

TRINIDAD INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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I. CONTEXT:

Trinidad, Texas is located on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway and Farm Road 1667, fifteen miles west of Athens in western part of Henderson County. It was first known as “Trinity Switch” due to its location on the Trinity River. In 1880 it became a station on the St. Louis Southwestern Railroad. In 1880, the residents applied for a post office in the name of Trinidad; since there was another location by the name of Trinity Switch. In 1891, the first post office was opened. In 1910 it had five businesses and a population of seventy. The population remained small until the 1920’s when Texas Power and Light opened a plant on the Trinity River and a Lone Star Producing Company plant began manufacturing chemical fertilizer. (1)

II. OVERVIEW:

Trinidad’s first school was taught in 1888 in a small log hut located on the N. Addison Survey that is now known as the Trinidad Cemetery. The families of Airheart, Pulley and Anderson mostly composed the student body along with the teacher, Miss Mattie Grady. The school only lasted for about a year. About 1889, the Trinidad and Mankin School Districts built a log school about a mile and half north of town known as the Gadberry School. The first teacher was Ned Grady. The trustees were J. P. Taafe and J. R. Perry. (2) In 1891 D. N. Kimes was listed as the teacher. (3) By 1892, they had an enrollment of thirty five students with the teacher being Steve C. Miller. Miss Paralee Reagan was the last teacher to work in this particular building. Each of the school sessions were about 4 months long.

In 1894-1895 the two districts were divided and the Trinidad Common School District

No. 6 was formed. Lawrence Ranceville, Ned Grady, Miss Johnnie York and Pearl Owens taught in the box building that was then the Trinidad School. It has been described as a subscription school in a one room box building in the hickory grove across from the old Calvary Church. (4) In 1896-1897 school year, J. T. Daniel served as teacher. In 1898-1900, the teachers were Minnie Waldron and L. A. Teague with the board members being: J. R. Perry, William Merryman and J. W. McManus. (5) Those serving on the school board in the 1900-1901 school year were: R. L. Gilbert, Alex Airheart and J. A. Grant and the teacher was Miss E. Richeson. Wooden benches were used for seats. (6) In 1901-1902, John W. Easterwood and R. M. Mimms served as teacher while Robert Bentley, C. H. Eaton, and T. H. Johnston served as board members. In 1902, D. C. Legg, Charles Wesley Airheart and J. H. Johnston served as trustees while J. H. Shiflett was the teacher. (7)

About 1903, a new building was built that served as a school and the Methodist Church. It was a larger and better constructed building. (8) The teacher at this building was R. M. Mimms; along with trustees: D. C. Legg, T. H. Johnston and Wes Airheart. Mr. Mimms continued to teach until 1907 when he was replaced by Jno. G. Malcolm. In 1907, the trustees were R. L. Bentley, C. H. Eaton and Tom Johnston. John N. Shiflett taught in 1908 with trustees D. C. Legg, T. H. Johnston and Wes Airheart. In 1909-1910, teachers were George D. Manion and J. H. Shiflett with trustees: T. H. Johnston, R. L. Bentley and W. J. Curry. In 1911, C. R. Owen and Nellie McCladden served as teachers while the trustees were A. D. Jackson, S. L. Stanfield, and L. M. Clark. (9)

By 1912, the enrollment was outgrowing this building. At this time, lots were purchased and a new three room school building was erected on Lawrence Street south of the railroad where the First Baptist Church is located. (10) The new school building contained single desks and jacketed stoves and a large cloak room. (11) A list of teachers and trustee members are as follows: 1913 C. R. Owen, Polmyra Meredith and Nellie McFadden were teachers with S. L.

Stanfield, L. M. Clark, A. D. Jackson, and Robert Bentley as trustees; 1914 teachers: Mrs. C. R. Owen and H. E. Armstrong; trustees: A. D. Jackson, Robert Bentley and J. B. Bradley; 1915: Teachers: A. B. Culbertson and Lillie Rogers; trustees: A. D. Jackson, Robert Bentley and J. B. Bradley; 1916, R. M. Mimms was the teacher while trustees were: A. D. Jackson, Robert Bentley, and J. B. Bradley; 1917: W. H. Culbertson, Bertha Culbertson, Josephine Swanson and R. C. Fisher; 1918 teachers: D. D. Hanks, Josephine Swanson, Grace Huddle, B. C. Adams, Lillian Terrell, H. J. Yarbrough, W. D. Rich, Walter A. Smith, Mrs. W. A. Smith; 1919 teachers: P. R. Wheeler, H. J. Glass, Ethelyn Bentley, Lillian F. Cunningham; 1920 teachers: Edgar Huston, Delia Smith, Ora Mitcham, Lillian Cunningham, trustees: G. R. Pierce, T. J. Trotman, S. L. Stanfield, W. A. Ball; 1922 teachers: A. C. Bentley, W. H. Culbertson, Lillian Cunningham, Jeanette Townsend, trustees: H. R. Barnes, Dr. L. W. Pulley, J. D. Bradley; 1923 teachers: Ethel Bentley, Phyllis Magers, L. T. Terrell, L. F. Cunningham, A. W. Bentley, Ethelyn Bentley, Zoe Bell Eaton, W. T. Jackson, trustees: J. D. Bradley, T. H. Johnston, J. B. Kessinger; 1924 teachers: R. B. Smitherman, Jimmie Craft, Eva McElhaney, W. T. Jackson, trustees: J. T. Bratman, T. H. Johnston, L. W. Pulley, J. D. Wolfe. (12)

In 1925, the construction crews arrived in Trinidad to begin building the TP&L Power Plant. It became evident that a new and larger school would be necessary to accommodate the new families moving to Trinidad. The Trinidad Independent School District was created by an act of the 39th Legislature approved and became effective March 24, 1925. It was created from Trinidad Common School District No. 6. It took in 9320 acres or 14.9 square miles. R. B. Smitherman was the first Principal in the Trinidad Independent School District On July 10, 1925, Mr. John W. Carpenter, Vice-President of Texas Power and Light Company met with the Trinidad School Board and expressed the willingness of TP&L to cooperate in every way in bringing about the building, equipping and organization of a first class school for the district. On September 8, 1925, at a meeting of the trustees in the Guaranty State Bank building, T. J.

Trotman Sr. moved that ten acres of land be bought in the northeast corner of the Pulley tract on the west side of the Trinidad Power Plant road for a school building. G. B. Johnston seconded the motion, J. L. Matthews and L. W. Pulley were then appointed to the building committee. An election was called for a \$50,000.00 bond issue which was held on December 21, 1925. The election carried and the money was to be spent purchasing a sight in the district; the construction as well as equipping the school building with needed items.

R.B. Smitherman, of Trinidad Independent School District assessed valuation of said district at \$837,777 on March 23, 1926. Contract for super-structures was given to Goodbar and Page for \$23,258.00 on March 20, 1926.

The Texas Construction Company building the TP&L Power Plant agreed to build the superstructure on the basis of actual cost to the construction company. The building was completed in time for the 1926-1927 school session. Mr. K. B. Adair was elected Superintendent along with classroom instruction by Miss Elizabeth Berry and Ester McGee, who served as teachers. In the spring of 1927, W. P. Crews succeeded G. B. Johnston as trustee and the faculty was increased to eight for the 1927-1928 session and the fight for high school accreditation began. On August 14, 1928, the school board voted to build a music building for the sum of \$1500.00. Some of the teachers employed at this time were: O. H. Pittman, Mrs. M. M. Stover, Elizabeth Berry, Lucy McLear, Loris Hellums and Henry Harris. Their salaries varied from \$85.00 to \$150.00. The State Department of Education changed the rating of the Trinidad School from a second class four year high school to a class "B" or first rate high school. (13)

A framed building was built for the Superintendent and his family about 1930. Mr. C. H. Thurman and his family were the first occupants. The teacherage was located behind the school building at Carpenter and McEntire Streets in Trinidad. Later, Mr. Thurman resigned and returned to college to earn a PHD in Education.

In a November election in 1933, a \$24,000 bond issue was passed to make improvements and

buy equipment to add to the school building. (14) This was to be supplemented by the Public Works Administration. In August of 1934, H. O. Blanding provided the plans and estimates for making two additions of three classrooms each to the existing school building. The board members approved of the plans. The board members also voted to make alterations to the Superintendent's house; make improvements to the athletic field and the playground. Board members present at this meeting were: T. H. Johnston, J. A. McElwain, W. W. Denton, J. C. McCallum and W. P. Crews. The east and west wings were added at that time. In the spring of this same year, it was decided by the board that a school building was needed for the black students. A building site was purchased on Tatum and Church Streets and a school constructed at the cost of \$4,838.58. In October 1934 when the school began, the new building was put into use. In 1934, several construction companies made bids on improvements to the existing brick school. H. E. White of Tyler, Texas was awarded the contract to make the necessary addition for his base bid of \$26,385.00. In 1935, Trinidad Independent School District spent \$2,237.18 for lockers, desks, and chairs to put in the new addition. About this time, the band was organized and instruments were purchased. Joel Trimble was hired to be the band director. This was the first time that Band had been offered as a subject. A. W. Blair held the first school clinic and on January 14, 1936, while he was Superintendent, the enrollment of the Trinidad School reached 314, being the highest on record. E. B. Fincher, J. R. Yeager, Nathan Chaney, C. D. Mercer and M. L. Hall served as Superintendents in the late 1930's and 1940's. During this time a tennis court was built; added sterilizers were added for the water system, plus the addition of a slide, swings, and climbing gym was added for the playground. (15) It was during the war years that Trinidad School suffered a setback because many of the people had to move to larger cities to obtain work in war related industries. This reduced the number of students attending Trinidad School so much that football and band had to be deleted from the curriculum. (16) M. C. Overall was Superintendent from 1946 until 1951. It was during these years that the PTA Organization

was formed. The PTA was responsible for motion picture equipment, pop corn popper, and much of the playground equipment and the cold water fountains. This organization also operated the school health clinics. Lights for the football field were installed in 1947. Bleachers for the football field were completed in 1950 and a new school bus was bought in 1951. The Gilmer Aiken Bill was passed in July 1949 and Trinidad School met the requirements for the 1949-1959 session. Henry Grady Larkin was Superintendent in 1951-1952. (17)

In March 1952, Stanley Brown was employed along with Ranschen, Pierce and Company Incorporation for bond service to get a bond election passed to build a new school gymnasium. On April 1952, a \$60,000 bond issue was passed for the purpose of building a gymnasium, and redecorating the main building and making other needed additions. In July 1952, a contract was awarded to W. J. Hardy for the sum of \$52,800.00 to construct the new gymnasium in a period of 140 days. In 1952, the teacherage was moved from its location on McEntire Street to its present location on West Street. It was moved because of the poorly drained condition of the yard in the old location.

In 1954, Trinidad School invited several new faculty members. Praise went to Mr. Leonard Rollins who was elected coach. Under the leadership of Coach Rollins the Trinidad football team won the Regional Championship. The following printed in 1954 Trojan Yearbook: "The Trojans ended their last game of a successful season with a win over the Allen Eagles, played on Carpenter Field at Trinidad, December 13, 1954. The Allen players suffered a great set-back when they lost some of their players that suffered injuries beforehand in the Regional play off. The final score of the last and final game of the most successful season ever enjoyed at Trinidad was Trinidad Trojans 67; Allen Eagles 0."

In the summer of 1957, more improvements were made to the Trinidad School, but the one most appreciated by the students and teachers was the purchase of new desks and chairs. The old desks and chairs were the ones installed in the building. The old equipment had many

scars and initials that had been carved by former students. (18) Herbert S. Kirksey served as the Principal of Trinidad School at this time. (19) In 1958 the ten graduating students went on a senior trip to Galveston. For several years the school board had been pondering the thought of re-activating the band. They hired a new band director, Mr. Lynch. He organized the band very successfully and had a class of about thirty members. Trinidad School purchased band uniforms for all members of the band and about twenty five instruments. This was also the year a concrete walkway was built to the gymnasium and two new dressing rooms were constructed on the east side of the gymnasium.

In 1960, Mr. Billy Dowdy joined the faculty of Trinidad High School as an English teacher and Mr. J. G. Hobson replaced Herbert S. Kirksey, who resigned as Principal and Math teacher. On August 26, 1960, the Trinidad School Board voted to buy new stands for the football field and they were bought from the Central Iron Works. In 1961, Mr. Tatum, who had been teaching at the black school since 1929, resigned his position as Principal to become a Counselor for the black schools in Henderson County.

On November 19, 1963, Mr. Hams Fender of Tyler, Texas was in a meeting with the Trinidad School Board to discuss the insurance and sale of bonds for building and improvement to the school. Mr. Fender and his company were employed to help with the bond issue of \$1,225.00. This was a bond issue to present to the voters, to provide a lunchroom, industrial education, other classrooms, more office space, a new heating system, and general face lifting project for the entire school system. It was agreed to call Mr. E. D. Wilcox, architectural engineer of Tyler, to be the architect for this work. The voters of the Trinidad School District approved the \$1,225.00 bond issue for improvements to the school at an election on January 4, 1964. On October 20, 1964, the board awarded the school improvement project to the Tyler Construction Company of Tyler, Texas for a total of \$185,511.20 which included \$3, 914.00 for new bleachers in the gymnasium, and \$6,292.00 for kitchen equipment.

In 1965, Trinidad Independent School District was growing at a rapid rate. The board had voted to integrate the school grades one through twelve. The school board and the PTA purchased a new score board for the football field. On October 3, 1966, the Trinidad School Board and the Malakoff School Board along with the superintendents from both schools met to discuss the possibility of presenting to both communities their choice of consolidation of the Malakoff and Trinidad Schools. On November 7, 1966, the Trinidad School Board voted to go on record as favoring consolidation with Malakoff. An election on consolidation was held on May 23, 1967 and when the votes was casted, it was found that 398 votes were cast with 176 votes cast for the merger and 221 votes cast against it, so the election was declared as not passing.

In the summer of 1968, William F. Story, who had been the Trinidad School Superintendent since 1952 was offered the position of Superintendent by the Kemp School Board. He resigned his position at Trinidad and relocated in Kemp. Mr. Weldon Corbell was elected by the Trinidad School Board to fill the position of the previous resignation. In the summer of 1969, extensive improvements were made to the Homemaking Cottage. A living room was added along with air conditioning. In 1969, the Trinidad School system was known to be a modern plant with fourteen class rooms which included Chemistry and Biology Labs, in addition to the Band Hall, Cafeteria, and Library. The school had a large modern gymnasium, a tennis court, and a well kept football field with adequate seating stands for all of the fans. The school was staffed with the Superintendent, a part time Principal, a part time Librarian, and thirteen full time teachers. Each year a group of young men and women graduate from Trinidad High School with a good educational background which enables them to go to college is they choose. The school continued to move forward and upward. (20)

In 1973 the Trinidad School District as well as other schools in Henderson County had to deal with financial cut backs. Texas Legislators ended the session with no provision for financial assistance to state schools. Each had to deal with the spiraling cost of utilities, maintenance along

with teaching materials and supplies. Weldon Corbell, superintendent of Trinidad said that the cost to operate the school the following year would cost more even if no changes occurred in the staff or curriculum. (21)

The Trinidad Independent School board members met February 1982 and approved the renewal of contracts for Principals Bennie King and James McDaniel and for Coach Larry Cumby. Trustees also discussed the school cafeteria situation followed by a report by superintendent, Bob Elsom. (22)

The voters in Trinidad approved an \$850,000 bond issue In May 1999. The bond issue is to renovate the district's existing cafeteria and build a new library-Media Center. The vote was 102-15 in favor of the bond. Mike Green, Trinidad ISD Superintendent was excited over the impressive victory. "This victory shows the kind of support we have in this community", he added. With the passage of the bond issue, Trinidad School District will apply for funding from the state. (23)

III. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

On October 2004, a new Monolithic dome gymnasium and field house was built at Trinidad School. At this date the community of Trinidad had a population of 1100 people and had about 300 students attending school. The gym was described as 130 feet in diameter and has a total height of 40 feet. The gym seats 800 people and is described as being 13, 266 square feet. The floors are of beautiful, wood parquet. It serves the different sporting events plus graduations. It has even served as a tornado shelter for the town during inclement weather. The second building is described as the field house for the Trinidad Trojans welcomes the visiting teams with locker rooms, showers, and restrooms. It measures as 41 feet in diameter and 8 foot wall and contains 1,700 feet of floor space. (24)

The Trinidad School that first began in 1888 is still going strong after 123 years. Today, the school is located at 105 West Eaton Street in Trinidad. There are two hundred and twenty seven

students PK-12. They employ twenty two teachers. The school holds a lot of history about the people and the community. Many fond memories were created in this old school that will last a lifetime and then be written into the history of Henderson County Texas.

IV. DOCUMENTATION:

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