

NUYAKA MISSION

SUMMARY OF STUDY TEAM FINDINGS

prepared by:
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Oklahoma Historical Society
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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Oklahoma Historical Society study team appreciated the courtesy and hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. W.L. Spears, current owners of Nuyaka Mission. Their kind assistance in showing the team the house in which they live, answering questions, and driving team members over the site was invaluable to our efforts. The Spears' dedication to and concern for preservation of the site is very obvious and commendable.

PURPOSE

On Wednesday, March 2, 1988, a special Oklahoma Historical Society study team visited Nuyaka Mission. Mr. and Mrs. W.L. Spears' proposed donation of the site included approximately fifty-five (55) acres of land and improvements. The team consisted of two staff members from the State Historic Preservation Office, one staff member from the Historic Sites Division, and one staff member from the Central Services Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The team was charged with collecting information about the property for summation and submission to the Oklahoma Historical Society's Board of Directors. The process is set forth in O.S. Title 53, Section 8.1.

The following report summarizes the overall historical significance of Nuyaka Mission, details the current physical condition of the property, assesses potential educational value of the resource, and discusses public accessibility. Illustrations of the current appearance (Exhibit "B") and historic appearance (Exhibit "C") are provided. It should be noted that other historic photographs are in the possession of the Spears and that photographs of current appearance were obtained by the study team during their visit. Heavy rainfall made photography difficult; however, the results contained herein are adequate for evaluation purposes.

EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In 1880, a fire destroyed Tullahassee Mission, a Presbyterian school for the Creeks. To fill the Creek Nation's need for educational facilities, Nuyaka Mission was established in 1882, at a site in present-day Okmulgee county, approximately eleven miles from Okmulgee. Nuyaka Mission functioned as a school for Creek children for about forty years, closing in May 1922.

Two noted missionary families are associated with Nuyaka Mission. Alice M. Robertson, daughter of William S. Robertson who was a teacher and superintendent at Tullahassee Mission, was instrumental in fund raising for the new school. The Robertson family administered the facility until the 1891-1892 school year. At that time, William B. Robe, also a Presbyterian, assumed responsibilities at the mission. Several members of the Robe family were active in the mission. One of the Robe's sons was teaching at Nuyaka in 1910.

The Creek National Council authorized establishment of Nuyaka for the "benefit of the full bloods in the western part of the Muskogee Nation." The Council appropriated \$2,500 to match the Presbyterian's \$10,000 for the new mission school. In accordance with provisions of the Curtis Act, the United States government assumed control of boarding schools in Indian Territory. Nuyaka was one of eight such schools in the Creek Nation. By 1914, Nuyaka

was one of eleven boarding schools still in operation in the former Indian Territory. It finally closed in 1922.

After closing as a boarding school, Nuyaka was operated by the Southern Baptist Convention as an orphanage. In 1931, the institution was closed; furniture and books were removed to another school, and the buildings were sold.

There is no doubt the work of missionaries among the Creeks, and other tribes, is an important chapter in Oklahoma history. Many churches, including the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist, worked extensively among the Five Tribes. Nuyaka Mission is only one of several similar institutions. For the Creek Nation, Koweta Mission and Tullahassee Missions date from the pre-Civil War era and represent the period when missionary schools were most influential. Nuyaka was not established until 1882, over thirty-five years after Koweta and Tullahassee were founded. While Nuyaka Mission represents a later phase in Creek educational history, evidence does not establish it as unique or of outstanding merit. It's significance is most accurately described as local.

Nuyaka Mission was listed in the National Register of Historic Places April 13, 1972. Educational history, religious history, and social history were claimed as areas of significance. Of Oklahoma's 707 National Register entries, fourteen are for missions and academies. These include, in addition to Nuyaka Mission, Wheelock

Academy, Union Mission, Tullahassee Mission Site, Bloomfield Academy Site, Armstrong Academy Site, Wapanucka Academy Site, Dwight Mission, Koweta Mission Site, Levering Mission, Mekasukey Academy, Spencer Academy, Sacred Heart Mission, Shawnee Friends Mission, Modoc Mission Church and Cemetery, and Mardock Mission.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

The proposed donation of property consists of approximately fifty-five acres of land with improvements. The property is situated in rural Okmulgee county, about eleven miles from the City of Okmulgee and about a thirty-five minute drive from Interstate Highway 40.

Improvements on the property are described below:

The Superintendent's house is a two story wood frame, wood clapboard sided building. The roof is less than three years old and is of barn red composition. A stone fireplace and chimney dominates the south elevation. Historic windows are 2/2, wood frame, double hung, with green painted wood shutters at all wall openings. The entry door is wood with oval glass. Living room windows at the fireplace are much larger with the upper portion of the top sash containing stained glass. A one story frame addition is attached to the west side of the house and it is to the west end of this addition that the covered walk is attached. The walk extends

north from the addition to the garage's south side. Green wood shutters also border the garage windows. An open porch is on the east elevation.

Interior areas of the house are a mixture of historic fabric and later work. Wood shelves and drapery valances are combined and conceal a great deal of the historic wall surfaces. All walls are covered with framed photos and art work of all kinds. The area not concealed by hung art and photos is covered with furniture. Interior doors reveal mortise and tenon construction hung with original butts and latches. Much plaster and lath of the two story building has been removed and replaced with sheet rock (walls and ceilings). Originally constructed with no closets, the owner has built-in these conveniences in each bedroom. The wood trim, originally stained, has been painted white throughout. The stair from the entry hall to the second floor has been divided at midpoint with a door to control the climate indoors, the lower floor being heated and cooled, the second floor not. The kitchen is contained in the addition with access to an enclosed back porch and basement below.

The Laundry Building is a one story wood frame, with barn red hipped roof covered with composition shingles. Windows are 2/2, double hung wood sash. No other distinguishing features except a masonry chimney of brick and metal vents through the roof. Clapboard siding is painted white. The condition is very poor. It

is presumed the interior could be judged by the exterior condition which would be poor. This building is in the historic category.

Mr. Spears' shop building is a metal frame and roof. Recent construction.

The Pecan Storehouse is a concrete masonry unit construction with pitched roof. One story, it has a loading dock with sheltering roof. As is the shop building, it is not historic and possesses no significant features.

The remains of metal silos are nearby. They have been roofed with metal, with the space between the silos used as a shelter area. A gasoline pump is located on the south end of the silos.

A structural steel tower is located to the northwest of the silos, very near a shed to the east. The silos and shed are directly north of the Laundry Building.

Mr. Spears' shop building is northeast of the Superintendent's House.

The Pecan Storehouse is north of the Superintendent's House.

Metal silos are northeast of the house.

Steel frame tower is northeast of the house.

The Laundry Building is east of the house.

A wood board fence, 2 rails, painted white, surrounds the Superintendent's house and grounds. Evidence of semi-formal gardens

are on the south and north of the house. A good many evergreens and shrubs have places in the gardens. At the entry gate, a sidewalk goes to the porch and front door on the east.

During the mission period of the property, there were the Superintendent's House, storm cellar, well, cistern, laundry, chapel/school, two cottages, barn, silo, commissary, shop building, and "other structures". With the exception of the Superintendent's House, the laundry building, well and cistern, as well as all other buildings have been removed or demolished. Foundation materials remaining on the surface were reportedly removed by the Spears to facilitate road construction around the property.

In the early 1970s, the Spears sold most of their land. A very irregular northern boundary was established for the proposed donation. No boundary fence exists. A survey will be necessary to assure precise property lines. Unfortunately, the sites of the original school building, the barn, and the silo are no longer on land the Spears own and propose for donation. According to the explanation of the property boundary, the dug well is surrounded on three sides by land not now owned by the Spears. The Superintendent's House is only a few yards from the irregular boundary line.

The land is basically agricultural. Several varieties of trees are found on the property. When the study team was on site, it was

raining heavily. The Spears emphasized the need to stay on hard-surfaced roadways. The team was driven in a four-wheel-drive vehicle around the house and other sites to avoid getting stuck. Attention is called to this matter to emphasize there will be a need for paved visitor parking and walkways.

Current photographs of the property are shown in Exhibit "B" and historic photographs in Exhibit "C" of this report.

ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL VALUE

If the Nuyaka Mission property were accurately and completely developed, visitors could learn about the work of missionaries among the tribes of Indian Territory. Visitors could tour the restored Superintendent's House, gaining an understand of life style at a mission. As the second floor was used as a dormitory, it would be possible to interpret how the children lived at the mission as well. Because the major buildings associated with the mission are not extant, it will be necessary to conduct historic archeological investigations to establish exact locations and sizes of the structures. Materials collected from excavations should also help interpret the work of and life at the mission. A system of walkways around the property to the sites of the original buildings would enable the visitor to gain some understanding of how the mission functioned. Displays of photographs (hopefully identified in the historical research phase) would provide the visitor a view of the

original mission facility.

Without the historical and archeological research, and restoration of the Superintendent's House, there would be little to allow visitors to gain a sense of the appearance and function of the Nuyaka Mission. A detailed discussion of the interpretive potential for Nuyaka Mission is provided in Exhibit "A" of this report.

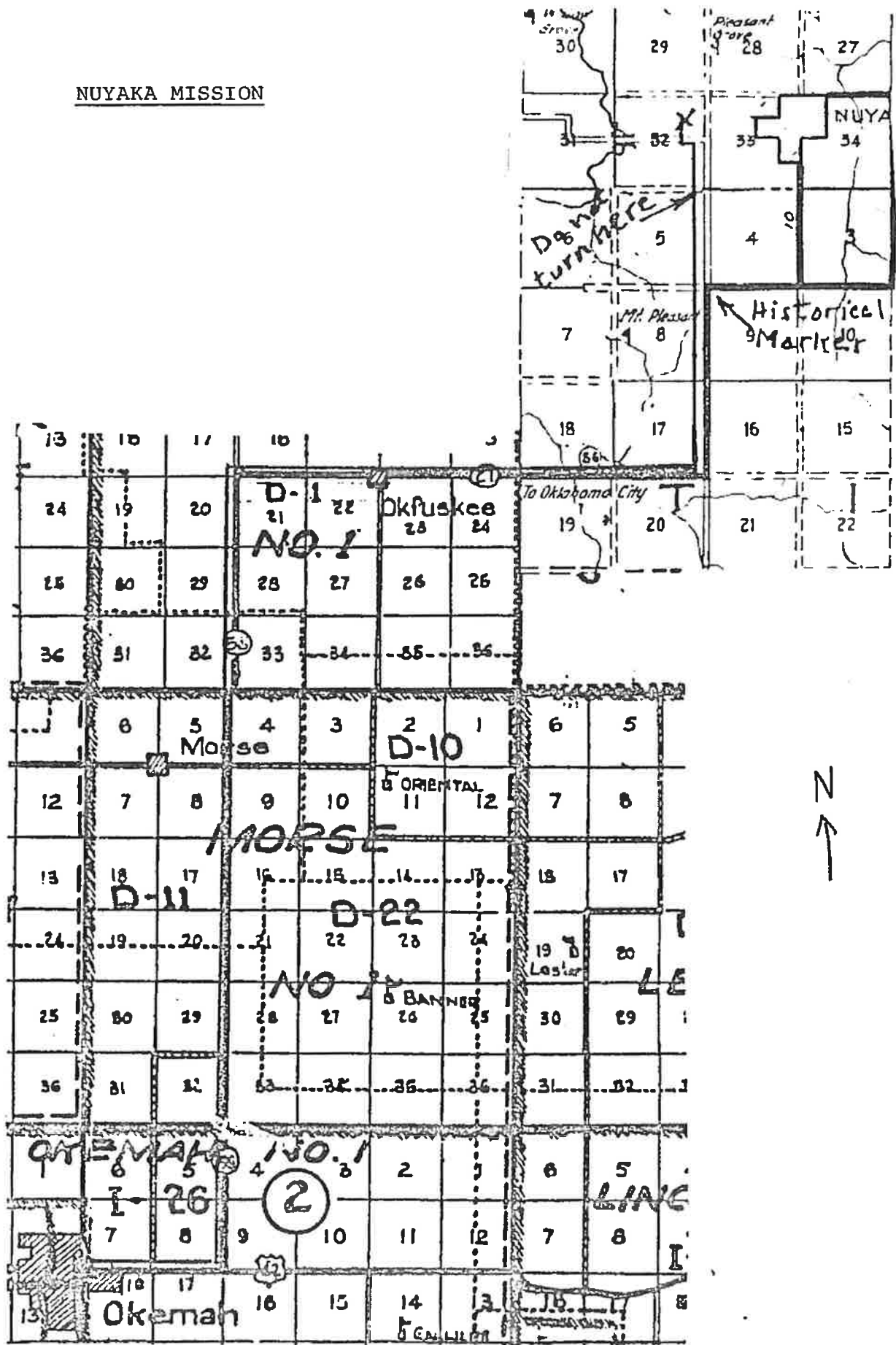
ACCESSIBILITY OF THE PROPERTY

Nuyaka Mission is approximately eleven miles from Okmulgee. It is a thirty-five minute drive from Interstate Highway 40. From the state highway, the mission is a five minute drive over dirt and gravel roads. A single-lane driveway lined with trees leads from the public roadway to the mission building and related sites.

The Superintendent's House is easily accessible. To visit sites of other mission related buildings, a system of walkways will need to be constructed to not only accommodate visitors, but also to protect whatever archeological evidence of the mission that may remain.

Handicapped access will have to be provided as well.

NUYAKA MISSION



ESTIMATED COST OF RESTORATION AND PROVIDING ACCESS

An estimated \$500,000 would be needed to carry out research, restoration, and stabilization work at Nuyaka Mission. Included in this cost would be a fulltime professional historian for at least one year, a historic archeologist and assistants for at least seven months, a restoration architect, restoration of the Superintendent's House, stabilization of the laundry building, furnishings for the Superintendent's House, parking for visitors, walkways to sites of mission buildings, interpretive displays, signage, and security.

ESTIMATED COST OF SITE OPERATION

At least three fulltime employees will be needed at the site including a curator, curatorial assistant, and maintenance person. One staff person will have to live on site for security purposes. The rural location necessitates this close supervision to protect the property in the event of fire, theft, or vandalism. Alarm systems alone would not be sufficient to safeguard the property. Office equipment and grounds' maintenance equipment will have to be purchased, as well as curatorial supplies and other materials. Utilities and services must also be considered. Therefore, the estimated annual cost of site operation is \$150,000.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Salaries and Benefits | \$60,000 |
| Equipment, Services and Supplies | <u>90,000</u> |
| TOTAL | \$150,000 |

EXHIBIT A

Interpretive Evaluation:
Nuyaka Mission

Keith Tolman
Director of Central Services

On March 2, 1988, a team from the Oklahoma Historical Society was sent to Nuyaka Mission to evaluate the property as a potential OHS historic site. My role as a member of the team was to evaluate the site with regard to potential historic interpretation.

Structures

The only surviving structures which date from mission period at Nuyaka are the superintendent's house and the laundry building, both of which present numerous problems with regard to interpretation.

The first floor of the superintendent's house has been modified by the addition of a kitchen, bathroom, fireplace, and back room, and would require extensive modification before it could be returned to a condition conducive to historic interpretation. In addition, other projects, such as installation of period wallpaper and the return of woodwork to the original finish, would need to be completed before historical integrity could be achieved.

The second floor of the structure, once used as a dormitory for girls, is basically original except for a partition and a door added near the landing of the stairwell. As with the first floor, the upstairs would require restoration of wall decoration and woodwork.

The laundry building, which once housed a steam plant, showers, and toilets, has been virtually stripped of these items, leaving little to use in the interpretation of this structure. It should also be noted that the structure has in the past been used to store hay and raise chickens and is in need of extensive repairs. It is also questionable as to what value this structure would have in the overall interpretation of the site even if restored.

Interpretation is further hampered by the absence of other important mission structures. These include a classroom building, vocational shops, dormitories, and barn, all central to the primary educational function of the facility.

Artifacts

The present occupants of Nuyaka Mission reported that artifacts relating to the facility were absent when they acquired the property in 1938. Since that time, they have acquired an assortment of furniture of various styles which they intend to leave at the site when they leave. Many of the pieces are rather ornate and are not of the style one would expect to find in use during active years of the mission.

The present occupants also have a collection of about thirty historic photographs taken of the mission and its occupants dating from the active period of the facility (1882-1922). These photographs are in desperate need of copying and conservation work.

The occupants also have in their possession a collection of miscellaneous artifacts, some of which were recovered from the ground by treasure hunters who have been allowed to dig indiscriminately on the property. These artifacts are of dubious providence and probably would not contribute significantly to the interpretation of the site.

Taken as a whole, the collection of artifacts collected by the present occupants would not aid significantly in the interpretation of the mission or its function. At this point, proper interpretation would require stripping all other OHS museums and historic sites of mission-related artifacts, a procedure not in keeping with accepted museum practices.

An alternative to the above method of interpretation would be to use reproductions. However, this method is extremely expensive and does not result in a what the public wants to see, i.e., the "real thing."

Environment

Climate control on the first floor of the superintendent's house is accomplished via a central heat and air system, one of the few positive things that can be said about the site in relation to artifact care. The second floor of the structure, however, is not connected to the downstairs system and is without any type of climate control. Before artifacts could be exhibited in this area a climate control system would need to be installed.

The laundry building is also without any type of climate control system. Without such a system, the rapid deterioration of artifacts exhibited in this structure would not only be inevitable but unconcionable.

Security

The superintendent's house is equiped with a security alarm and several smoke detectors. These systems, however, are not connected via telephone to the agencies likely to respond to an emergency. Even with a direct connection to such services (some thirty minutes away), it is unlikely the responding agency would arrive in time to prevent theft or contain a fire.

An alternative to such an eventuality would be for the governing authority to provide housing for an on-site curator. Obviously, this would be a very expensive alternative, but it offers one of the few viable options with regard to security at the site.

Research

Relatively little scholarly historical research has been conducted with regard to Nuyaka Mission. It is essential that such a historical study be conducted and incorporated into a comprehensive interpretive plan before any interpretive or construction projects are begun at the site. It is estimated that such a study would take at least one year to complete and would require the services of a full time researcher.

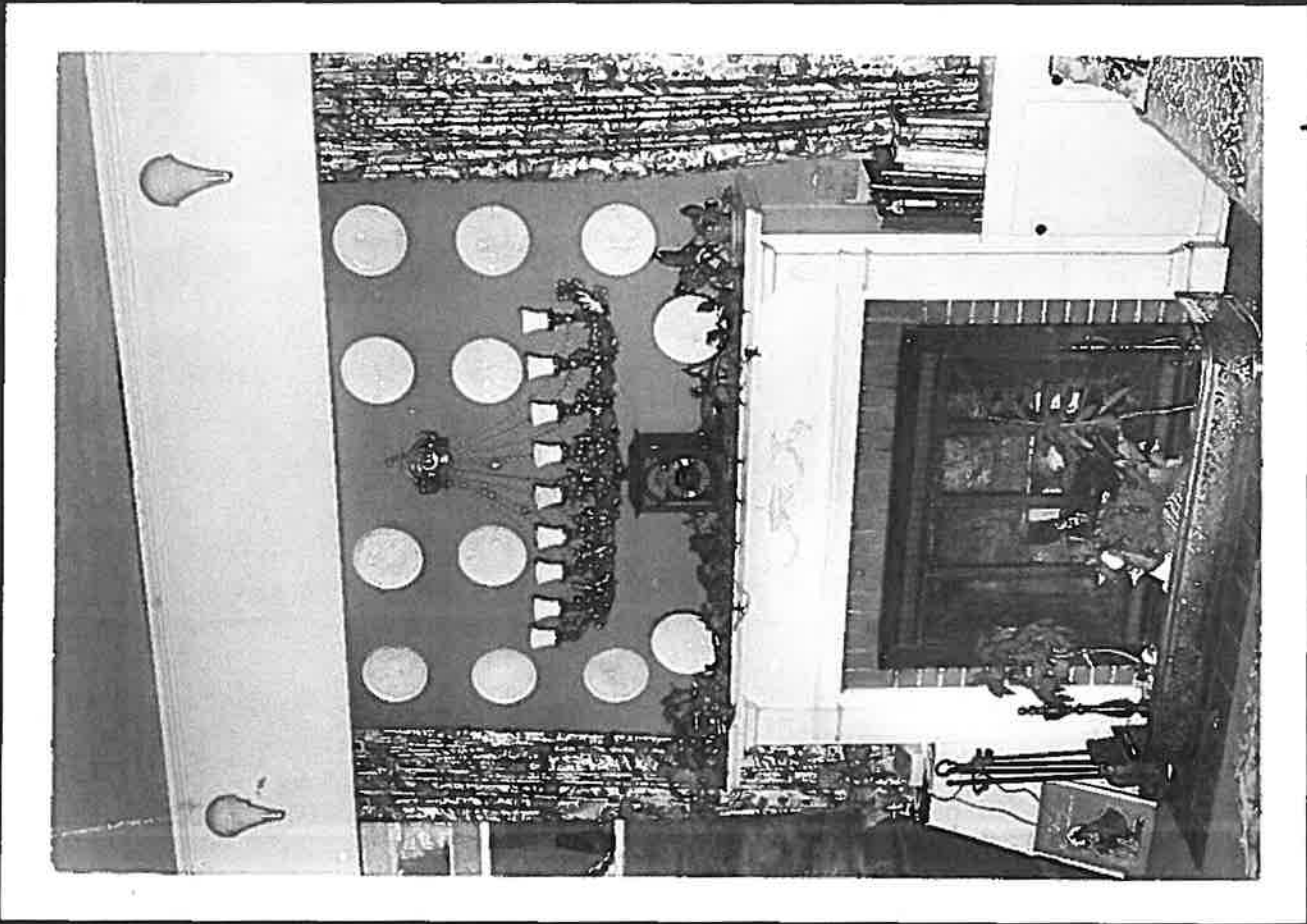
A comprehensive archaeological study of the property should also be conducted before any work is begun. This should involve a thorough archeological survey and test excavations to locate and determine the original use of all structures relating to the mission. It is estimated that such a project would take at least several months to complete and would require the services of an aerchaeologist and at least one assistant.

Conclusion

After a visit to Nuyaka Mission it is obvious that interpretaion of the facility would be a complicated and expensive undertaking. Proper interpretaion of the site would be hampered by the number of structural changes required, absence of structures central to the role of the facility, and lack of artifacts with which to tell the story of the school and the role it played in the Creek Nation.

Of utmost concern with regard to interpretaion of the site is the lack or scholarly research concerning the mission. The importance of completing a historical research study and interpretive plan before any work is begun cannot be over emphasized.

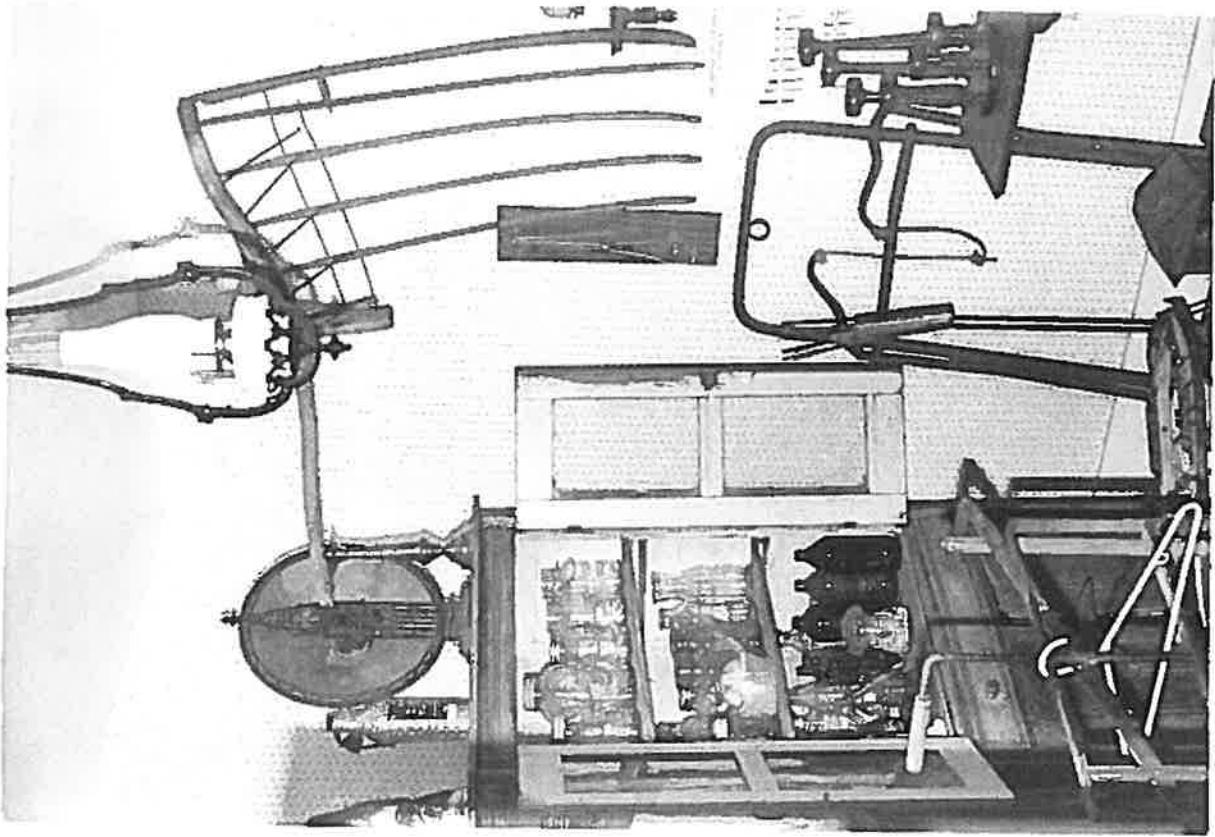
EXHIBIT B



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
FIRST FLOOR LIVING ROOM FIREPLACE
MANTEL, DRAPERY VALANCE, LOW
STORAGE & WALL-TO-WALL CARPET.



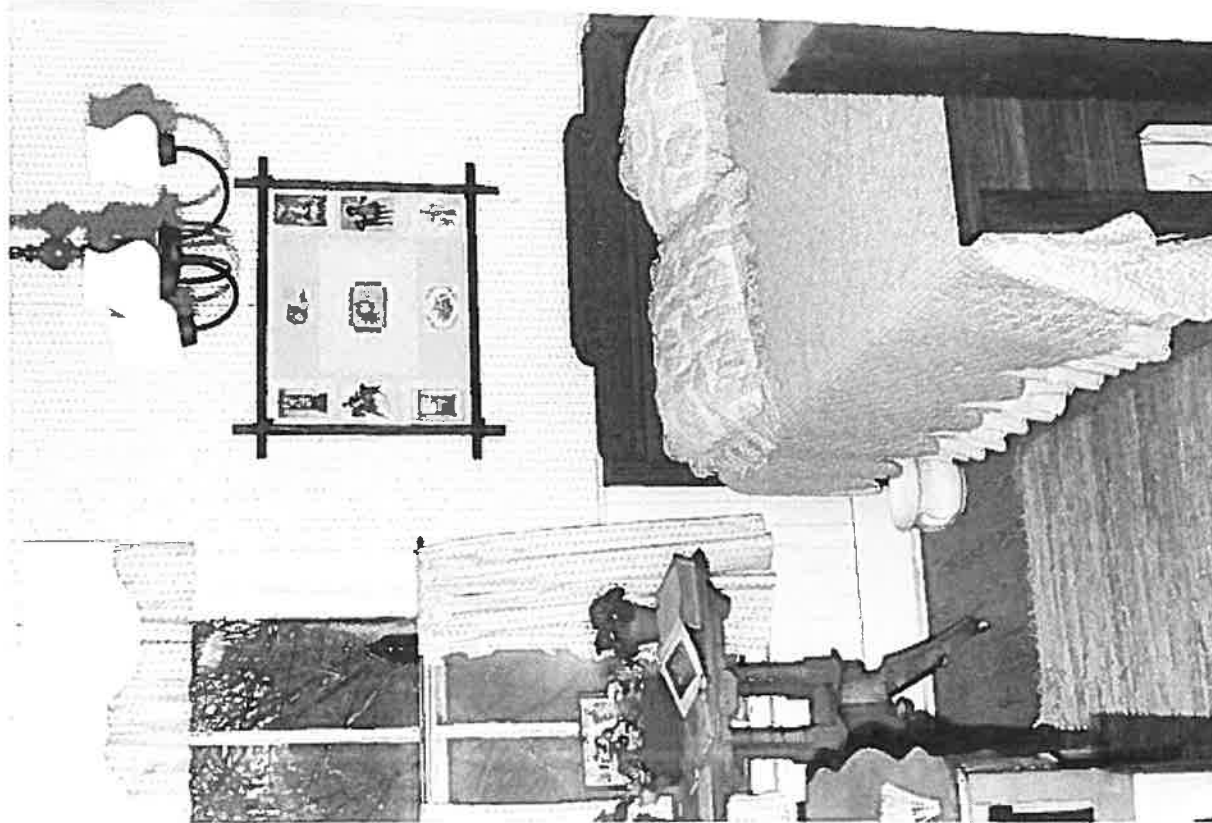
NUYAKA MISSION - OKMUGEE COUNTY
LOOKING FROM FIRST FLOOR LIVING
ROOM TO ENTRY HALL WITH EXHIBITS.



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
SECOND FLOOR EXHIBIT ROOM OF TOOLS
AND IMPLEMENTS FOUND ON GROUNDS
OR GIFTS.



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
THE ROAD BETWEEN THE MISSION AND
THE HISTORIC MARKER ON THE ALL
WEATHER ROAD.



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
FIRST FLOOR BEDROOM IN SUPER'T'D'T
HOUSE.

EXHIBIT C

ASSUMED: ADMINISTRATION BLDG.
IMMEDIATE LEFT - BOYS DORMITORY
FARTHER - KITCHEN AND DINING IN
THE CENTER - GIRLS DORMITORY ON
THE RIGHT



BY J. STANDFORD
THE PHOTOGRAPHER AT
MUSKOGEE

INDIAN TERRITORY
OCT. 1911

THE BEAUTIFUL
INDIAN TERRITORY
ILLUSTRATED

1578

THE CAMERA IS FACING NORTHEAST.
GIRLS DORMITORY ON THE RIGHT -
KITCHEN AND DINING CENTER LEFT -
BOYS DORMITORY ON LEFT.

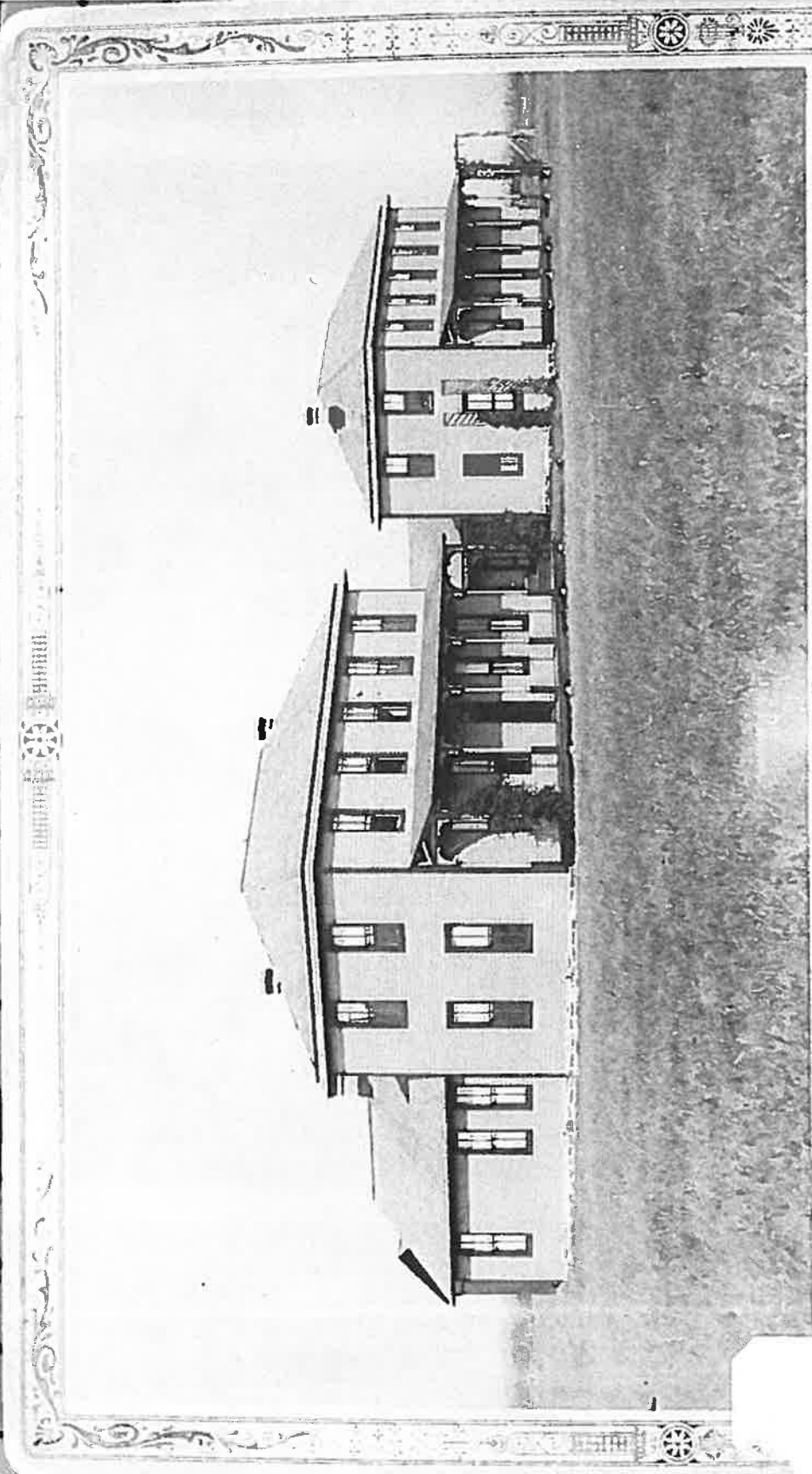
1908



BY J. STANDIFORD
THE PHOTOGRAPHER AT
MUSKOGEE
SOUTHERN
MISSION, MUSKOGEE
SOUTHERN
ILLUSTRATED

5838-205

ONE OF THESE BUILDINGS IS THE
BOYS DORMITORY - THE OTHER IS THE
ADMINISTRATION (ACCORDING TO THE
DIRECTIONAL SIGN STILL ON THE
MISSION PROPERTY.



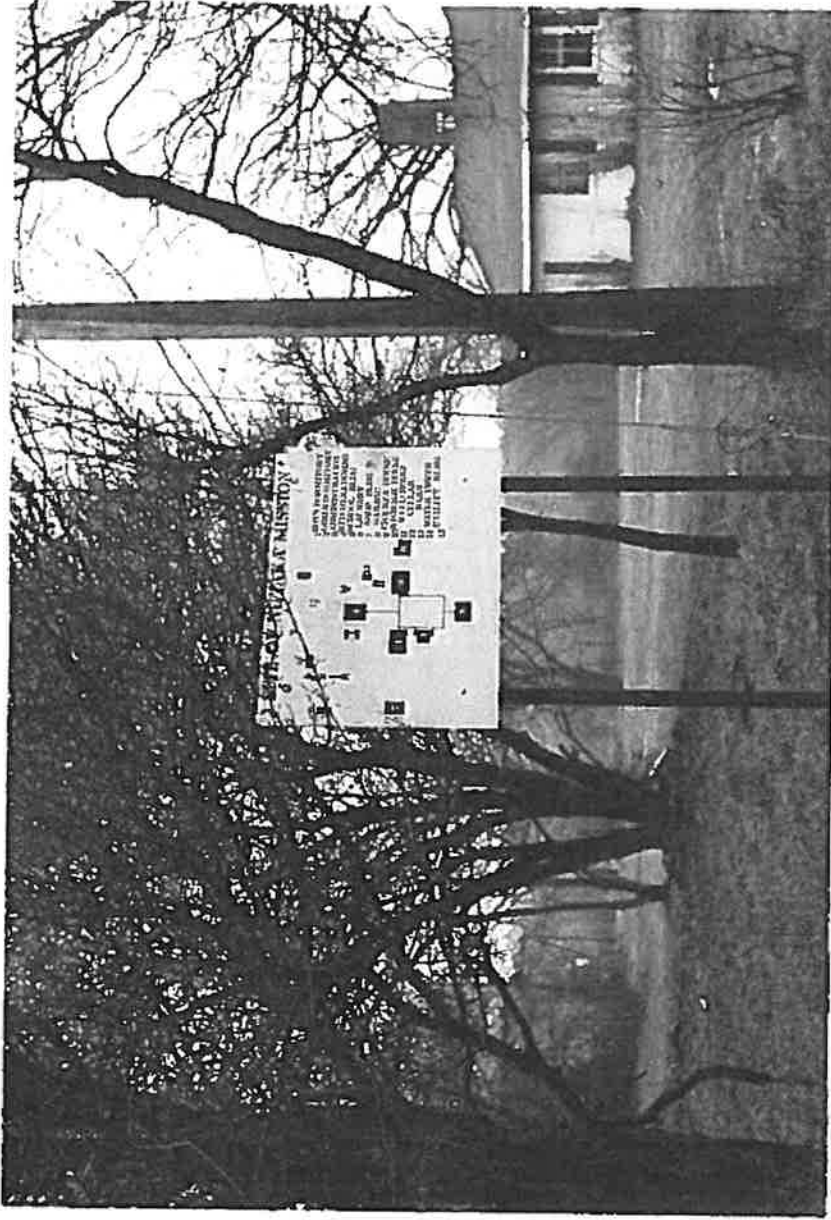
BY J. STANDFORD
PHOTOGRAPHER AT
THE PHOTO MUSKOGEE



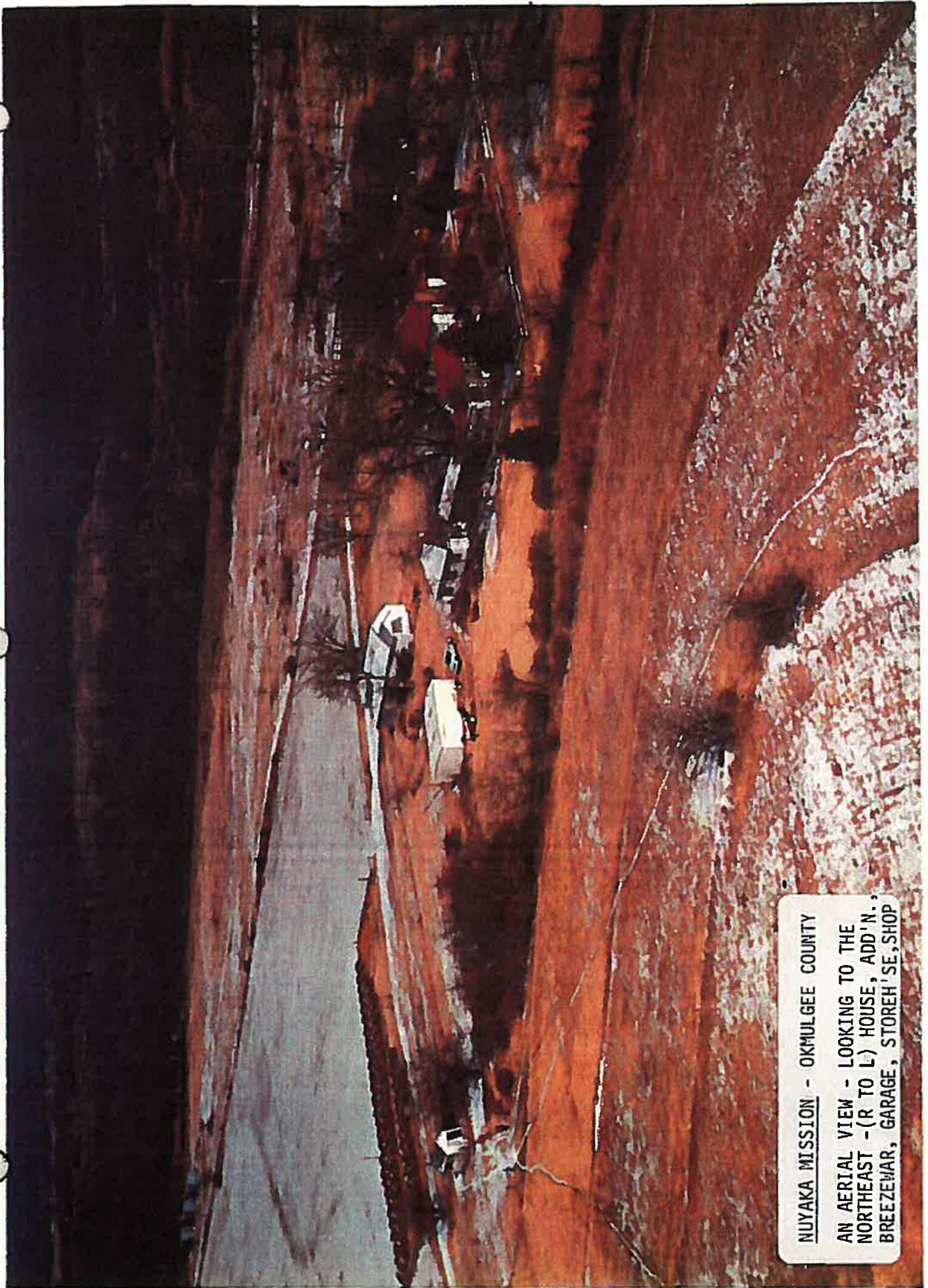
INDIAN TERRITORY
Illustrated
Muskogee Mission, Okla., 1888

INDIAN TERRITORY
Illustrated

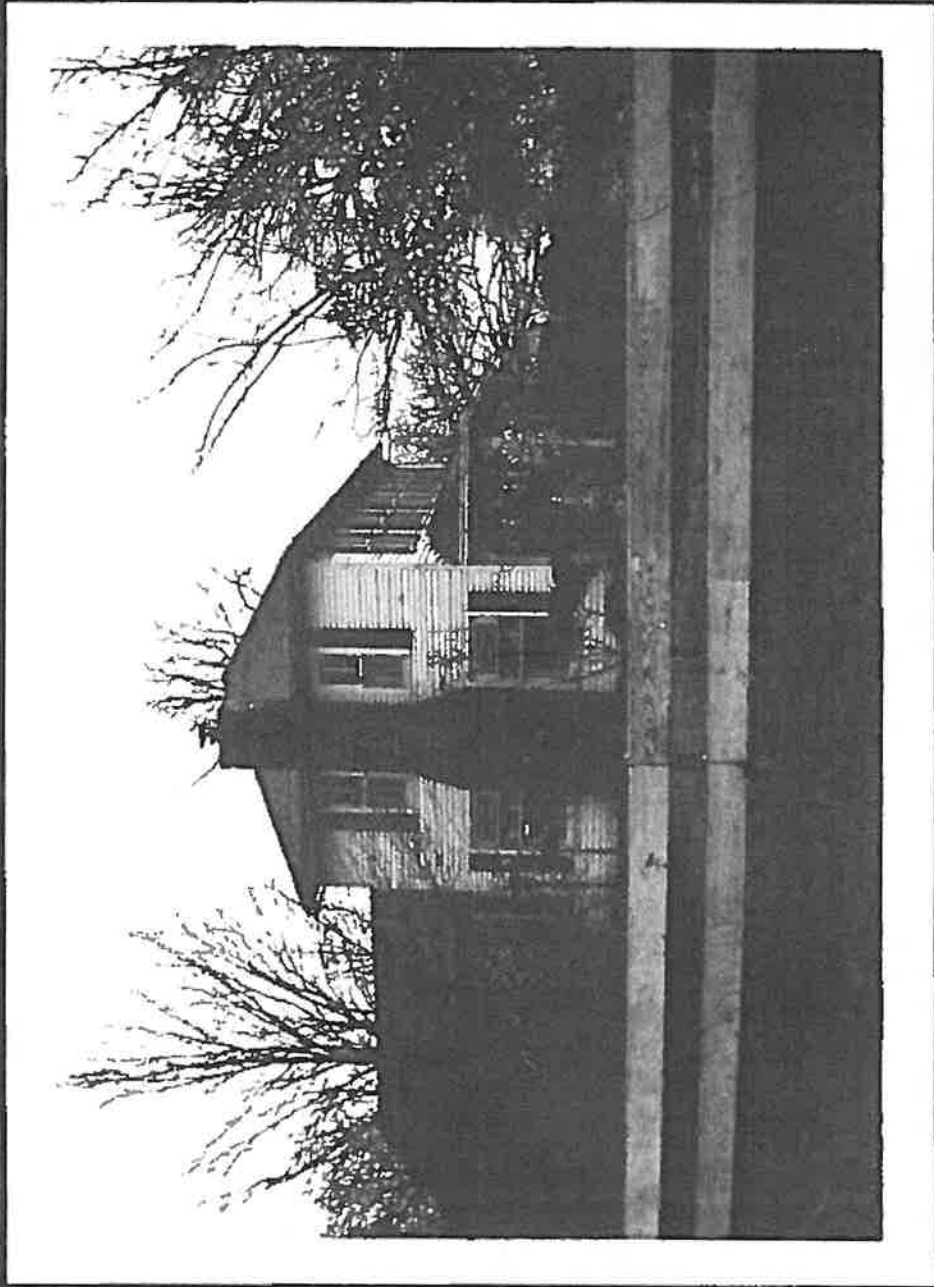
5839



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
DIRECTIONAL SIGN LOCATED BETWEEN
(6) LAUNDRY AND (1) ADMINISTRAT'N.

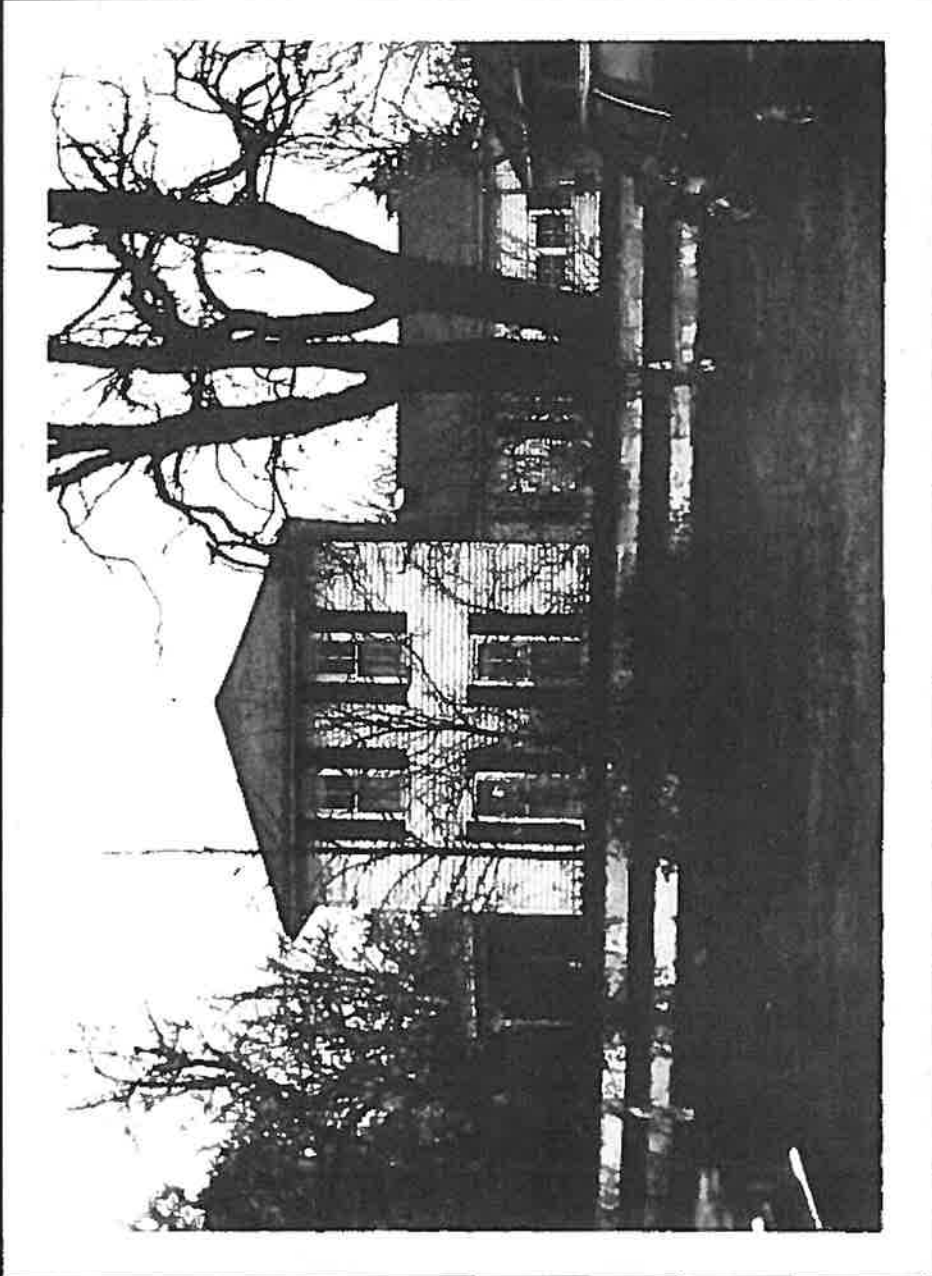


NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
AN AERIAL VIEW - LOOKING TO THE
NORTHEAST -(R TO L) HOUSE, ADD'N.,
BREEZEWAR, GARAGE, STOREH' SE, SHOP

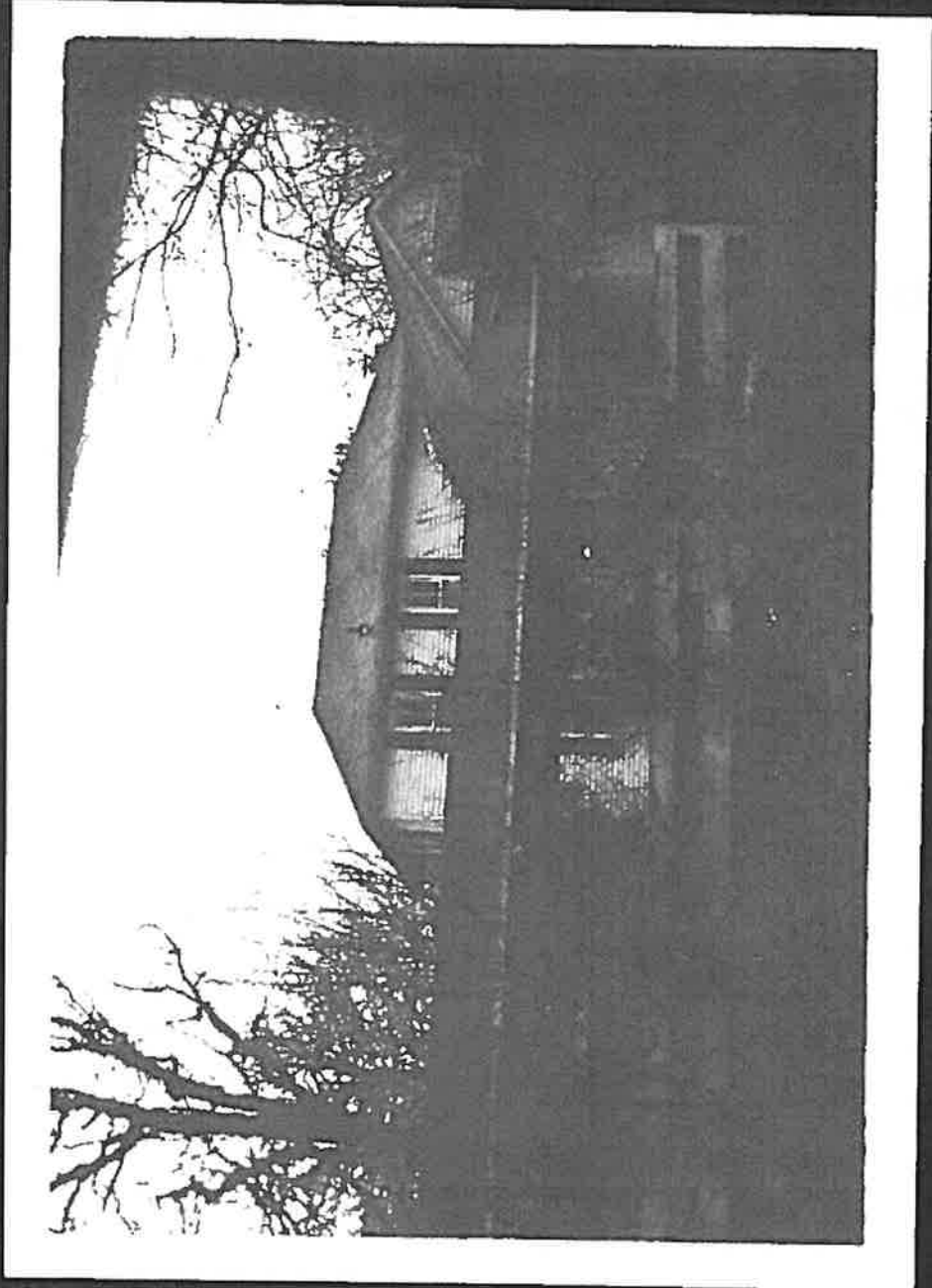


NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY

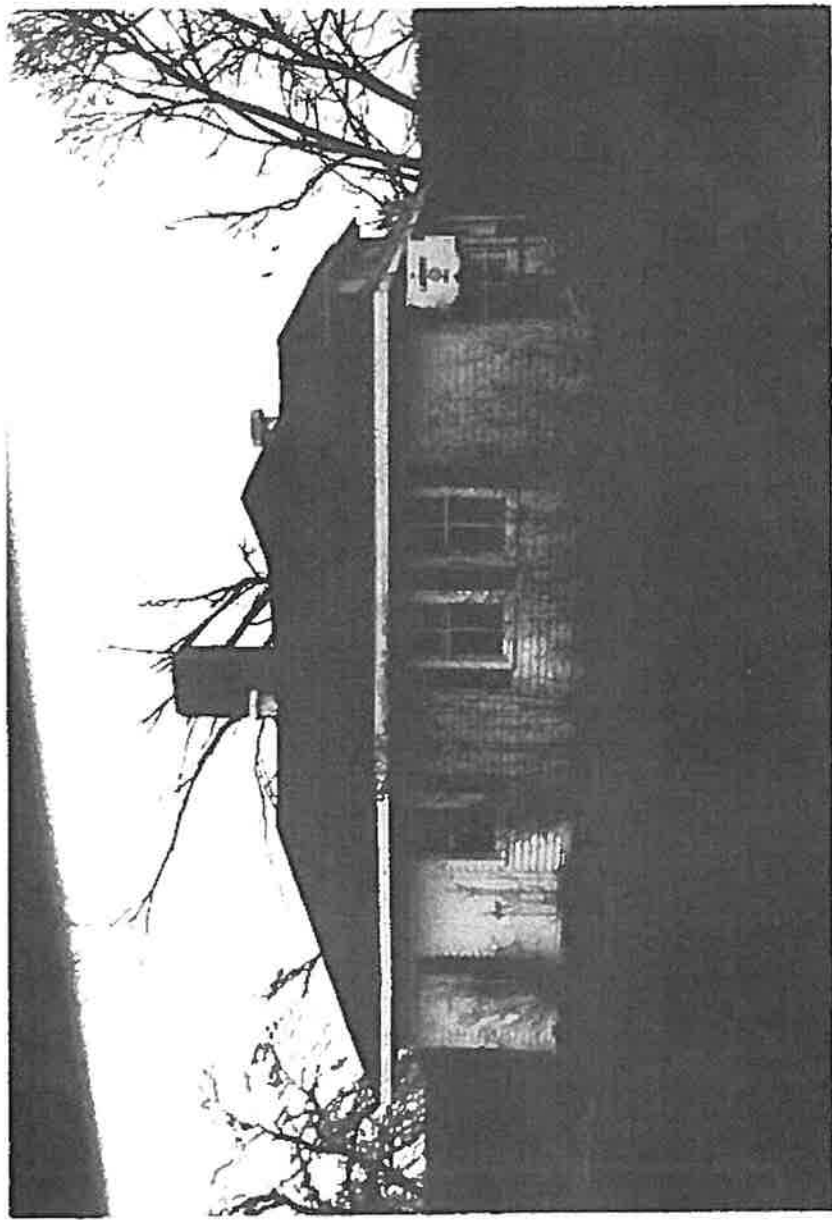
VIEW OF SOUTH ELEVATION OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE



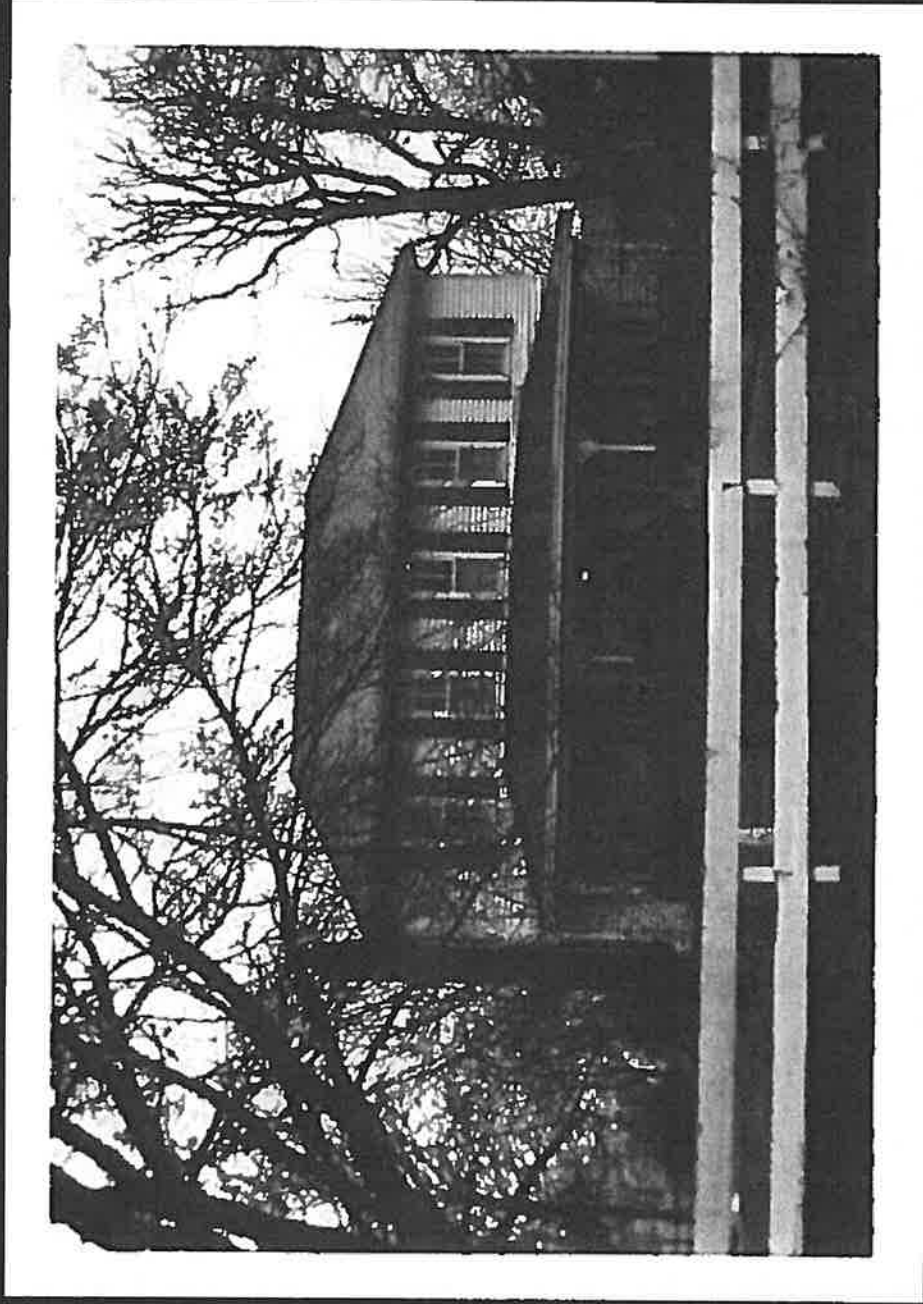
NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
VIEW OF THE NORTH ELEVATION OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE



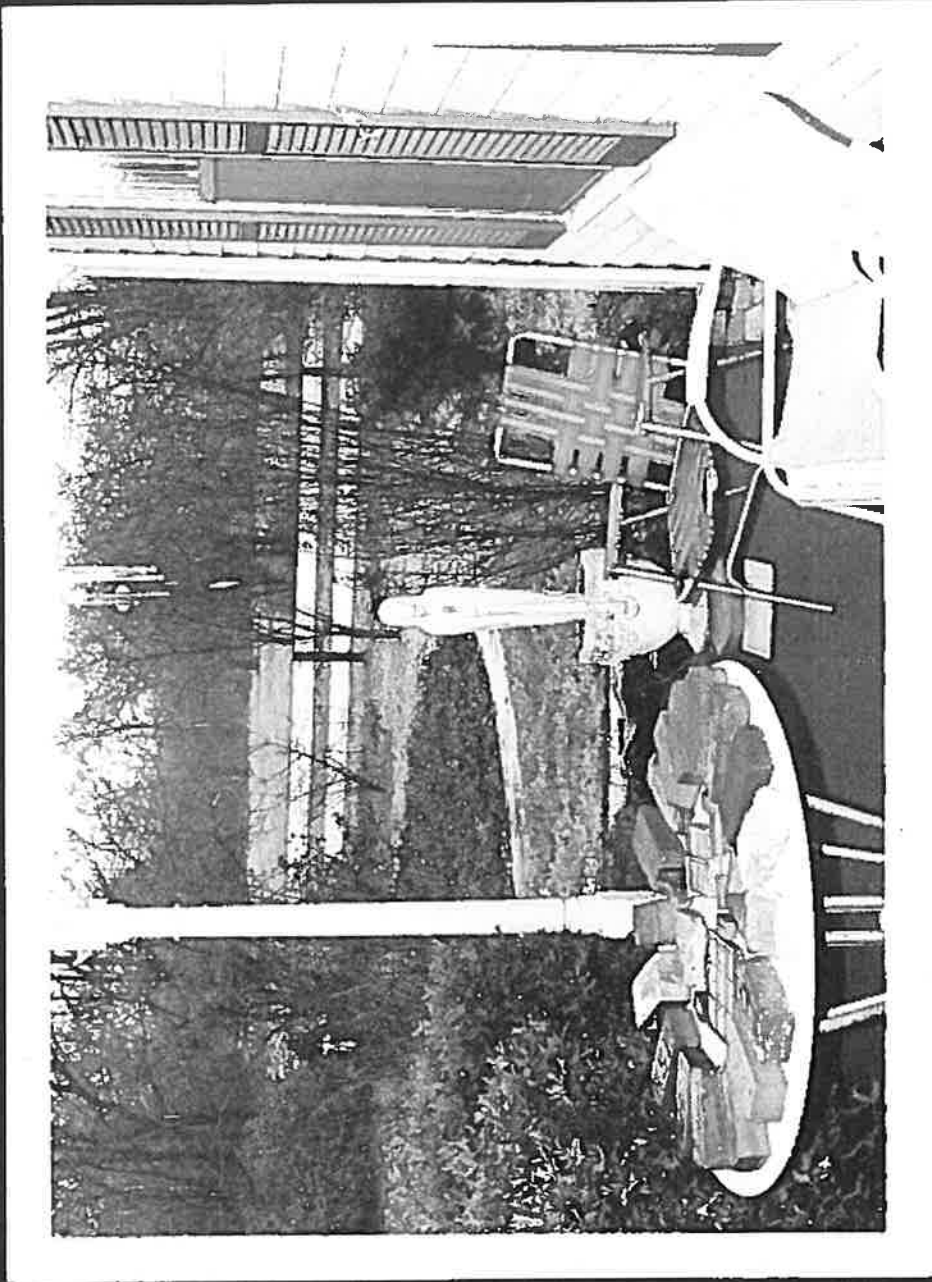
NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
VIEW OF THE WEST ELEVATION OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
VIEW OF THE WEST ELEVATION OF
THE LAUNDRY BUILDING



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY
VIEW OF EAST ELEVATION OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE



NUYAKA MISSION - OKMULGEE COUNTY

THE FRONT PORCH AND ADJOINING
GARDEN WITH BOARD FENCE AND
NATURAL LANDSCAPE

