

**LILAH
DENTON
LINDSEY**
1860-1943



**TIRELESS
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZER**

One of the great civic leaders in the early days of Tulsa was philanthropist and community organizer Lilah Denton Lindsey. Her parents migrated during Removal to Indian Territory in the early 1830s. She was born near Blue Creek, Creek Nation in 1860. Her mother Susan was a Creek medicine woman who often took Lilah along when she ministered to the sick.

Lilah attended the Tullahassee Mission, near Muskogee. In 1879, the wife of a Tullahassee missionary arranged for her to attend the Synodical Female College in Missouri, which had an opening for a “deserving Indian girl”. When the school closed in June 1880, she moved to Hillsboro, Ohio to attend Highland Institute, a boarding school for girls to become teachers and missionaries. She graduated with honors in 1883, becoming the first female Creek Indian to graduate from Hillsboro.

After graduation, she returned to Indian Territory to teach at Wealaka Mission. She also taught at Koweta Mission. In 1884, she married Lee Lindsey, an Ohio stonemason and Civil War veteran, who had moved to Okmulgee to complete the walls and enclosure of the old Creek Nation Council House. In 1886, they moved to Tulsa.

Tulsa was discovered by the Creeks during their forced emigration, by following the Arkansas River westward. The leaders found an oak tree, now known as the Creek Council Oak, which stands between Denver and Cheyenne Avenues and 17th and 18th Streets. In the early days, Tulsa was a rowdy place with few activities outside the home for women. As time passed, the ladies of Tulsa began looking for more civic activities and cultural opportunities.

Lindsey became a leader in many woman’s organizations in Tulsa. In 1898, she organized the Tulsa chapter of the Woman’s Relief Corps. Lindsey also became a charter member of the Tulsa Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). From that time until statehood, she was president of the Indian Territory organization.

Lee used his wife’s land allotment to build their two-story home at 12th and Guthrie in 1906. Lilah also donated land to the city for a school which later became Riverview School. In 1909, she sponsored the Industrial School of Tulsa, which taught trades to orphans. In 1917 she helped establish the Frances Willard Home for Girls. She secured the donation of land for the Florence Crittenton Home for Fallen Girls, but failing health prevented her from completing its construction.

Lilah Denton Lindsey was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1937. Somehow, she lost everything and was forced to move from her home on Guthrie to 516 North Frisco, where she died in poverty in 1943.

Lilah Lindsey is still remembered for the many contributions she made to Tulsa. “Mrs. Lindsey was a leader in practically all woman’s organizations of any note in Tulsa. In her work for her city, she became a searchlight, seeking out the needs of the city before it felt them. She had ever been in readiness to supply the need when it came.”