



“Haskell Indian Nations University Memorial Arch” By Eric Anderson

Originally aired April 2021

The Stadium and Memorial Arch on the campus of Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence may be a familiar site to many. Long a local landmark, it bears witness to Haskell’s history of athletic prowess and hosted numerous “Friday Night Lights” for Lawrence High School football. Yet few know the story behind this impressive structure.

Haskell Institute opened in 1884 as part of the federal government’s plan to assimilate American Indian youth. By the 1920s, it was the largest Indian school and a source of Native pride due to its educational programs and tribal diversity. After the disproportionate service of Indians in World War One and the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, Haskell became the natural place to showcase student talent and the fact that Indians, far from “vanishing,” were thriving.

Thus, an all-Indian fund drive began that eventually raised the money to build a venue for its immensely successful (and popular) football team. The Osage and Quapaw tribes, newly rich from mineral wealth, were among the biggest contributors, but smaller donations rounded out the entire cost of nearly \$250,000. The stadium arch, honoring 415 Haskellites who served in The Great War, was paid for by two Quapaw women, both alumnae of the institute. Another Quapaw gave the largest single sum, totaling over \$56,000, even though he had never attended Haskell.

Dedicated in October 1926, the festivities encompassed a multi-day celebration bringing representatives from some 70 Indian Nations and approximately 12,000 visitors to campus. An “Indian Village,” erected on the south edge of school grounds drew curious onlookers eager to see old tribal traditions, although the homecoming parade focused more on how contemporary Indians were finding success. Guests enjoyed a buffalo barbecue, a staging of the play *Hiawatha*, and a beautiful-baby contest, all culminating in the crushing 36-0 defeat of the Bucknell College Bisons on the football field by the Haskell squad. (There must have been some delicious irony in the Indians overcoming buffalo once again.)

Other features should be noted: paid for exclusively by Indian dollars, it was the first lighted stadium in the Midwest, the third largest in Kansas, the first built anywhere for a Native American football team, and one of the earliest WWI memorials. That opening weekend, furthermore, brought together the largest multi-tribal gathering since the close of the 19th century.

So, the next time you visit our campus (and please do), now you should have a better sense of this centerpiece of our history. Although Haskell retired its football program in 2015, the stadium stands as a testament to proud tradition and both the history of the school and Lawrence.

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