architect Solomon Andrew Layton, and was completed in 1907. The Jacobethian style building is the oldest building on the Northwestern campus, which was the second normal institution designated by the Territorial legislature.

This building, which is one of Layton's early works, contained a library, gymnasium, and a lecture hall with a capacity of three hundred. The building has served a variety of functions of various departments and for a short time after the loss of the administration building in the 1930's quartered that division. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

ANOTHER BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE of the initial creation and development of higher education in Oklahoma is the Science Building at Southwestern State University in Weatherford. The three-story, brick building, though designated as the Science Building, provided classroom space to some sixteen other departments of the school when completed in 1909.

The Science Building features large, Ionic style columns on the front elevation supporting a balcony and triangular pediment with a classic detailing and design. The building, the second building constructed on the campus, is the oldest as the original Administration Building was lost to fire in 1941. This building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

One building that might be found within a town marking that served as a gauge of not only community progress, but also became an indicator of local pride and civic spirit was the public library. If the town happened to be the county seat, chances were that the library might be a building constructed with the aid of an Andrew Carnegie Foundation Library grant. The El Reno, Hobart, and Lawton Carnegie Libraries

are examples of this type of building which are on the National Register of Historic Places.

FINISHED IN 1905, THE EL Reno Library was only the fourth Carnegie-sponsored building authorized in what was to become Oklahoma. The design of the library was somewhat unusual as there was a second-story auditorium. This area was found useful for a number of public functions such as the high-school graduations until other facilities were constructed to accommodate these activities.

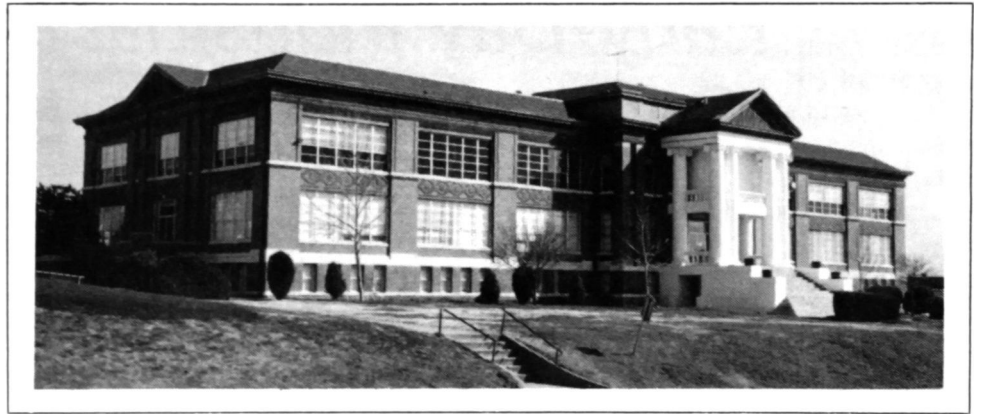
With interior changes, updating of equipment, and the addition of an archives building, the El Reno Carnegie Library continues to serve the city's population, the oldest Carnegie Library to still be a functioning facility. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

THE HOBART CARNEGIE Library was opened in September, 1912; it was constructed with some 10,000.00 dollars from the Carnegie Foundation. The final creation of the library in Hobart was actually the result of a long-term desire on the part of the citizens of Hobart. This effort dated back to September, 1901, one month after the first sale of town lots, with creation of a public reading room featuring newspapers, periodicals, and books.

Though the brick building is small, having one floor and a basement area, its design allows the maximum use of interior space. The front facade features a projected entry and the primary decorative elements to be observed in the building. The three remaining exterior walls possess simple windows set high up in the wall to allow uninterrupted wall areas to allow the placement of book shelves.

The basement area of the building initially served as a meeting area and space for community activities such as the Yamparika Club. As needs increased, however, the basement was designated and used as the Junior Library. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

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The Old Science Building at Weatherford is associated with early efforts to eliminate a teacher shortage in the early 1900's.

LAWTON'S CARNEGIE LI-brary is the last building to be built in Oklahoma with the sponsorship of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. Its construction represented a twenty-year effort on the part of interested citizens to bring a library to the town.

The first letter of interest was submitted to Mr. Carnegie in August, 1902, by an interested individual; the first city authorized request for assistance came in 1910. When a vote was held to approve a grant of \$20,000 from the Carnegie Foundation, the support for the project was not resounding, succeeding by only fifty-five votes.

Because of this and the poor record of the other libraries funded in the state, the Carnegie Foundation was somewhat reticent to act. However, in March of 1916, the appropriate papers were forwarded to the Carnegie officials and the funds were committed to the planned Lawton building.

Though another town election was held in April of 1917 that provided the needed majority to accept the committed funds, the United States entry into World War I again delayed beginning of actual construction. The final acceptance was fortunate as the offering of new grants was ended in November of 1917, and only those committed and accepted before that date were honored.

Construction on the building was finally begun in late 1920, and the Lawton Carnegie Library was dedicated on June 22, 1922, its service continuing until 1973. The building

was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

Another and perhaps seemingly unrelated building that serves as an example of community development as expressed by civic spirit is a small structure located adjacent to the railroad tracks in El Reno. This is the Red Cross Canteen.

El Reno's Red Cross Canteen is a unique structure both historically and structurally being recognized as the nation's first such facility to be introduced. The idea of such a facility was originated by a local bridge club known as the "TBA" early in 1918 to provide relief and assistance to the multitude of soldiers passing through the town on trains during WWI.

Built of donated telegraph poles by Rock Island railroad employee volunteers in 1918, the building had a log cabin appearance and was set on the railroad right of way.

Following the end of its use after World War I, the building was moved from its first site and placed in a city park. However, it was repaired and rededicated near its original site as a Bicentennial project and is now a part of the Canadian County Society Museum complex. The building is used as a center depicting the efforts of the Red Cross Canteen during the first and second world wars. Despite having been moved, this building possessed exceptional historical significance and so still qualified for the National Register of Historic Places. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. ❧