



Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851- 1909

Devon A. Mihesuah

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Established by the Cherokee Nation in 1851 in present-day eastern Oklahoma, the nondenominational Cherokee Female Seminary was one of the most important schools in the history of American Indian education. Unusual among Indian schools because it was founded by neither the federal government nor by missionary agencies, the school offered a rigorous curriculum from elementary grades through high school that was patterned after that of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. It offered no instruction in the Cherokee language or culture, but it was open only to full- and mixed-blood Cherokee girls. Many of the seminarians were acculturated Cherokees who welcomed the opportunity to study in an environment where "white ways" were held up as the ideal. More traditional Cherokees found the atmosphere oppressive. Devon Mihesuah explores the school's history, examining curriculum, faculty, administration, and educational philosophy and showing how these elements affected the 2,300 women who were educated there. A number of the seminary's graduates went on to study at colleges and universities across the country, becoming teachers, physicians, businesswomen, and social workers. Even those former students who did not seek careers exerted considerable influence within their families and in civic life. *Cultivating the Rosebuds* is a study of acculturation, assimilation, and tribal identity, sensitively delving into the differences between progressive and traditional Cherokees and the interactions between them. It also offers insights into the school's role in the tribe's cultural transitions, the changing roles of Cherokee women, and the impact of the students' experiences upon their tribe.

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