

LURA LOWREY
1867-1923
JANIE STEWART
1874-1962



WOMEN
OF THE
SCHOOL FOR
THE BLIND

In 1897, Lura Rowland Lowrey, a graduate of the Arkansas School for the Blind, established a school in Indian Territory for blind children. She was allowed to use the old Barracks Building in Fort Gibson for her school, which was formally opened with ten students in January 1898.

Lowrey operated the school without any government assistance for the next decade. During the first four years, the school was supported solely by contributions from people in Indian Territory and other states. She traveled all over Indian Territory to secure funds – imploring governors, congressmen, and other public officials to assist her struggling school.

In 1900 the Choctaw and Cherokee Nations each made appropriations for the maintenance of the school. Repeated unsuccessful efforts were made to have Congress aid the school through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The First Oklahoma Legislature appropriated five thousand dollars in May 1908 for the maintenance of “The Lura A. Lowrey School for the Blind”. The school was supported by legislative appropriations, varying from twenty to thirty thousand dollars yearly.

In May 1911, the State Board of Education changed the school’s name to the Oklahoma School for the Blind. In July, Oscar W. Stewart, a Texas School for the Blind graduate, became the new superintendent. He arranged to increase the capacity of the school to sixty students. Through Mr. Stewart’s untiring efforts, he succeeded in permanently locating the school near Muskogee.

The Oklahoma School for the Blind was moved to its present location in June 1913, in accordance with an act of the Fourth Legislature. An eighty-acre tract of land was donated by Governor Charles Haskell. Helen Keller visited the school in 1915. Will Rogers visited in 1926.

The eligibility of students was as follows: “All persons over six and under twenty-one years of age, who are of such mental and physical ability as to enable them to do systematic study, whose vision is so impaired as to make it impossible for them to attend the school for the sighted, are proper persons to be admitted to the School for the Blind.”

After Mr. Stewart’s death in 1925, his wife Janie was appointed as school superintendent. After serving for twenty years as superintendent, Janie planned to retire. In April 1945, a tornado destroyed the entire school. The gymnasium was demolished, killing Delores Hicks, 14, Alda Stephens, 15, and Juanita Moss, 15.

After the tragedy, class was suspended at the school for more than a year. Ultimately, the Legislature appropriated \$400,000 to rebuild structures and purchase new equipment. Stewart stayed on to ensure that funds were raised to rebuild. The school was reopened eighteen months later.

Without the dream of Lura Rowland Lowry, to start the school, and Janie West Robertson Stewart, to rebuild the school, the Parkview School, that sits on Gibson Street, would not be the successful educational institution it is today.