

BOSQUE

LETTER

June 2013

Meridian School

The newly formed Bosque County Commissioners granted in 1855 Lot 3 Block 11 for a school (corner of Fuller and Morgan, where Hope Bail Bonds is currently located in the old filling station) in Meridian. A log building was constructed which also served for church services. After the Civil War a two story wooden school was built near the location of the swimming pool.

In 1898 the average school went through the eighth grade. Education past that point was done with private tutors at home or children were sent away to a preparatory school. Attorney Richard Kimball and other citizens felt there was a need to build a prep school in Bosque County. Meridian Academy was created and was open from 1898 until 1912, when a public school was built that included the upper grades. Meridian College bought the academy and used it until 1927, when the college closed.

From the Meridian Tribune, September 9, 1900:

"The Meridian Academy opened up last Monday with flattering prospects. Some 35 or 40 students were enrolled the first day, and the probability is that it will double that number before the close of the present term. This is going to be a good school. We advise all parents who have children ready to enter the higher branches of education and who want them properly trained by competent teachers to send them to this school."

From an ad for Meridian Academy: "prepares students for college in English, French, German, Greek, Latin, History, Mathematics and Music, with primary and grammar work for those who wish it." Mind you, the academy was not a free public school. Another article encourages "People of moderate means in search of school should learn that these can be had here at much less expenditure of money than at other places where more is said and less is done."

At the same time a public elementary school was built near the academy, a two story concrete building. This elementary building was sold to Meridian College by the trustees before the new public school was completed, so the students had to share classes with the college for a time. Coming full circle, the Meridian College Administration Building was bought by Meridian Independent School District and used for the new High School in 1935, and a new three story red brick building was used as the elementary school.

In 1939 the first football game was played at night, as lighting was added to the field. "The lighting equipment proved very satisfactory, and furnished an abundance of light for all sections of the field. It is believed Meridian now has one of the best lighted fields to be found in a town this size. The school and entire citizenship co-operated splendidly to make this improvement possible. The pride which the city takes in the accomplishment is well earned and fans are now assured of athletic contests that will interest them."

In 1948, a new elementary school was opened and in 1951 a new high school was built. One Meridian Tribune headline stated "New School's Cost Not to Exceed \$85,000." Whitney Dam contractor L.P. Reed donated the lumber and concrete. Mr. Reed owned a ranch between Meridian and Cranfills Gap.

As life goes, Meridian outgrew these schools and in the fall of 1985 high school students started the year in a beautiful and spacious school located just north of town. The school trustees tried to keep costs down, even to the point of installing used cafeteria equipment. In 2008 elementary students were welcomed into their new school next to the high school.

The enrollment for 2012-2013 for grades Pre-K through sixth grade is two hundred eighty one with twenty teachers. The elementary school is rated exemplary by the state. In 1981 a computerized reading program was installed. Meridian sponsors the Bosque County Cluster School, which provides instruction to all physically disadvantaged students.

Other schools that have served the county in the Meridian area are:

Round Mountain, near Lucky Dog Ranch, consolidated with Meridian.

Cooper was on CR 3105 off of Hwy 6 south of Meridian, and consolidated with Clifton. Mr. Wallace owned the land next to the school and built a swing bridge across the Bosque. This bridge was for farming purposes, but also to enable students to cross the river to attend Cooper. The school was moved and used by the Clifton ISD.

West of town on a mountain was Lumpkin School, which consolidated with Meridian.

Cove Springs was near Spring Creek, and it not only had a school, but also a store, a gin and a cemetery. It consolidated with Cranfills Gap.

North toward Walnut Springs were Loader Springs, Jordan, Grapevine and Midway.

East of Meridian were Pilot's Knob, Brown, Turner and Garnersville, the later being divided between Meridian and Clifton.

Walling Bend was on the Brazos River.

After WWII, soldiers returning home needed jobs. Most Bosque County veterans had only been trained in agricultural skills, so the need for technical skills and some pre-college preparation was urgent. The Meridian School trustees created a vocational school and opened it free of charge to veterans. Mechanics, welding, electrical, plumbing, carpentry plus many other skills were taught by local craftsmen. Carl Vick taught an English class. Carl stated that he wasn't much older than some of his students, but they all formed bonds. Many of the young veterans thanked him for volunteering to help them. This was before VA benefits kicked in, and provided a tremendous service to the county.

Meridian College

Poem written by an anonymous senior after exams, published in the 1911 yearbook:

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig my grave and let me lie;
Glad did I live but gladly die,
For now I'm free of all exams.

In 1907 a group of business men and community leaders offered the old Meridian Academy to the Northwest Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church as an enticement to build a "training school" in Meridian. There was much competition for this site, especially from Clifton, and the local leaders wanted desperately to get the school. According to documents in County Judge Phillip Hale's papers (MSS 66) the leaders began taking "subscriptions" to raise funds to help with the costs of building the school. These subscriptions were pledges to be collected at a later date, and almost strong-armed out of some folks. Later, when people were called upon to pay up, it was discovered that some over-zealous pledge takers had added names of those who actually hadn't pledged. It was a nasty situation, with civil suits being threatened - on both sides. The Texas Central Conference Journal reported: "They have \$7000.00 unpaid subscriptions, \$3000.00 of which is possibly good."

Tensions were high, because so much was at stake. Having a college in Meridian was not only good for morale and status, it was good for business. Two local business icons were especially involved, J.J. Lumpkin and Meridian Mayor J.W. Rudasill. Dr. Lumpkin was voted as chairman of the Board of Directors for the college. At one particular meeting of fund-raisers, Mr. Rudasill was heard to make a public pledge, and someone asked Dr. Lumpkin if he was going to pledge. He replied he would match whatever Mr. Rudasill pledged. Later Mr. Odle approached the doctor and asked for the \$1000.00 pledge, and Meridian almost had a melt down. The doctor said he never pledged that much and when reminded of his statement he said he never heard Mr. Rudasill name an amount. This misunderstanding led to a civil case in which Dr. Lumpkin was sued for the \$1000.00. Such a shame for this to come to this, as both these men were so instrumental to the growth and development of Meridian, and both instrumental in getting the college to come to Meridian. They had been fierce rivals for many years, however. They both built banks, across the street from each other. They both claimed to have the first automobile in Meridian. The Lumpkin home is so large because he felt he had to outdo Rudasill.

The college was built and opened its doors September 1909 with an enrollment of 135. Enrollment grew every year. It was known as Meridian Training School until June of 1912, when "Meridian College" was adopted as the name. Music, art, language, science and mathematics were offered. The students nicknamed the old cafeteria "The Beanery".

This is what an ad from the Meridian Tribune said: "The only Junior College in Central Texas. The most beautiful and healthful location in the State. Typhoid is unknown. Four buildings with modern and commodious furnishings."

Students were expected to adhere to strict social standards; however in their free time they loved to canoe along the Bosque or picnic atop Bee Mountain.

In 1910 a small fire broke out in the girls dormitory, but was quickly extinguished without too much damage. This made the college officials realize they were not insured. Local business men came to the aid and helped acquire a policy.

In 1918 Meridian College contracted with the government for the Students Army Training Corps. A young man could be inducted into this program and be considered a soldier, while attending the college. Tuition was paid for and he would receive \$30.00 monthly. He trained as a soldier, wore a uniform, and was subject to military discipline while attending classes. This was during WWI, and the government felt that it would be more efficient if a group of young men were already trained and ready to go to war. The program was disbanded at the end of the war.

Tragedy struck the college beginning on February 26, 1921. Fire broke out in the boys dormitory, or the "Barracks" as they called it. The fire swept through very fast, and there was no hydrant near enough to help. The insurance policy covered \$13,625.00, but the damage was \$25,000.00. Towns people opened up their homes to the boys, in fact there were more homes offered than there were boys.

Money was raised and a new dormitory was completed October 21, 1921. Then on January 9, 1922 the new dorm was engulfed with flames. In September 1922 another dorm was open and ready for students. On March 24, 1924 Higgins Hall, the girls dorm, burned. These three fires were a large part of the cause of the college's closing. Financial difficulties had plagued the school for several years, so in May of 1927 the college filed bankruptcy and closed its doors. The school was bought by S.T. Brogdon and a summer session was offered. The school hoped to develop as a leading teacher's college. In 1929 a state committee moved to open a new teachers school in Central Texas, and Meridian was considered; however Clifton was awarded the contract. The administration building that was sold to Meridian ISD also burned in February of 1966.

A debate arose about where to store students records. One suggestion was to transfer them to Weatherford College.; however, the majority won out and the records were kept in Meridian. Records were transferred to the County School Superintendent's office in the courthouse. Unfortunately, no one knows what became of those records over the years.

On June 7, 1970 ex-students of the college dedicated a marker on the old college grounds that reads: "On these Grounds Stood Meridian College 1907 - 1927".

Krueger Foundation School for Spastics

When the doctors told Jesse Merle Krueger that her baby girl had cerebral palsy and would never be normal, she took the baby home and began to work with her. She exercised the baby any way she could think, and finally devised a system that worked. It worked so well that Doris graduated from Meridian High School in 1948, and then attended Texas State College for Women.

To help through the stress of caring for a disabled child, she formed a support group with other parents of children afflicted with the disease. The medical term used by doctors was "spastic." Jesse Merle's program was so effective that the other parents asked her to help with their children. Pretty soon, even the doctors were impressed and they referred parents to her. She formed support groups throughout the state. She was an invited speaker at the annual meeting of the Texas Society for Crippled Children. Soon she was receiving funds to help with her endeavor.

A movement was started for a state funded spastic school with Congressman Bob Poage, State Senator Keith Kelley and other politicians, physicians and businessmen leading the way. The school was to be placed in Meridian, Mrs. Krueger's hometown.

The proposition failed to get state approval; however, Mrs. Krueger didn't give up. She created the Krueger Foundation School for Spastics and got financial help from private donors. A banker in Dallas contributed a large sum and built the school building, in honor of the work Mrs. Krueger had done with his daughter, who suffered from cerebral palsy. The school opened in September 1948, and was located at the end of south Main Street, on a corner lot now owned by Double B Company. The brick house stood until 2001, when Double B built a large cooling system on the site.

The community of Meridian was supportive of the school and contributed with building supplies and equipment, food and money. Dr. Holt and Dr. J.T. Archer served as the resident physicians. At the time, there were only two schools for spastics, both in New York.

Big State Baseball Camp

Meridian ISD got a boon in October, 1950 when Johnny Carrigan chose Meridian as the site for his Big State Baseball Camp. Mr. Carrigan had a promising semi-pro career, but due to an injury had to give up baseball. However, he dedicated his life to helping young men learn the fundamentals of the game. The school opened up classrooms and offices for the students and coaches, and the cafeteria staff provided meals. Use of the school and the cafeteria was extra money for the school district, and much needed. When word got out, boys from all over the United States and several foreign countries began applying. Meridian was on the map!

In February 1951 the Meridian Chamber of Commerce hosted a banquet welcoming Mr. Carrigan and other dignitaries and sports writers from all over. Cotton Dorman was the master of ceremonies. Turkey and dressing was prepared by the school cafeteria staff and served by the Home Economics Department. Also in attendance was one of the first boys to enroll in the camp, and he stated that he would come just for the food.

The camp was the first of its kind in Texas, open to boys from age ten through nineteen. Sessions lasted three weeks and there were three sessions, with professional coaches teaching pitching and batting and other techniques. A May 1951 Meridian Tribune article stated "Boys of all ages will have the opportunity to play under the lights of one of the best illuminated fields in the state," and "Big State Camp has been organized to give promising youngsters a chance to receive valuable training under the expert supervision of men who have devoted a lifetime to baseball." Some of the pros who worked as coaches were: C.C. Tex Hughson, Johnny Hudson and Buster Chatham.

By 1960, as many as 100 boys had signed up for the sessions. Junior and Senior boys were housed in different sections of the administration building, which had been turned into a dormitory. Later, Carrigan bought the engineering building from the Whitney Dam project, and remodeled it for more dorm space. An additional dorm was planned in 1960.

Local ranches gave tours and served the boys barbeque. And local citizens got to watch baseball games all summer. The school baseball field, which had been built during Meridian College days, was improved to make a first class field, and many of those improvements are still visible today.

The camp had its last season in 1963, after a successful run of twelve years.

MSS066, *Meridian College* by Rebecca Radde, Meridian Tribune, MSS049

Womack-White Cemetery Marker Ceremony

Saturday, June 15th at 11:00 am will be a very special event for Womack-White Cemetery near Morgan. A Texas Historical Marker will be unveiled, along with a special Confederate Veteran marker and a special marker presented by the DRT.

To qualify for a THC marker, a cemetery must first be recognized as a Designated Historic Cemetery, which Womack-White received in July, 2011. Hugh Woodard has been working at a homeric pace to preserve this cemetery. Hugh is a fireman for the city of Austin but finds the time to drive to Bosque County for this labor of love. The cemetery is located on the Taylor Payne place in a stand of oak trees in the middle of a grazing pasture. Over the years, tombstones (the earliest dates back to 1874) have tumbled and gravesites have been covered over. Some gravesites are only marked with rocks. Hugh along with the support and help of property owners Flonnie and Taylor Payne began the task of clearing undergrowth and identifying graves. Other family members and local volunteers soon were pitching in. A fence was built around the graves to keep cattle out and a road was recently added to the cemetery. Hugh has lovingly cleaned and repaired broken headstones. His honor for the memory of his family is commendable.

The Abner Pryor Womack family were early settlers in this area and became valued community and county leaders. Abner, a widower with thirteen children, married Telitha Kirby Ferguson, a widow with four children and in 1859 moved to Bosque County, where they were blessed with six of their own children. That's twenty-three total. Ed Nichols in "Ed Nichols Rode a Horse" told that whenever the Womack's got together for Sunday dinner, it was quite a crowd. Once when a traveling salesman rode by he stopped and asked if someone had died. Abner P., or Uncle Ap as he was known replied "No, just some of the chillin' come to take dinner."

Abner bought a large tract from J.P. Baker in 1866, and settled along Steele Creek. In 1877 Abner sold his land to the White family, however in the deed he reserved two acres for burial purposes. The White family also to used the burial site , hence it became known as the Womack-White Cemetery.

Abner Carroll Womack was born in Simpson County, Mississippi on February 15, 1835. He came with his family to Texas in 1850 and settled along Steele Creek in 1860. He was conscripted into service for the Confederate Army in 1862; however due to failing eyesight he was discharged. Abner returned home and served with the militia.

He and Susan Howard were united in marriage May 9, 1861. Susan and her father and mother were all citizens of the Republic of Texas, her father served in the Army of the Republic. He was later a Bosque County Justice of the Peace and District Clerk. Susan and Abner had ten children.

Abner was an avid reader and studied history, many extolling his intelligence. He was a die-hard Republican and Sam Houston supporter, and a charter member of the Morgan Mason Lodge. He died March 25, 1910.

Telitha Kirby came to Texas at an early age from Kentucky with her family. Her father, Isaiah Kirby served in the Army of the Republic. Telitha will be honored by the Sterling C. Robertson Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas of Waco with a "Citizen of the Republic of Texas" medallion. Several of the Womack sons served during the War Between the States. Abner Carroll Womack served as a Private in Company C, 3rd Regiment Texas Infantry. He will be honored with a Confederate Veteran Marker to be presented by the Felix H. Robertson Camp 129 Chapter of the Sons of the Confederacy of Waco.

The Womack and White descendants welcome you to this ceremony. Refreshments are provided, please bring a lawn chair. For more information call 254-435-6182.

Donations:

Had a surprise visit from **Bill O'Neal, Texas State Historian**, who presented his latest book "West Texas Cattle Kingdom." This is an excellent compilation of photos and facts that covers the Texas cattle business from the early Spanish influence through the heyday of the Stockyards. It features famous cattlemen and women, cattle trails, range wars, rodeos and the railroad. The Bosque Collection is grateful to Mr. O'Neal for this donation.

Many thanks to **Marion Mount** for the incredible table she created. The table fits into an odd corner space and opens up many possibilities for use. Marion made the table out of an old church pew, and added legs that fold in a way not to take up much space when the table is stored. Thank you Marion!



Donna Stevens served as AgriLife Agent, who worked with 4-H for over twenty years in Bosque, recently retired and donated 4-H and extension education records.

Rex Hopson donated a history that his uncle R.L. Hopson wrote for his 8th grade class at Meridian; included was a class photograph. He also donated a booklet of "Memories of Meridian 1918-1940". This was made up of news articles published in the Bosque County News May and June of 2005.

Bob Gordon donated a family history sheet of the Gordon family of the Iredell area. Mr. Gordon donated the land for the first school in Iredell and also for the Gordon school. Three photographs of the Gordon school were included.

Dr. James Fisk donated two Texas Women's College yearbooks, 1921 and 1922, which belonged to Etta "Skeet" Parks.

Darrell York submitted some remembrances of Dr. Walter Blankenship, who practiced "country medicine" in the Mosheim area for 40 years.

The Bosque Collection and the Bosque County Historical Commission wish to thank all our faithful members. Our mission will remain the same: to gather, preserve and document history.