

PACT: Choctaw Nation supports restoration of academy, says Richardson

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letter.

“The school site further likely exhibits archeological potential, although not enough information is included at present to justify an argument under NHL Criterion 6,” the letter states.

The Choctaw Nation is in support of the 1800s-era dormitory restoration, Richardson said.

“It’s a very historic site for the Choctaw Nation,” Ian Thompson, tribal historic preservation officer, told Kentucky Lantern.

Through the years of trying to find support for Academy restoration, Richardson said the museum has “now interrupted our ability to accept charitable contributions.”

“A donor has now stepped forward with a \$60,000 pledge, and after years of work, we finally have the opportunity to restore this extraordinary place,” he said.

Richardson finds the museum’s decision “troubling,” he said.

The museum board began questioning their involvement with Choctaw Academy in 2022, citing lack of resources, according to documentation, letters and email correspondence between former County Attorney Rand Marshall, Richardson and Scott County Fiscal Court.

A News-Graphic article from September 2022, following a fiscal court meeting, cites Richardson as saying the museum was “excited” about their Academy involvement

until 2020.

In Sosbe’s letter to Richardson from June 22, 2026, he cites “insurance coverage;” “no significant benefit to the Museum;” “potential liabilities;” and “limited funding” as reasons the museum seeks to leave the easement.

The easement, dated August 31, 2018 and signed by Larry M. Cassity, then-museum board chair, states the easement only applies to the dormitory exterior.

“Grantors shall make the Exterior available for non-commercial viewing by appointment through Grantee on two week-end days during Native American Heritage Month (November) and on two weekend days during Preservation Month (May),” reads the easement in part.

“Grantee shall have the right to enter the Property to make photographs, drawings, videos, and other representations documenting the Exterior and to make them available to the public in magazines, newsletters, the internet, or other publicly available publications.”

The museum would be responsible for “repairing, maintaining, and otherwise preserving the Exterior (‘Preservation Work’); provided however, nothing in this Easement shall require Grantee to perform Preservation Work except to the extent sufficient funds have been raised by it for such purpose,” according to the easement.

The easement also calls for annual inspection of the exterior by the museum, as well as obtaining “com-

prehensive general liability insurance against claims for personal injury, death, and property damage arising from the Preservation Work, the viewing, study, or documentation the Exterior by others, or otherwise arising out of Grantee’s rights, responsibilities, and interests under this Easement.”

Richardson and his wife Candace are also named as additional insured, according to the easement.

In Sosbe’s June letter, he references “frustrations” between Richardson and the museum board of directors.

“It is clear that the Easement was entered into by all parties to further the purpose of preserving the dormitory building,” Sosbe’s June letter reads. “It is equally apparent that the purpose has largely been frustrated over the years. The Board of Directors of the Museum feels that in light of the frustration of that purpose, that there is no significant benefit to the Museum from retaining the easement. There is, however, an economic obligation, and a huge potential liability. The Museum therefore wishes to surrender the easement, and wishes to formalize that process.”

Richardson “respectfully disagrees with the conclusion that the preservation purpose of the easement has been frustrated,” he wrote in a formal July response to Sosbe’s June letter.

“The Preservation Easement itself repeatedly states that its purpose is to

preserve and maintain the Choctaw Academy Dormitory and its Preservation Values for the benefit of the public,” Richardson writes.

“It further provides that the easement shall run in perpetuity, bind successors and assigns, and may be transferred to another qualified holder so long as the conservation and preservation purposes continue to be carried out.”

Richardson still believes in restoration of the Academy, he said, noting in his July response, “the significance of the Choctaw Academy has never been more widely recognized.”

The potential for a NHL “validates and strengthens” the easement, Richardson writes.

“The easement itself has become a critical component of the preservation framework that has allowed the Academy to survive,” he writes.

The majority of preservation work has been carried out by the Richardson family and “small group of supporters,” Richardson states in his response.

“To my knowledge, the Museum has not undertaken any significant public awareness campaign, organized fundraising efforts, pursued grants, requested budgetary support, had Board or Executive engagement, or otherwise actively advanced the restoration and preservation of the Academy,” he writes.

“In my opinion, some of the frustration referenced in your letter is largely due to the Museum’s lack of any meaningful assistance. The Museum’s nonperfor-

mance’s genuinely impeded the ability to pursue grants and related funding opportunities.

“If the easement was extinguished and the Museum withdrew without an alternative stewardship arrangement in place, the consequences would be severe. The loss of the easement would result in the inability to continue raising funds necessary to preserve the Academy. In practical terms, the extinguishment of the easement could contribute directly to the eventual loss of the very historic resource that the Museum accepted the easement to protect in 2018.”

Richardson notes liability concerns were addressed in the agreement, he writes.

“To my knowledge no claims have ever been asserted against the Museum arising from the easement during the eight years since its execution,” Richardson writes.

“The Save the Choctaw Academy preservation entity has held a stand-alone general liability policy since approximately 2018, to indemnify it and the fiscal agent, and that policy is not terribly costly.”

Richardson “remains willing to discuss (the Academy and easement) in good faith,” he writes.

“The Academy is one of Kentucky’s most important historic resources and one of the nation’s most significant Native American historic sites,” Richardson writes.

Following those discussions, the museum is “willing to transfer its

rights as the holder of the dominant estate under the Easement to any qualifying entity that expresses a willingness to accept the Easement,” according to Sosbe’s September letter to Richardson.

“The Museum is willing to postpone its previously referenced termination of the Easement through the end of this calendar year,” Sosbe writes in response to Richardson. He also notes Richardson may set up a 501(c)(3) of his own.

“It was also the Board’s unanimous agreement that the timeline referenced above should be conveyed to you- in the clearest possible terms- to be a fixed timeline,” Sosbe wrote.

In a Sept. 4 request for comment regarding why the museum sought to leave the easement and seek legal action; correspondence between Richardson and the museum in reference to restoration over the course of the easement; and if the museum has received monetary donations toward the Academy over the course of the easement, Sosbe said: “This is a matter that is being actively discussed between the Museum and private landowners to decide what makes the most sense moving forward. Further public comment outside that process by any of the involved parties is not helpful or appropriate at this time.”

Georgetown/Scott County Museum Director Ruthie Stevens had previously declined to comment. She was named museum director in 2015 following David Rice.

HISTORY: Academy closed in 1845

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school with Rev. Thomas Henderson serving as superintendent, Bevins writes. The boys were studying science and surveying.

“In 1826, the Pottowatomie and Creek nations joined the project,” she writes. Enrollment “swelled” to more than 100 boys, Bevins writes.

By 1828 Chickasaw joined, according to Bevins’ book. In 1931 the school moved to White Sulphur Spring Farm, also owned by Johnson.

Trades taught within Choctaw Academy, according to her book, included: tailoring, cabinetmaking, boot and shoe making, blacksmithing and wagon making.

“The Lancastrian system was adapted to the curriculum, providing for trade shops and vocational profit sharing,” Bevins writes.

Some 14 years later, in 1845, Choctaw Academy was discontinued as “the Choctaw nation decided to educate their youth in their own country,” Bevins writes.

Chip Richardson now owns the property and has been attempting for years to restore the only remaining building on the property, a dormitory. A recent letter from the U.S. Department of the Interior has deemed the property eligible for National Historical Landmark status if pursued.

“It wasn’t long before I met (local historian) Ann Bevins, who’s a fountain of information about Scott County,” Richardson said in 2016.

“She said there’s probably no more historically rich area in Scott County than the area around the Choctaw Academy,” he said.

In 2016, Richardson sought to have a “wall-less barn” put up around the Academy to protect the collapsing roof, according to previous News-Graphic reports.

“(The Academy) really had a very positive impact on the evolution of Native American life during the times of European settlement,” Richardson told the News-Graphic in November 2016 when he was raising restoration funds before winter. By February 2017, Choctaw Academy was sheltered by a “pole-barn,” according to previous reporting.

Richardson credits Academy history as being “multi-racial” in a time when that wasn’t common, he said in 2022.

“Richard Mentor Johnson had two mixed-race daughters with Julia Chinn, who was actually his father’s slave,” Richardson said. “They were receiving an

education there as well. There’s really no other time in American history where you had a secular boarding school for education that was multi-racial like this. There’s no other time.”

Through research, Richardson told the News-Graphic in 2024, “he, along with the help of others like Preservation Officer Ian Thompson with the Choctaw Tribe, that former students of Choctaw Academy very well could have been the first Native American physicians.”

“Joel Barrow and William Treyhern studied at the Choctaw Academy, later pursuing medical degrees from Transylvania University in Lexington,” according to Richardson in 2024. “Though it is hard to find evidence of Treyhern actually graduating in the 1830’s, Barrow a few years later, (in 1844), did graduate with a medical degree from the university,” he said.

Barrow, or Arcmuggue, as he was known before the name change, was “perhaps the most accomplished student to ever attend Choctaw Academy,” Christina Snyder wrote in her book, “Great Crossings.”

Richardson believes Choctaw Academy is the “most important place in Antebellum America,” he told the News-Graphic in March of this year.

COUNCIL: Second hearing set for Sept. 21

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affordable housing or workforce housing for people to try to make it as cheap as possible. Then, your taxes that we ask from them eats us up, and then we turn around and we give it to the developer instead of giving it back to the taxpayers and letting them make choices.”

Councilmember Todd Stone pointed to rising gasoline and diesel prices that drive up the prices of other goods and services.

“All of that’s coming back around, so this would be a perfect opportunity to show that we have a heart and give some relief back,” Stone said.

Property valuations “constantly going up” are also contributing to high taxes for residents, Councilmember Greg Hampton said. Given the rising property valuations and large development projects across the community, the City’s revenue from property taxes may “level out” even with a reduced rate, Tingle Sames added.

Prior to the meeting, City Council hosted a special-called meeting for public comment on the proposed rate, where citizen Bill Abernathy objected to the slight rate increase “at a time when

many of our citizens are hurting,” he said.

“Property taxes are spiraling and they’re a burden, especially to those of us who are on fixed income,” Abernathy said. “Many of us worked hard to pay off our mortgages, but we face the challenge of steadily increasing property taxes. I’ve heard the city of Georgetown has a fairly large cash reserve. Most of the citizens of our city don’t have a cash reserve like that.”

Based on Fiscal Court’s property tax reduction, Mayor Burney Jenkins “anticipated” Council’s desire not to move forward with a rate increase and presented an alternative tax ordinance at the compensating rate.

The compensating rate tax levy would impose taxes at 6.1 cents per \$100 assessed for both real and personal property, a one cent decrease from the 2025 rate, according to the ordinance.

Because this levy was set at the compensating rate, Council was not required to have a second reading after Monday’s meeting, City Attorney Emilee Buttrum said.

However, Jenkins asked that a special-called meeting would be held Monday, Sept. 21, for a second reading.

Following Monday’s meeting, Jenkins stated that he wanted to be prepared for Council’s rejection of the originally proposed tax increase after Fiscal Court moved forward on a reduced tax rate.

“We have to be ready because, this, to be honest, being an election year and everything else, you want to try and do something back for the people,” he said. “So, we didn’t want to be like, if (Fiscal Court) is dropping their taxes and we’re raising them, that’s not a good look, either. It should be that if they’re dropping theirs, we could drop ours, too.”

The reduced rate is not expected to complicate Council’s budget for the 2027 Fiscal Year, Jenkins said.

“It is the right thing to do. Our job is to provide services, but we can, through budgets, make up the difference,” he said. “We’re going to make up the difference in that once we start getting some of these commercial things online, people with jobs, and so on. We’ll get it back.”

“... I’m just glad it was an opportunity for us, I think, to do the right thing by people. If we’ve got a chance to lower things, let’s do that.”

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