

**META
CHESTNUTT
SAGER
(1863-1948)**



**FIRST
INSTITUTE
OF HIGHER
LEARNING**

When Meta Chestnut made her decision to be an educational missionary among the Indians, she was not much troubled by the changing demographics of Indian Territory. Instead, she was realizing a childhood dream to serve Indian people.

Born in Lenoir County, North Carolina, in September 1863, Chestnut grew up on a plantation. Unlike many southern women, Chestnut received a formal education, at Bethel Academy (1884), Greenville Institute (1886), Peabody Normal School and the University of Nashville.

While in Nashville, the six-foot-two missionary met the noted evangelist, T. B. Larimore. She shared her dream of ministering to Indian children. Larimore referred her to his friends, the W. J. Erwins, who were citizens and residents of the Chickasaw Nation.

Chestnut wrote immediately to the Erwins. Their local school at Silver City, on the South Canadian River, just north of present-day Tuttle, had need of a teacher. If she accepted the position, she could live with them. Most of her students would be Chickasaw Indians.

When she told her fiancé, he was heartbroken. She argued passionately that she should pursue her dreams and answer the call of God. He knew she was a woman of independent judgment, strength, vision, and purpose.

Chestnut arrived in Oklahoma Territory on September 4, 1889, just after the great land run. W. J. Erwin took her by wagon to Silver City. The following Monday, she opened her first school. She lived in a lean-to structure attached to the back of the Erwin house.

In addition to teaching school, Chestnut started a Sunday school, serving communion with the silver service and white linen which she had brought with her. On her journeys over the prairie, she always carried her Bible with her, but also her pistol. At a revival she met a full-blood Chickasaw woman, Mrs. J. H. Bond, who would become a close friend.

The Rock Island Railroad extended its line southward across the South Canadian River and laid out the town of Minco. The community of Silver City moved en masse to Minco on July 4, 1890. This included Chestnut's day school, which also served as the "Sunny South Christian Church".

In 1892, thanks to Mrs. Bond, the Chickasaw and Choctaw tribal governments agreed to subsidize their children education at the Minco school. In 1894 Chestnut built a much larger establishment, for primary, secondary, and collegiate students. It became the El Meta Bond College, affording an opportunity for parents to educate their children near home. Over 2,500 passed through its doors while Chestnut served as president until it closed its doors in 1920.

Chestnut and her husband, J. Albra Sager, whom she had married in 1906, later moved to Chickasha. He was a member of the music faculty at Oklahoma College for Women until his death in 1929. She was an assistant cataloguer at the college until her death in 1948.

In 1939 Chestnut was elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. That same year, a park was created on the grounds that was formerly part of the El Meta Bond College surroundings and a bronze plaque was placed as a memorial to the "tall, stately lady with gray eyes and steadfast courage."