

The History of the San Jacinto School

Episode 32: April 14, 2008

First script segment adapted, by permission of the Walker County Historical Commission, from: The San Jacinto School. (1986). In Walker County Historical Commission (Ed.), *Walker County, Texas: A History* (pp. 118-119). Dallas: Curtis Media. Second script segment based on conversations with Evelyn McDaniel (April ?? and April 9, 2008).

Read by Evelyn McDaniel, Secretary to the Department of Communication Studies at Sam Houston State University.

The San Jacinto School was established in 1900. The building was a large, one-room, wooden structure. The furniture consisted of wooden benches for the children to sit on and the teacher's desk; the children had no desks. About fifty pupils attended the school at that time. One teacher taught all grades from primary to seventh grade.

The school was located about fourteen miles west of Huntsville, one-half mile off FM 1791 on Walker Loop. Some of the early families whose children attended this school were Walker, Grissom, Morton, Doughtie, Farris, Allen, Simms, Burnett, and Ellington.

The school's first teacher was Miss Alice Farris. John C. Edwards began teaching in 1905 and made the first desks for the pupils. The subjects taught were reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and geography.

In 1911, the county schools were classified by the county school board. San Jacinto School was classified as an intermediate school of six grades with permission to teach the seventh grade.

The school was growing and needed a larger building. In 1913, a two-story structure was built about a mile from the first building, nearer to the center of the community. This building had four large rooms, an entrance hall, and an auditorium on the second floor. New furniture and playground equipment were bought for the school, and a home was built for the teachers.

Eventually the San Jacinto School merged with the Wooten School, and the school's classification increased to include additional grade levels. When logging camps came to the West Sandy Community in 1926, the enrollment rose to 155 students, and the facilities were expanded to accommodate them.

In the late 1930s, the ninth and tenth grades were transferred to Huntsville High School. During World War II, people moved away to work in the shipyards and other places, and by 1944, the school had only three teachers. The old school building was torn down in 1948, and a three-room building was constructed. The teachers' home burned about that time and was never rebuilt.

San Jacinto School consolidated with Richards School in Grimes County in the 1960s, and the remaining San Jacinto School building was given to the West Sandy community to be used as a community center.

The West Sandy Community Association lapsed into inactivity around the 1980s, and the old school building eventually fell into disrepair. As I often drove past the place on weekends, I wanted to do something, since there are so few rural schoolhouses remaining. After I did some research and submitted a nomination to the non-profit group Preservation Texas, the San Jacinto Schoolhouse was listed among the most endangered historical properties in the state in 2005.

I began a grassroots campaign to restore the building and received assistance from numerous local residents, especially those who had once been students or teachers in the San Jacinto School. These residents also helped to revive the West

Sandy Community Association after nearly 25 years of inactivity. Current and former Walker County residents donated money to fundraisers for the school, and much of the actual restoration work was performed by inmates from a local prison campus.

It has been a long journey, but the restored San Jacinto Schoolhouse is now the base of operations for the resurrected West Sandy Community Association, which holds monthly meetings as well as community events, such as domino games and fundraiser suppers. The schoolhouse also serves as a social hall for private receptions, showers, and parties. A rededication ceremony for the schoolhouse is planned for April 19, 2008.