

MUSEUM MUSINGS

By Laura Ann Cannon

I was an educator in Madison County for 38 years, so August and September always make me think of school. I've been retired since 2012. That means I've been observing education here for almost 50 years. Recently in Madison County Museum I was able to delve farther back.

In 1915, a teachers' magazine listed the following rules for teachers' conduct of that day:

You will not marry during the term of your contract.

You are not to keep company with men.

You must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function.

You may not loiter downtown in any of the ice cream stores.

You may not travel beyond the city limits unless you have permission of the board chairman.

You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother.

You may not smoke cigarettes.

You may not dress in bright colors.

You may under no circumstances dye your hair.

You must wear at least 2 petticoats.

Your dresses must not be any shorter than 2 inches above your ankle.

Also, to keep the schoolroom clean, you must sweep the floor at least once daily; scrub the floor at least once a week with hot, soapy water, and clean the blackboards at least once a day. You must start the fire at 7 a.m. so the room will be warm by 8 a.m.

Recently in the Museum I found a file containing instructions to Madison County Commissioners Court from Madison County School District School Superintendent Loula Malone ((1872-1961), directing them to levy taxes in varying amounts to the county's school districts for the year 1924. Besides her signature, that individual school district's trustees signed each form except for 1. There must have at one time been at least 33 local school districts because of the numbering, though I did not find forms for all 33. I found no form for Madisonville. Maybe some had been consolidated or closed by 1924. I was astonished that not all local districts were instructed to levy the same and I feel sure that many landowners were unhappy with that fact.

Elwood School District's trustees B L. Dickey, J. W. Gibson, and R. E Wilson signed, along with Loula Malone, directing County Commissioners to levy an ad valorem tax of 57 cents on the valuation of \$100 taxable property, for the purpose of supplementing the State school funds apportioned to the district for the maintenance of public free schools therein. Also, a tax of 18 cents per \$100 valuation was to be levied to pay the one year's sinking fund for the bonds for interest on and provide said district. Elwood's total school tax was 75 cents. Below, I did not include "per \$100 valuation" but it was, in every case.

Connor's trustees W. G. Massey and Luther Floyd instructed to levy 50 cents to supplement the State school fund, and none to pay current interest, for a total of 50 cents

High Prairie's trustees, J. W. Fannin, H. B. Ratliff, and D.C. Cannon were to levy 25 cents to supplement the State school fund and 25 cents to pay current interest, for a total of 50 cents.

Ten Mile trustees J. T. Harrington, J.A. Kinney, and H.B. Whitmire said to levy 55 cents to supplement the State funds and 20 cents to pay the interest, for 75 cents total.

Plainview trustees, G.W. Rosier, George Brigham, and Lewis McLain, directed to levy 60 cents to supplement State funds and 40 cents to pay interest, for a total of 100 cents (yes, that's what the form said).

Union trustees G.E. Jones, Lawrence Standley, and Sam Hendrix said to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds and 25 cents to pay interest, for a total of 75 cents.

Oak Grove's form must have been misplaced. Loula Malone wrote a simple notation on a single sheet, saying "Levy 50 cents for Oak Grove District #11". No school trustees' names were shown.

Greenbriar's trustees Matt Stewart and S. Winters directed to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds and 25 cents to pay interest, for a total of 75 cents.

Liberty District's trustees Sam Starns, W. L. Haeser(?), and M. F. Elliot said to levy 25 cents to supplement State funds and 25 cents to pay interest, for a total of 50 cents.

Hollis District's trustees E.H. Walton and J. E. Williamson directed to levy 55 cents to supplement State funds and 35 cents to pay interest, for a total of 100 cents.

George District's trustees Noah Batson, E. H. Tallant, and B Mize said to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds and 50 cents to pay interest, for a total of 100 cents.

Jenkins District's trustees P. B. Wycough, J. R. Alexander, and J. C. Friery directed to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds but none for interest, for a total of 50 cents.

Rogers Prairie's trustees J. W. Patterson, R. L. Leveston, and A. J. Kessner said to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds and 25 cents to pay interest, for a total of 75 cents.

Cobbs Creek's trustees T. N. McVey, J. H. Bates, and H. C. Wells directed to levy 50 cents to supplement State funds but none for interest, for a total of 50 cents.

Center District's trustees E. J. Batson and J. L. Blair said to levy 60 cents to supplement State funds and 15 cents to pay interest, for a total of 75 cents.

Chapel Hill's trustees T. B. Mott and Burt Mott said to levy 20 cents to supplement State funds and 30 cents to pay interest, for a total of 50 cents.

When those 1924 school tax forms were copied, some had other things copied onto the back. I hate to waste interesting things so ...

Ten Mile School's building was a bit west of what some now call Ten Mile Baptist Church, on FM 2289. An earlier school building was farther west, and a later one was built just across the road from the church.

The land was originally given for a school on June 10, 1914 by J.J. Bledsoe and his wife, Irene. After the building was torn down, the unused land was sold to Colvin Walker in 1975.

The Museum has a good photo of Hollis School, taken during the 1915-1916 term. It was located between Madisonville and North Zulch, north of present Highway 21. An attachment to the photo identifies students and the teachers, J. Ethel Winborn, a lieutenant colonel retired from the Army, and Miss Ozell Newman (who later married Marshall Parker).

We have a photo of Center School's building in the early 1900s. The first school in that community was called Liberty or old Liberty and stood on what is now Oak Ridge Country Club property. That first structure served not only for education but also as a church for the Mormons until their church was built on Highway 21 near Jozye Cemetery.

A photo of High Prairie School also is available in the Museum, thanks to the late Nina Lou Wilson McCaig, who attended that school between 1930 and 1937. It stood on what is now FM 2289, west of High Prairie Cemetery. My father, his siblings, others attended that school. I know he lived in town with a sister when he went to high school, because High Prairie only offered earlier instruction.

The varying sums of school taxes shown for around our county amazed me. I tried to find more information. I finally located a masters thesis done at the University of Texas by Herman Wrenn in 1936, entitled "Educational Survey of County with Plans for Reorganization..." It explained that the quality of school facilities in the different districts here varied greatly. Some were a rude shack with crude benches, and some were much more. Improvements had been costly, hence some of the districts owed interest on those expenses. In 1931, Midway had issued a bond for \$35,000 to fund improvements.

The above-named author was in favor of some consolidation, and he said that for 24 years preceding 1933, no local schools had been consolidated. During 1934-1935, Cobbs Creek, Elwood, and Connor Schools consolidated, which he deemed that very positive. He also stated that in 1935, there were 26 school districts in Madison County, covering 25 white schools and 13 colored schools, for a total of 38 school buildings employing 43 instructors. Attendance varied according to the population in each area. Brushy had 13 whites and no colored. Madisonville had 419 whites and no colored. Chapel Hill had no white and 62 colored. The author included the fact that only Midway, North Zulch, and Madisonville offered 11 grades.

That's the way things were then, almost 100 years ago. However, not long ago, I talked with a man who told me that in about 1960, he had lived with his grandfather within 2 miles of where I lived and now live. I did not know him then. I rode a school bus to Madisonville every day. Every day, he walked cross-country to the above-named Chapel Hill School, at a distance of at least a mile, maybe more. That fact amazed and embarrassed me. Our school bus went right by where he lived but he was the wrong color to ride that bus. Again, I thank God some things have changed.

As I've said repeatedly, we are in dire need of your interest in Madison County Museum. The lack of interest discourages me and makes feel like I'm spinning my wheels writing these Musings. Madison County Historical Commission oversees the Museum, and we sure would appreciate your membership. MCHC's new year begins October 1, and \$25 membership covers an individual or his/her family.

The Madison County Museum, at 201 North Madison, Madisonville, TX 77864, is open to the public Wednesday through Saturday 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The Museum's mailing address is P.O. Box 61, and the telephone number is 936.348.5230.

