

Terrell County Memorial Museum News

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Sanderson, Texas

Schools in Terrell County



Photo: TCMM

Dryden School bus, ca 1936, Donald Smith sitting on top.

Terrell County residents have always been supportive of the education of their children. Before there was a town, ranchers and inhabitants of the small water stops on the railroad tutored their children at home or hired “professors” or governesses to teach their children the basics.

For the first ten years there were few residents in town, in fact, few women, even. In a *San Antonio Light* article for August 10, 1885, just three years after the founding of the town, railroaders reported that there were just three women in town. These were probably “working girls,” so-called “calico queens.”

By the late 1880s, though, more people had moved to town, bringing their families with them. A need arose for a public school and the first school was built in 1888, as confirmed by early resident Alejandro Marquez, Sr. in an interview in the 1960s, and stood where the Harrell Dairy now stands, south of the railroad tracks on 2nd Street. According to Marquez, it was a crude building made of railroad ties and was not sealed, allowing freezing wind to pass through in the winter.

The first teacher in this little school, according to the *Sanderson Times* in a 1937 article, was Miss Fanny Patterson. Later, Miss Lou Darling came from

Alpine to teach in the little school. The school term, in those days, was 240 days, compared with today's 180-day school year, or, a full two months longer.

The second school was built of lumber and stood across the street from the present-day location of Sanderson Bank, at Oak and School Street. That, in fact, is the reason School Street was so named. One teacher at this school was Miss Susie Riggs.

A few years later, in 1898, a third school was built, this one of adobe and located near the access way between the old Kountry Kitchen building and the old Roundhouse Restaurant/McKnight Motor Company building. Since Oak Street had not been surveyed or dedicated at the time, the school was located near the middle of the present-day street. Mr. Taylor was the teacher, later Miss Nettie Carpenter, Scudder Biggs and Edgar Biggs, with Miss

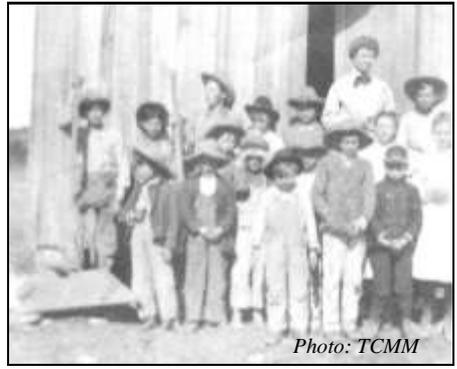


Photo: TCMM

The second school, a frame structure, was located across from the present Sanderson Bank at Oak and School Streets, ca 1896-98. Standing behind is the teacher, Miss Susie Riggs.

Lizzie Savage teaching in this school after the Savages moved to Sanderson in 1899.

When Oak Street was surveyed around 1900, the adobe school was found to be in the middle of the new



Photo: Alice Evans Downie

The third school building erected for the town of Sanderson, built near the middle of present-day Oak Street, which was not surveyed or dedicated at that time, between Wilson and School Streets, ca 1899. The teacher, Miss Nettie Carpenter, is standing ground level at the far right.

street and was razed and a lumber building constructed near Hominy Hill, where the present Church of Christ building stands, at the top of Persimmon Street. A Miss Wilson was one of the teachers, as well as the celebrated J. J. Allen, who later became Sanderson's third and very successful sheriff.

With the organization of Terrell County in 1905, the Terrell County Common School District was created with the County Judge as its superintendent. This district, however, covered only a part of the county.

In 1907, a school was organized at Dryden, with other small schools eventually being located at Independence, Watkins (a railroad stop 34 miles east of Sanderson on a now-abandoned section of the line,) the Allen Ranch and the Sam Bell Ranch. These schools came and went as needed.

In 1910, the school building at Hominy Hill began to burst at the seams, with a burgeoning town population and resultant influx of new students. It was decided to build a new school, with plenty of room for growth.

The idea had been sounded before, and even a fledgling effort at selling school bonds was made, but nothing came of it.

Finally, in the spring of 1910, a \$25,000 school construction bond elec-

tion was overwhelmingly approved. San Antonio architect Henry T. Phelps was retained to draw up plans for a new school building. The highly-respected Phelps had drawn the plans for the first Terrell County Courthouse, along with many schools, commercial buildings, depots, courthouses and private homes across the State. His plans were accepted and bids were let in July of 1910. The winning bid was made by Martin Brauer of Del Rio, with a bid of \$21,700 to construct an imposing three-storey brick building, to be located a block south of the courthouse on Pine Street, and include a steam plant to heat the building.

The red brick school building was completed on schedule and opened on May 1, 1911, in time to use the new auditorium for end-of-school activities. Although there was no graduating class for 1911, the students put on plays and skits for the year-end celebration. The highlight of the evening was a Tom Thumb Wedding, starring the children of the primary department.

In 1911, passage of a new state law allowed schools to absorb all districts in a county to become a single school district. But, it was not until 1929 that the county commissioners decreed that the Terrell County Common School District expand to become the Terrell



Dryden School, in operation from 1907 until 1956.



Photo: TCMM

Sanderson School, aka, the red brick school, pictured shortly after opening in 1911. It was advertised as the finest, most modern school building in West Texas, at the time. It served nearly 70 years and was demolished in 1970.

County Consolidated School District #1 to simplify administration of schools in the county and greatly improve the chances for all students to get a good education.

The red brick school served the county for the next seventy years, first housing all eleven grades, and then,

with the construction of the new high school in 1930, housing the elementary school.

In those days, first through seventh grades were considered elementary or grammar school and eighth through eleventh grades were considered high school. There were no junior high or



Photo: TCMM

Kid's slide at the red brick school, with the fire escape slide in the background, ca 1928, Troy Druse is at the far right.



Photo: TCMM

The new Sanderson High School, as completed in 1931. This building served for 71 years, and portions of it are still in use to this day. A new high school building was opened in 2012, south of the Sanderson Junior High School building, facing 2nd Street.

middle schools, nor public kindergartens or pre-schools. Mrs. Cecil Elder Nations conducted a kindergarten in her home in the 1920s, but it was not affiliated with the Terrell County Consolidated School District.

In 1931, a new high school building was completed on the north side of the school block, facing Hackberry and the courthouse. Again, the citizens spared no expense, and the \$150,000 building was hailed as a bellwether for area schools. Ultra-modern and done in Art Deco-style, the building was designed by well-known San Antonio architect, Ralph Cameron. Rather than a stark, utilitarian building, he incorporated bas-relief panels above the main entrance depicting Truth, Culture, Progress and Success, and added Art Deco elements, inside and out. It was a point of pride for the citizens of the community, and a last gasp of hope for prosperous times, in the face of the coming Depression.

As years passed, the smaller schools in the Common School District disappeared, one by one. Finally, as the Dryden population dwindled, their school was determined to be no longer cost effective and was closed in 1956. The remaining students were bused to

Sanderson elementary. This ended the era of small country schools in Terrell County.

Originally, public schools in Texas were governed by the State Board of Education, a committee of nine members appointed by the governor and led by a State Superintendent of Public Education. In 1929, this group was reorganized by constitutional amendment.

In 1941, in an effort to "beef up" standards, the State Board of Education added the twelfth grade to the curriculum and, much later, allowed kindergarten and pre-school on a voluntary basis, comprising the system we use today.

In 1949, the Gilmer-Aiken Laws abolished this board and the Texas Education Agency was formed, consisting of 21 members, one from each congressional district, and led by a Commissioner of Education. This group was given much more control over local school districts than previous boards. It sets teacher licensing and standards, administers school book selection, adoption and standards, sets education requirements and policies and controls state and Federal monies and budgets



Photo: Sanderson Times Collection, TCMM

The new Lamar Ward School, as completed in 1939. Directly behind it is the old Lamar Ward School, previously called the East Ward School, and behind that the Atletico Catolico or C.A.C. building, eventually the VFW Hall and today the Terrell County Fair building. The old school was used for storage and as a locker room for junior high athletics, but was finally demolished in 1975. When the Hispanic school census reached 540 in 1937, the C.A.C. building was used for overflow. A grant and matching funds totaling \$45,000 built the new building and made renovations at the gymnasium and the red brick school.

for the schools of the state.

Because of the early-day state policy of segregation, a lower-grade ward school for Spanish-speaking students was built near the present site of El Buen Pastor Mexican Methodist Church, shortly after organization of the county. A part of this frame building was moved to the high school grounds near the site of the old shop building at Hackberry and 2nd Street and improved for Spanish-speaking students.

In 1929, the so-called East Ward School for Hispanic children was built on the present parking lot between the band hall and the Terrell County Fair Building, which had started life as the C.A.C. building and then became the VFW hall.

In 1938, the present band hall was built to the side of the old school, facing 3rd Street, and named the Lamar Ward School. It was built to satisfy overcrowding of the 540 Hispanic students in the East Ward building, with spill-over into the C.A.C. building. The old school was demolished in 1975.

In 1954, the state school system was desegregated by Federal law, and for a few years, the Lamar Ward School housed three integrated 1st grade classes. Eventually, when the new elementary school was completed, classes at TCISD were completely integrated and the Lamar Ward building was converted to a band hall.

In 1958, the Common School District #1 was reorganized and became Terrell County Independent School District. The district tax office was created, with Mr. A. H. Zuberbueler as the first Tax-collector and Business Manager for the District.

In 1959, with the old red school building nearing the end of its useful life, the new elementary school was built at the top of Fourth Street. With the condemnation of the third floor of the old school and implementation of desegregation in the district, the district began to undergo crowding of the student body.

Still, the faithful old building served another ten years until the new, octagonal Junior High School building was

erected in 1970, at Hackberry and 2nd Streets. As soon as the new building was occupied, wreckers moved in to raze the red brick school, which held so many dear (and not so dear) memories for generations of Sanderson residents. They remembered with joy the plays, parties, assembly programs and year-round activities that took place in that dear old building, including the thrill of sliding down the unique fire escape slides at each end of the building.

And so the years rolled by with the school and administration comforted by the thought that the district's facilities were in good condition and met the standards of the state and the needs of the students and parents.

In 1977, however, the *Sanderson Times* reported that the high school

building was visited by unknown arsonists and considerable damage was done to the building around the main entrance and in the science lab. Extensive work was done to restore the facilities, but the culprits were never caught.

In 1996, in the middle of class one morning, students were rapidly evacuated from the high school building, not even allowed to retrieve personal items from their lockers. Officials had discovered a dangerous sag in the roof of the auditorium and an inspecting engineer warned that it was in imminent danger of collapse, perhaps bringing the rest of the building down with it.

By doubling up classes and using the education building of St. James Church across the street, the student body was moved to the Junior High



Photo: *Sanderson Times* Collection, TCMM

Low first grade of the East Ward School in 1931-32, predecessor to Lamar Ward. This school sat on the present-day parking lot behind the Band Hall, and was demolished in 1975. Pictured with their teacher, Miss Vanola Lane (Mrs. Austin Nance) are, back row: Inez Fierro, Cruz Torres, Lola Torres, Selzo Perez, Valentín Flores, Santiago Flores, Jose Angel Flores, Otilio Escudero; front row: Cresensio Rodriguez, unknown, Fortino Olgin, Erminia Flores, Irene Villarreal, Cata Rodriguez, Sulema Falcon, Margarita Rodriguez, Rita Gutierrez, Anita Hernandez, unknown, Pime Muñoz, Benigno Salazar, Antonio Calzada and Modesto Galvan.

