

In 1911, when J.S. Esslinger, the first president of Haskell State School of Agriculture, built a house for himself across the street from campus, the owner of the Broken Arrow Brick Co. personally handpicked every brick. His daughter, after all, was married to Esslinger, so it had to be the biggest and finest home in town.

Indeed, for the next 50 years, it would be the only multi-story brick house in Broken Arrow. With a wrap-around porch supported by sturdy brick posts, it had bedrooms across three floors. Haskell State opened in 1909 with classes meeting at the Opera House on Main Street. Construction on its own building didn't start until the next year, with an 80-acre campus on East College Street, where facilities included poultry houses, a barn, creamery, pastures and grain fields, along with a caretaker's house, according to a written history provided by Clarence Oliver Jr., a retired superintendent of Broken Arrow schools. The campus didn't have dormitories, so students lived with Broken Arrow families.

In 1916, the Esslinger House served as a residence hall for about 30 women, in addition to the college president and his family. How all of them managed to fit, history books unfortunately don't explain. It was a big house but not that big. Haskell closed in 1917 after the Legislature canceled its funding, and some of the campus facilities, including the college's football field, became part of Broken Arrow High School. Later, the site evolved into the North Intermediate campus, Oliver said. Officials declared the original Haskell classroom building "structurally dangerous" and tore it down in 1987.

The Esslinger house became the only remaining structure dating back to the old college. Last May, Preservation Oklahoma named it one of the "Most Endangered Places" in the state, hoping to spark community support for restoring it. But the owners reportedly found extensive structural problems that would have made a restoration project exorbitantly expensive. The Esslinger House was demolished last week. And with it, Broken Arrow lost the last trace of a part of its history. Michael Overall 918-581-8383 michael.overall@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @MichaelOverall2 Get news delivered to your inbox! Subscribe to our Daily Headlines newsletter. Sign up! *

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