

HISTORY OF COAHOMA SCHOOLS

by Sue Tindol

Coahoma's first school was built in 1891. Annie Phinney says that the school was started and the town grew up around it. The first school was said to have been on the J.J. Jackson farm; half a mile north and a mile east of the present day school plant. It was built by the parents. The first pupils were Bill, Mattie, and Cory Spears; also Walter and Charles Robinson who were twins. It seems this school had a different type of chalk board than we have today—it had one wall painted that served as the "chalk board." One source says the first teacher was Gertrude McIntyre and she had about seven students. The next year a man, Charlie Sawyer, was hired as schoolmaster or teacher, and the enrollment jumped way up to sixteen! This school was well equipped for a school in its day. Heat was supplied by a pot-bellied stove in which they burned mesquite stumps. Someone hauled in the water supply in a barrel by horse and wagon. Water was brought in a bucket during winter weather and everyone used a dipper probably made out of tin or maybe granite ware. (They believed in recycling.)

Students made it to school any way the families could supply. The lucky ones got to ride in a buggy, wagon or cart drawn by a horse, donkey or mule. Most walked and some walked several miles thinking they were lucky to be able to go to school to learn and get an education so they could amount to something someday. You have to realize their times, transportation and roads were much different than ours today. Often there weren't even roads on which to ride or walk. The book bags in those days might have been homemade out of oilcloth carried by a shoulder strap. It might have contained a slate, which was like a small chalk board, a cedar pencil and paper.

If students didn't live close to the school where they could walk home at lunch, then they carried their lunch likely in a syrup bucket (recycling again) with holes having been punched in it to help keep it fresh. Biscuits, large in size, with maybe a piece of pork sausage or two hard boiled eggs were included in the "canned" lunch. Sometimes it might include a cucumber pickle, homemade, of course. Fried pies called sugar pies (like a fried pie of today except baked in the ovens like I've heard of my Grandma Buchanan fixing for lunches like these or having hot in the afternoon as the children returned home from school) were included.

And, of course, they had the outdoor "privies." Boys on one side and girls on the other. You had to beware of snakes, spiders and other bothersome outdoor wildlife as you went to take care of business. Readin', ritin', and 'rithmetic, were the subjects taught in these early schools as we are reminded in the ole song. Other subjects might be included if the teacher was proficient in music, art, or geography. Recess time brought simple games such as jacks, pop-the-whip, tag, drop the handkerchief, and London Bridge is Fallin' Down. Lots of exciting fun, huh?



• Men and women of vision have always provided ways to educate and benefit their youth. Our country was built on high religious values as well as a high regard for learning and education. And here in our location, such men as R.V. Guthrie and John R. Wheeler made plans for a school district. In the early 1900's, C.C. Saunders, father of our present day mayor, Eleanor Garrett donated ten acres of land to the school district. Later the family sold more acres to be used for school expansion. The next building was erected in 1904 at the southwest corner of the present school campus. It had three or four rooms. When school was to start, in fact, they say the night after registration in 1909, this building burned. Students had to attend school in three local church buildings. S. Wolf, the father of Doris Hale, one of our local citizens now, also taught in the school thought to be located out near the Glyn Mitchel home northeast of Coahoma. Doris told me that her dad taught band and had programs. He played the cornet, violin, and guitar. Her mother also taught piano lessons. In 1905, he taught the basic curriculum and music.

The community then began again to insure that their kids would have a school and some learning. They built a two story brick building described as a "beautiful, modern brick building." They even had water piped in from a nearby well and really modern two "five-holers" out back. (Now we know that was the outhouses, don't we?) It had an auditorium where socials, plays and entertainment was provided for the community: box suppers, where the gals decorated a box and filled it with a delicious meal and auctioned it off to the highest bidder (hopefully this would be her sweetie or the boy on whom she had a crush on at the time), musicals (when outside musicians came in to entertain), as well as plays and pantomimes were some of the favorites.

I'm sure it was an exciting time for three students in 1915. It was Coahoma school's first graduation. These three students were Leroy Echols, father of Roy Echols, Gladys Sullivan and Vernon Guthrie. Also, that same year, boys' and girls' basketball teams were organized. The "Dandy Doers" was the name the girls chose for their team. At that time, the girls' basketball court was divided into three equal parts and the girls that played in the middle part only caught the ball and passed it to the other end. The players could only take one dribble at a time. They wore bloomers (long, full-cut shorts) stockings and middy blouses that had ties, which showed the colors of the school. Mrs. Eula Bess Westmoreland explained this was the uniform when she coached. She coached in Central Texas both boys and girls and she had never seen nor played a game of basketball. She said she used the rule book and told the students to get in there and get the ball. She said if a girl's middy blouse tail came out during play the official would stop the games and order for her to put it back into its "proper" place. Basketball was played outside on a dirt court in its earliest days. It certainly has had changes from those early days till now.

