

**BELLA
McCALLUM
GIBBONS
1864-1937**



**MORE
THAN
A
TEACHER**

When Bella McCallum arrived at Goodland Academy near Hugo, she was the first white woman to teach Indian children in Choctaw County. For the next 39 years, she served as a teacher, mother to the children, and editor of the school publication “Indian Arrow”.

In 1848, minister John Lanthrop and his wife came to Yakni Achukman, or Good Land. They built the first log manse and ministered two years to the Choctaw people. As they returned home in 1850, Rev. Oliver Porter Stark arrived. His wife Margaret taught four Choctaw boys to read from her Bible. Two years later, there were 42 students meeting in the church on the Good Land campus.

In 1860, Stark changed “Good Land” to one word. After the Civil War had ended, all Mission Schools in Indian Territory were suspended. In the 1894 the Southern Board of Home Missions sent Reverend Joseph Gibbons to manage the Goodland School and Orphanage. The church members built a log house, gathered a number of orphaned Indian children, and divided their provisions with them. Many of them took some of them into their homes.

Bella McCallum was born in Arkansas in September 1864 and grew up in North Carolina. In August 1898 she arrived at Goodland to teach. Reverend Gibbons’ wife Mary died after a lengthy illness in 1900, leaving five young children. The next year, Gibbons married Bella McCallum. The Gibbons completed the church’s first major renovation and the first orphanage dormitory. The building was one large room with a sleeping loft overhead and a kitchen/dining room. Supplies for the orphans were donated by nearby Indian families, including meat, meal, flour, potatoes, sugar, molasses, and coal oil.

Silas Bacon was the first Superintendent of Goodland Academy, formerly a student there himself. He housed and educated over 200 children during his tenure from 1901 until his death in 1921. During his administration, four dormitories, a school building and a bathhouse were built. By 1920, the Goodland Church and Academy owned a total of 75 acres. His highest priority was to provide the children the best education.

In 1907, Bella Gibbons was appointed Chairman of the Board of Examiners to grant teacher certificates in Choctaw County. After publishing her book “Work Among the Indians” (1912) and the death of her husband (1918), she also recorded Goodland’s history, and tirelessly appealed for funds.

During the 1929 financial crash, Goodland had crushing debt of \$30,000. When Reverend E. D. Miller arrived, the last days of Goodland looked inevitable, but miraculously a California man paid off the debt. Goodland prospered under Miller’s leadership over the next fifteen years, adding a tennis court, football field, gym and auditorium – which still stand today.

In 1933, Bella Gibbons was made a colonel by Governor W. J. Holloway, the first Oklahoma woman ever appointed to a governor's staff, and elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. She died in December 1937 at age 73 and is buried along with her husband at the Goodland Cemetery.

In the 1960’s, due to Civil Rights legislation, Goodland ceased to function as a boarding school. In 1981, it became a home for boys from dysfunctional families. Goodland is the oldest and last remaining mission begun by early missionaries.