

# A Seminary Hall Narrative

Written for the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of Seminary Hall by Dr. Brad Agnew

Since 1851, May 7 has been a special day for Cherokees and those who shared their dream of improvement through education. That Wednesday, dedication ceremonies marked the opening of the tribe's National Female Seminary at Park Hill; a date still observed on the campus of Northeastern State University by the homecoming of the descendants of seminary graduates. Almost thirty-six years later, on Easter Sunday, 1887, that original Cherokee National Female Seminary was destroyed by fire. A special session of the tribal council convened soon after the fire and voted to rebuild.

Because Park Hill had been declining since the Civil War and water was not readily available at the site, a building committee appointed by the Cherokee National Council decided to rebuild the female seminary north of Tahlequah where a spring provided an abundance of water. The land selected had belonged to Caleb Covell, who had moved to the Cherokee Nation before the Civil War and married a full-blood Cherokee. The Covell cabin was still standing on the property when construction began on the seminary building.

The tribal council hired Saint Louis Architect C.E. Illsley to design the building, and his son W.A. Illsley, a contractor from Chetopa, Kansas, was chosen to build the structure for \$57,500. As usual, costs exceeded the budget, and the council authorized an additional \$4,000 to complete the project. Work on the new building began on November 3, just seven months after the fire that destroyed the original seminary. About six months later, on April 25, 1888, fifteen hundred Cherokee officials and area residents attended the laying of its cornerstone. William P. Ross, former chief of the Cherokees, addressed the crowd and reviewed the history of the tribe's educational progress.

The three-story structure featured a distinctive tower rising two additional stories. Most construction materials were obtained locally; the red bricks were fired onsite from sandy clay obtained north of the building. The depression left by the removal of the clay remained for more than half a century until the expansion of Northeastern's campus filled the excavation. Trees from the area were felled for the framing material and milled lumber. Red terra cotta ornaments were used to trim the gable ends and set off the arches. Flanking the turrets on both sides of the main (southern) entrance were porches of wooden spindle-work, which were removed between 1909

and 1912. The west side of the east wing featured porches at each of the three levels that were removed before 1904.

The building is reputed to have been the first major structure in the area to have indoor plumbing and steam heat. The National Park Service's Historic American Buildings Survey called the "late Romanesque Revival building . . . the most elaborate high-style structure in the area and has always been a source of pride to the Cherokees." An iron fence and entrance gate surrounded the building and grounds, but were removed after the property was acquired by the state in 1909. Portions of the fence may still be seen on the campus and around Tahlequah.

A year after the laying of the cornerstone, dedication ceremonies on May 7, 1889, marked the reopening of the female seminary. An area newspaper reported, "Several thousand people were present to witness . . . the occasion." The Tahlequah cornet band led a procession from the Masonic Hall, followed by members of the Masonic fraternity, Odd Fellows, Cherokee Chief Joel B. Mayes and other tribal officials, and students from the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist Sunday Schools. Among these students, Professor Edwin V. Dolgorouki, a Russian émigré, led a choir of more than a hundred well-trained voices. Boys from the Male Seminary came next in military formation. The procession wound around to the triple galleries in the rear, where the chief and other dignitaries spoke.

Shortly after the ceremonies, Principal A. Florence Wilson renewed the seminary's Spartan academic regime. Classroom instruction was only one of the educational experiences offered by the school. The teachers were also concerned about the social development of their students. Even meals were considered a learning experience at which the young ladies were taught table manners and conversational skills. Seated at white linen-covered tables in the seminary dining room, the girls were closely supervised and corrected by the matron, teachers, and older students. Classrooms have replaced the seminary dining room on the first floor of the building's east wing. Periodic renovations have eradicated all signs of its original use except the rounded-over sandstone sill on a north window, worn down by cooks who stropped their knives on it for twenty years.

The dedication of the new Cherokee Female Seminary Building just north of Tahlequah occurred during a fateful year in Oklahoma history; 1889 also witnessed the run into the Unassigned Land, which marked the final chapter of an inexorable crusade to open all of Indian Territory to white settlement. The run and other landmarks on the path to Oklahoma statehood foreshadowed the end of the Cherokee seminaries, but for the next twenty years the stately building was home and school for another

generation of young Cherokee women.

Almost every one of those years witnessed further incursions by the federal government on the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation. By 1900, officials in Washington, D.C., extended their authority to the realm of education and held the first of eight summer teacher institutes, or normals, in the female seminary building in Tahlequah. These institutes were designed to improve the qualifications of teachers in an area that would soon become northeastern Oklahoma.

By 1905, the idea of a permanent normal school in Tahlequah had taken root. As statehood neared, the citizens of the town began a campaign to transform their summer teaching institutes into a state-supported, year-round normal school. When the first state legislature convened in Guthrie on December 2, 1907, Governor Charles N. Haskell asked its members to create additional normal schools similar to three already training teachers in western Oklahoma. Cherokee Chief W. C. Rogers led a delegation to Guthrie in early January 1908 to lobby on behalf of Tahlequah. His effort paid dividends on February 1, when the governor recommended the city in a special message to the legislature. The press of other business prevented the first legislature from enacting a law necessary for its establishment.

At the beginning of the state's second legislative session, Governor Haskell sent a special message to the lawmakers on January 11, 1909, recommending the purchase of the Cherokee Female Seminary building and forty acres of adjacent land for \$45,000 for a normal school. He emphasized in purchasing the building and property for a normal school the State of Oklahoma would "justly recognize and commemorate the history of such commendable educational effort as was put forth by the Cherokee Nation in the days when they were such an important part of the small lamp of enlightenment surrounded by a wilderness of darkness." The legislature accepted the governor's recommendation and appropriated \$70,000 for maintenance of the institution for two years. The governor signed the bill at 3 p.m. on March 6, which is now observed as "Founders Day" on the NSU campus.

Informal ceremonies marked the beginning of the normal's first term on Tuesday, September 14. Tahlequah mayor Houston B. Teehee and other prominent members of the community welcomed the 180 students and faculty. "After the exercises, the regular academic routine began, and so opened the Northeastern State Normal," the *Tahlequah Arrow* chronicled. Disappointed that more students had not enrolled, the president decided to allow students to enter the normal at any time. By the end of the fall 1909 term, enrollment had risen to nearly 300 and continued to increase gradually

until the nation entered World War I.

The formal opening of Northeastern State Normal occurred on Tuesday, November 16, 1909, the second anniversary of statehood. The public toured the building and observed student recitation in the morning. Most businesses in Tahlequah closed in the afternoon, and many townspeople attended a reception in the president's office and visited the building. At 3:30 students, faculty, and residents of Tahlequah attended a football game at which Northeastern defeated a team from East Central at Ada. At 8 p.m. a large crowd assembled in Northeastern's chapel for the inauguration of D. Frank Redd as President of Northeastern State Normal School.

In its early years, the former seminary building was Northeastern State Normal School. It easily accommodated the students, faculty, and administration during the school's first decade of slow growth. The only classroom building for more than twenty years, it was the nucleus from which Northeastern State University evolved.

Housing students would have been a problem if enrollment had been larger, but with only 180 students, many of whom lived in Tahlequah, accommodations for the entire school were arranged at homes within the town. In the summer, enrollment swelled with the influx of teachers who needed to maintain their certification. Because of the shortage of housing in the summer and their modest means, many students chose to camp on the grounds in tents. Within a few years Northeastern provided tents at \$15.25 for the spring or summer term. The school paper declared the campground the most "glorious place . . . in the state for summer camping." To save money many of the students cooked their meals over campfires. Years later, Dr. T.L. Ballenger, a professor of history, recalled, "We could almost tell whether they had bacon for breakfast or not by the way they smelled when they came to class." The former seminary building housed a coeducational state "normal school," that offered high school and two years of college training for prospective teachers. The course of study did not lead to a college degree; instead it offered those who completed the program teacher certification for life. To graduate, students were required to complete eighty-four units in six years. Tuition was free in all departments. The school also offered instruction from kindergarten through the eighth grade in its training school, which gave students nearing the end of the normal curriculum actual teaching experience.

Although students and faculty did not reside in the building, the normal school's educational routine was similar to the seminary's. The day was divided into six periods. Classes began at 8 a.m. and students and faculty members attended chapel at 10 each morning. Ministers from the city and

area frequently addressed those present, but the daily meetings were also used for presentations of a non-religious character. The chapel was located in a large room with stained-glass windows on the first floor of the building's southwest corner. The third and fourth class periods followed chapel; after a break for lunch, instruction continued for two hours in the afternoon. A seventh period beginning at 3:30 was designated for club meetings and other student activities. Five classes a term was considered a full load, but many instructors taught from 8 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. with an hour and fifteen minutes off at noon.

Late in the 1914 summer term, students met in chapel and unanimously decided to erect a memorial. Representatives from each of the fifteen counties in Northeastern's district decided to build a column on campus with bricks from the ruins of the female seminary at Park Hill to honor the memory of Ann Florence Wilson, principal teacher at the Cherokee Female Seminary between 1875 and 1901. The column, reconstructed south of the normal school, was dedicated Friday, December 4, in a ceremony described as "undoubtedly the biggest event ever held at this institution."

The early graduating classes established a tradition of leaving gifts. The seniors of 1915 contributed two concrete benches placed on either side of the sidewalk in front of the building. Of all the gifts of the early graduating classes, the benches are the only ones that survived the twentieth century. Another tradition established in the early days of the normal school was presidential tenure so brief that the men who headed the school had little time to warm those benches, had they chosen to sit on them. The political nature of higher education early in state history resulted in the appointment of six presidents of the Tahlequah institution in the fourteen years between 1909 and 1923.

During the winter semester of 1915, the school's fifth president, George Gable, personally supervised the construction of an athletic field north of the building. The site had been a thicket of scrub trees and brush and required several workmen, with the assistance of student volunteers, to blast out stumps and level a small knoll. By September, the new field was "in good shape," and NESN students decided to name it after the president who supervised its construction. Relocated twice since, Gable Field remains the site of Northeastern's home football games in the twenty-first century.

Although workers carted off loads of rock during construction, more worked their way to the surface, prompting some opposing teams to refuse to play until the field was cleared. Dr.

Ballenger recalled that on days before games, classes were occasionally dismissed so students and faculty could clear rocks from the field.

The old seminary building was the only substantial structure on campus until 1916. That spring President Gable obtained \$4,400 from the legislature to construct a bathhouse about fifty feet from the northeast corner of the original building and adjacent to Gable Field. The brick facility featured dressing rooms for male and female athletes. The first permanent addition to the campus, the bathhouse served many purposes over the years, but few appreciated it as much as the students who camped nearby and used its facilities.

American entry into World War I produced a small dip in the school's enrollment and delayed construction on the first substantial addition to the campus—an auditorium. Completed in March of 1918, the 800-seat facility was constructed of red brick, like the normal's classroom building, but its modern, art deco architecture contrasted sharply with the turrets and tower of the older building. The student newspaper called the building "the realization of dreams of long standing." Since it was no longer the only significant building on campus, the old seminary structure required a name. Although it remained home to most of the school's classes, it also housed the administration, and was referred to as the Administration Building until the president and his staff vacated the structure half a century later.

One of the last legacies of President Gable was a memorial dedicated to John Ross, chief of the Cherokees when the tribe's male and female seminaries were opened sixty-eight years earlier. On Sunday, July 13, 1919, NESN's outgoing president presided over a ceremony at which a column constructed of bricks from the ruins of the male seminary, which burned in 1910, was unveiled on Northeastern's campus. The Ross memorial column was relocated to a position near the Wilson column in 1958 to make way for the construction of the school's second gymnasium, but for almost forty years the Ross column and the earlier one dedicated to Florence Wilson flanked the sidewalk leading to the main entrance of the campus, like silent sentinels linking Northeastern to its Cherokee precursors.

Enrollment rebounded after the armistice that ended World War I in 1918. Northeastern's 1919 winter term was interrupted by a two-week Christmas holiday. When classes resumed in January, students and faculty were informed Northeastern was now a four-year normal college authorized to issue bachelor's degrees at the beginning of the summer term. The change

in designation and curriculum was designed to enable the college to prepare teachers for positions in high schools as well common schools. Although the institution's name was not officially changed, from 1921 "Northeastern State Teachers' College" bulletins appeared annually until 1939 when the legislature officially designated it Northeastern State College. As a college, Northeastern was placed on a semester system in which academic progress was measured in hours earned rather than classes completed.

While the first six Northeastern presidents account for only fourteen years of the school's history, the next three spanned forty-seven years of boom times, depression, world war, and cold war. Through turbulence, conflict, and international tension, they provided nearly half a century of stability that allowed Northeastern to extend educational roots deep into the communities in the region of the state it served and beyond. Monroe P. Hammond assumed leadership of the Tahlequah college in 1923.

While sports were a major part of life at Northeastern since its establishment, in 1924 an editorial in the *Northeastern* urged students to select a name for the school's teams. "Northeastern should have a name for her athletic teams so that the student body and citizens of Tahlequah could speak of Northeastern's teams not as 'Our boys' or 'The Town Team,' but as some characteristic or distinguishing name," the writer asserted. By the fall names used occasionally, such as the "Pedagogues," "Normalites," and "N-Men," were heard less frequently as more people associated Northeastern with its Native American antecedents. "Redmen" and "Redskins" were used interchangeably for several years, but the school and its teams eventually became the "Redmen."

From the third floor of the Administration Building observers could watch the Redmen in action on Gable Field. On November 21, 1924, they would have seen the beginning of a tradition still observed each fall at Gable Field. In a game pitting the Tahlequah varsity against a team from Kansas City University, Northeastern State Teachers College crowned its first Homecoming Queen. Pre-game festivities began Thursday night with a mass rally and an alumni assembly the following morning. At 1 p.m., the Northeastern fans gathered at the end of the pavement below the campus. With the green and white float of Homecoming Queen Margaret Sims, a Keota freshman, leading the way, the students paraded through Tahlequah to Gable Field where Sims was crowned just before kickoff. The Redmen shut out the Kansas City team 10 to 0.

Early in Hammond's administration, work began on a gymnasium addition to the auditorium. By the beginning of the 1926-27 school year the \$40,000 athletic facility had been completed. With shower facilities in the

new gymnasium, the bathhouse was no longer needed. Marion E. Franklin, head of the manual arts department, supervised the construction of a 42 by 60-foot addition to the north side of the old bathhouse. When the addition was completed in 1926, the manual arts department moved from the Administration Building to its new facility. Almost all other classes remained in the old building, but the diaspora had begun. Gradually discipline after discipline left the school's first building for new homes in halls surrounding the one that had housed them all during the school's formative years.

The paving of a circular driveway connecting the hard-surfaced roads of the town with the campus was completed before the beginning of the 1926 fall term. Additional parking places were laid out on campus near the east entrance to the Administration Building, and plans were made to construct a road linking Gable Field with Seminary Avenue to relieve traffic congestion on game days. Although few students owned automobiles in the 1920s, creating parking space and dealing with traffic congestion would occupy more of the attention of school officials with each passing decade.

By the 1923 school year Northeastern's enrollment exceeded 700 students, and more than 1,600 further strained the college's already overcrowded primary classroom building during the summer term. While the Administration Building could no longer adequately accommodate the growing enrollment, it would take President Hammond several years to secure funds to relieve the overcrowding. The most significant addition to the Northeastern campus since the state purchased the property was the opening of a new classroom building in the fall of 1928. For almost a year, it was called the "education building" or the "training school."

The faculty of the department of education had voted to name it for John M. Hackler, the head of the department of education, director of the training school, and only member of the faculty who had been at Northeastern since the school opened in 1909. When Hackler, who was on a leave of absence completing a Ph.D. at Leland Stanford University in California, declined the honor, the faculty named their new building "Bagley Hall" in honor of Dr. William C. Bagley, a Columbia University professor, who had visited Tahlequah briefly while construction of the education building was underway. While touring the facility, he pronounced it "one of the best, if not the best, training school buildings west of the Mississippi."

With the education building completed and occupied, school officials made the renovation of the Administration Building their top priority. In May 1929, the legislature appropriated \$95,000 for the remodeling. Because of the structure's historical significance and symbolism as a tangible link to the

early commitment of the Cherokees to education, the building's facade remained unchanged. Inside, the "long halls and the lovely old corridors" were left intact, but the remainder of the interior was demolished and reconfigured into modern science laboratories and twenty-nine other classrooms. The remodeling proceeded by stages, leaving most of the building open to classes, although some classes were relocated in the new Bagley Hall.

As the Administration Building was being refurbished, the stock market collapsed, plunging the nation into a decade-long depression that demanded most of President Hammond's attention to continue the institution's educational mission with reduced resources. Federal recovery measures were slow in producing results at Northeastern, but they eventually stimulated enrollment. The first indication of the New Deal's impact on campus appeared on the walls of the Administration Building in 1934. Stephen Mopope and James Auchiah, two young Kiowa artists, were commissioned by the Federal Public Works Art Project to paint two murals. One, on the wall opposite the main entrance to the building, depicted Plains Indian warriors in a buffalo hunt. The other, overlooking the space on the second floor above the main staircase, featured four Indian war dancers around five drummers.

In early March just after Hammond presented Northeastern's case for more adequate funding to the legislature, the school's forty-six-year-old president suffered a heart attack and died in the Capitol Building. After an interim presidency, John S. Vaughan, the state superintendent of public instruction, was named to head Northeastern. Before he assumed the office, plans for the school's first dormitories had been completed, and the Works Progress Administration had begun work on a second Gable Field. Other New Deal projects were expanding and improving the campus. The most significant of these was the construction of Wilson Hall, a women's dorm northwest of the Administration Building and Haskell Hall, northeast of it. Named for A. Florence Wilson, longest-serving principal of the Cherokee Female Seminary, and for Charles N. Haskell, Oklahoma's first governor, who played a key role in the location of a state normal school in Tahlequah, the three-story brick structures changed the nature of student life on campus. The dining room in the women's dormitory became the center of social activity for students and the Tahlequah community.

The mortar binding the dormitory bricks was probably not completely cured when President Vaughan began a campaign to secure a library building for Northeastern, the only former normal school without a free-standing library. Northeastern's books had experienced an odyssey in the Administration Building, moving from their original home in the female

seminary parlor opposite the main entrance to the chapel on the southwest side of the first floor and finally to the east wing with a reading room on the first floor and storage above. None of these spaces was adequate, a message Northeastern's president proclaimed repeatedly to anyone who would listen. On several occasions, Vaughan seemed on the verge of securing his goal, but politics and then world war dashed his hopes.

The evolving role of the state's teachers colleges prompted Oklahoma's seventeenth legislature to alter their names and mission. On April 6, 1939, Governor Leon Phillips signed a bill that changed the names of Northeastern and the other state teachers colleges, except Southwestern. The Tahlequah school became Northeastern State College, and its mission was broadened beyond providing teacher training. In 1927, the State Board of Education had authorized Northeastern to grant degrees to students who did not enroll in the teacher-education program, but throughout most of the 1930s all graduates earned teaching credentials even if they had no intention of ever using them. The action of the legislature in 1939 formally recognized the changing nature of the school's students and provided a name more appropriate to Northeastern's new role.

World War II came close to closing Northeastern and converting it to some war function. Despite sentiment for closing many colleges, Northeastern officials made a strong case that the school could contribute significantly to the mobilization of the nation. The college launched a pilot-training program, offered courses that prepared personnel for the military and defense industries, and provided space and resources for a nursing program. Unlike World War I, when the number of male students declined slightly, but co-ed enrollment was unaffected, World War II practically eliminated male students at the junior and senior-level and significantly slashed female enrollment. By 1943 Northeastern's total enrollment was 308 students. Many faculty members volunteered or were drafted into the military or accepted positions in defense industries.

The passage of the GI Bill, which provided educational benefits for veterans, reversed the plummeting enrollment before the war ended. By 1945 enrollment had almost doubled, and as veterans returned from the theaters of combat and reentered civilian life, enrollment soared. With federal assistance the college purchased surplus military buildings, supplies, and equipment, and strained to meet the mushrooming needs for professors, classrooms, and facilities. The number of veterans enrolled at Northeastern increased from eight in the 1944-45 academic year to 708 in 1949-50.

The G.I. Bill produced another change as well. Since Oklahoma had never charged students tuition, the state could not collect tuition authorized by the federal legislation. Despite a deeply ingrained opposition to charging students to attend college, in 1947 the legislature authorized state schools to impose tuition. The rate at four-year colleges was \$33 per semester, which Northeastern called a fee, while advertising that the school charged no tuition. For years the "fee" remained modest, but as the century neared its end politicians, mindful of voters who demanded low taxes, shifted the burden of supporting higher education to the students and their families.

By that time John Vaughan had realized his long-frustrated dream. In November 1947, ground was broken for a library. The two-story, 140 x 85-foot structure, described as "modernistic" with "an accent on glass," was designed to provide adequate storage and patron space for the school's burgeoning enrollment and book collection. Built north of the Administration Building between the two dormitories, the new library's northern windows offered an excellent view of Gable Field. In planning the facility, President Vaughan anticipated the needs of a graduate program he hoped to establish on the Tahlequah campus.

Sunday, January 21, 1951, the day before the beginning of registration for the spring semester at NSC, President Vaughan died at his home on campus from a coronary thrombosis. His burial was in the Tahlequah cemetery where a stone marked his grave. Much larger monuments to his life still stand on the campus of Northeastern surrounding the Administration Building--the first two permanent dormitories, Wilson and Haskell Halls, the Industrial Arts (now the CASE) Building, the auditorium-fine arts complex and the student center under construction at the time of his death, and the John Vaughan Library, named in his honor by the regents less than a month before his death.

Two months later Harrell Garrison, the first Ph.D. selected as president by regular appointment, assumed leadership of the college. Most of his nineteen-year administration was marked by constant construction that lagged behind the soaring enrollment until his final years as president. Improvement in the area highways made travel easier, and the number of students who commuted to Northeastern increased steadily. Early in Garrison's term the school was integrated with little notice, and a graduate program was established to allow public school teachers to obtain master's degrees without travelling to Stillwater or Norman.

The fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the second Cherokee Female Seminary had passed without fanfare in May of 1939, but on March 6, 1959, the student newspaper proclaimed a milestone in the history of the

college in headlines proclaiming, "Northeastern Reaches Its 50th Anniversary." That half century was a tumultuous era shaped by two world wars, the nation's most severe depression, and a nuclear arms race.

By contrast, most of the Garrison administration was a tranquil interlude during which students were content to enjoy college life and ignore whatever issue confronted society. For most of the 1960s, as students elsewhere began to focus on an unpopular war and social injustice, Northeastern undergraduates remained complacent, preferring parties and river outings to protest. Late in the decade the familiar patterns of the past quarter century changed abruptly. The creation of other institutions of higher learning deprived Northeastern of students who took advantage of educational opportunities closer to home. A construction program that anticipated 10,000 students left the school deeply in debt when enrollment, which peaked in 1968 at 5,992, fell to 5,519 in 1971. Black students unhappy about what they considered token integration protested.

In 1968 a new, larger student center was completed. Remodeled, the old structure was occupied by the president and other college officials in October of 1969 and immediately became known as the Administration Building. The school's original building, known as the Administration Building for fifty years, was left nameless until rechristened Seminary Hall. After the departure of the administration, the building underwent a thorough renovation to convert most of the space abandoned by college officials into classrooms and faculty offices. Garrison's unparalleled record of campus expansion was recognized in 1973 when a memorial fountain north of the University Center he built was named in his honor.

Ill equipped to cope with the problems suddenly confronting him, Garrison was replaced by Robert Collier, a younger man who was less doctrinaire in his dealings with protesting students. During his administration, Northeastern and other state colleges were elevated to university status. The Tahlequah school was given the cumbersome designation of Northeastern Oklahoma State University. In the spring of 1975, work began on the renovation of Seminary Hall and two other buildings. Central air conditioning was installed on the first two floors of the former seminary building; restrooms were re-plumbed and tiled, and the walls in the corridors were carpeted because repainting or paneling the old walls was not considered feasible. With a budget of about \$400,000 for all three projects, most of the changes were cosmetic, but students and faculty, who had tolerated noisy room air conditioners in warm weather, welcomed the quiet of central air.

During the Collier administration the third floor of Bagley Hall was

removed because of the building's leaky roof. The flat roof that replaced it shed water no better, and the decapitation of the stately building created widespread protest. Despite a promising start, President Collier proved inexperienced with the infighting of Oklahoma's higher education establishment and unable to resolve the economic and political problem he inherited. He was dismissed by the Board of Regents in 1977.

W. Roger Webb, Oklahoma's commissioner of public safety, assumed the presidency in 1978. Despite his youth and inexperience in higher education, Webb proved to be a master of public relations with extraordinary political savvy. He found solutions to the issues that confounded his predecessors, shortened the school's name to Northeastern State University, and improved its image and reputation. Although he reversed the downward enrollment spiral, the era of constant expansion of the physical plant was past. Only two significant structures were built in his nineteen-year tenure at NSU—the Fitness Center and a high-rise technology building later named the W. Roger Webb Educational Technology Center.

Through 1994 and half of 1995 Seminary Hall underwent the most thorough renovation since its construction, funded by \$3.4 million from the Higher Education to Rebuild Oklahoma (HERO) bond issue. Although the building had been totally renovated, structural problems were readily apparent. In places the floors sagged, and in others they buckled. The building continued to leak, and plaster on the ceiling and walls buckled and gave way. In the summer of 2003, engineers discovered that water leaking through the walls had weakened floor supports that were separating from the walls. Portions of the building were closed as hazardous, and repair work began immediately and was completed by early fall.

In a shuffling of positions Webb, who departed Northeastern to assume the presidency of the University of Central Oklahoma in 1997, was followed by Larry Williams, who left as head of Southeastern Oklahoma State University. He guided Northeastern for a decade before being disabled by a heart attack, which occurred a year before the economic collapse of 2008. He planned the celebration of the school's centennial, a project he was unable to complete because of his health. The most enduring legacy of the observance was the reconstruction of the southern approach to Seminary Hall featuring a Centennial Plaza surrounding a bronze statue of Sequoyah by Dan Horsechief, a Cherokee artist.

The most controversial development of the Williams administration was the abandonment of the school's designation as "Redmen" and the adoption of the "RiverHawk" as the school's symbol. Since Williams' retirement the university has had four presidents in six years. To placate

irate fans who opposed the change from Redmen, President Don Betz designated the remaining eastern wall of the second Gable Field (1936 to 1964), as the Redmen Heritage Wall and in 2012 dedicated it to the tradition of the Redmen and RiverHawks.

Over the past 125 years the seminary building and the students and teachers who occupied it constitute an unbroken, kaleidoscopic saga from Florence Wilson and her students to those teaching and learning in Seminary Hall in the second decade of the 21st century. A campus master plan announced in 2014 by President Steve Turner to chart Northeastern's course for the next twenty years envisions changing the function of the campus's original building by returning the administrative offices of the institution to their original home. The plans are not yet final, but whatever its role, Seminary Hall will remain the university's focal point and a lamp of enlightenment ignited by the Cherokees in the nineteenth century.