

**IDA BELLE
RICHARDS
WRIGHT
1865-1941**



**OPENED
MISSION
SCHOOL IN
ATOKA**

Ida Richards came to Choctaw Nation in 1897 to open a mission school in Atoka. She married into the Wright family and continued the female tradition of service to others.

Ida Belle Richards was born in 1865 in St. Louis. She traced her ancestry to the Mayflower and claimed to be related to President Chester A. Arthur. She graduated from Lindenwood College in St. Charles, MO and completed graduate work at the Illinois State School. In 1887 she came to Indian Territory for the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions to open the mission school in Atoka.

In April 1888 she married Dr. Eliphalet Nott Wright, son of Choctaw Governor Allen Wright and his wife Harriet Newell Mitchell. He was born in April 1858 near the Armstrong Academy in Caddo but was reared at Boggy Depot. He was named Eliphalet Nott, the president of Union College in Schenectady, NY from 1802 to 1866.

He was tutored by Clara Eddy, a graduate of Emma Willard Seminary, Troy, NY, spent a year at Westminster College in Fulton, MO and attended Spencer Academy, near Doaksville for three years. Eliphalet entered his father's alma mater Union College at Schenectady in 1878. When family money was tight, he switched from a classical course to his professional course in medicine at Albany Medical College, graduating in 1884. After graduation, his friends encouraged him to remain in New York State but Dr. Wright returned to Indian Territory to open his practice at Boggy Depot.

Dr. Wright formed the first oil company in the state, the Choctaw Oil and Refining Company, which drilled a well near Atoka in 1888. He was appointed by the Choctaw governor to manage the revenues of about \$300,000 for the sale of timber, stone and coal for school maintenance. In 1893, Congress created the Dawes Commission to secure land allotment and dissolve tribal governments. Dr. Wright was appointed to meet with delegates with the other five civilized tribes in Checotah. The convention opposed the making of any treaties for the next two years.

In 1895, Dr. Wright established his practice in Atoka so the family moved from the farm to town so his daughter Muriel could attend Presbyterian and Baptist elementary schools. Finally in 1896, the tribes negotiated with the Dawes Commission. Although his father Allen had suggested the name Oklahoma, it was Eliphalet's leadership that proved a strong factor in extending the name Oklahoma over all Indian Territory and finally creating the state of Oklahoma.

In 1901, the Rock Island Railroad was constructing its line between Haileyville and Ardmore, when Dr. Wright persuaded the railroad authorities to locate a station near Clear Boggy and within the vicinity of his farm near Olney. Ida Belle, being a lover of nature and the broad expanse of open country, suggested the possibility of returning to the farm and ranch to better manage all of their business interests. As a trained teacher, she decided to tutor the girls at home and prepare them for college. They lived at the farm until Eliphalet's death in 1931.

Ida Belle moved to Oklahoma City, staying with her daughter Muriel and assisting her in her work as a writer and with research work on Indian history and culture, until her health began to fail. She was inducted in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1937. Ida Belle died in January 1941 at age 75 in Oklahoma City. She was buried at the Boggy Depot Cemetery.