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EARLY SCHOOLS IN JASPER COUNTY

R. B. MARTIN

The first step toward establishment of free public education in Texas was made in 1838 when the Congress of the Republic made grants of four leagues of land (17,712 acres) to each of the counties for the support of public schools.¹ It must be admitted that these grants yielded little or no revenue, and, after annexation, the State tried again, under the Constitution of 1845, to provide for a system of public schools. However, it was not until 1854, during the administration of Governor Elisha M. Pease, that actual cash revenue began to dribble from the treasury to the communities by way of the commissioners' courts.

On November 10, 1854, State Treasurer James H. Raymond complained that he was unable to make any apportionment of school funds to certain counties for the simple reason that assessors and collectors had failed to send in the required reports. Three weeks later in his report to Governor Pease, the treasurer showed that Jasper County had complied with every requirement and had been allotted \$354.02 for the 571 scholastics of the county for that year.²

For the school year of 1857-1858 the Jasper County Commissioners' Court authorized the distribution of public school funds to schools in fifteen districts, and, on May 17, 1857, County Treasurer G. W. Rose reported that the amount in the "School Fund" was \$408.50.³ The next year on May 17, 1858, the county treasurer reported a "Ballance in Treasury" for the schools of \$1,508.24.⁴

The effort to establish sound public schools had indeed been made, but those who wanted to do more for their children still relied upon tutors and private schools. This was especially true for education beyond the elementary level.

The first institution of higher learning chartered in Jasper County was the Jasper Collegiate Institute. It was sponsored by interested citizens and continued in existence for fifteen years, fulfilling the educational needs of Jasper and surrounding communities. The charter, dated November 24, 1851, provided for a board of eleven members. They were:

J. T. Armstrong
William Allen
Fayben Adams
John Blewitt
R. C. Doom
Z. Williams Eddy

R. C. McFarlane
John H. McRae
William H. Neyland
William S. Neyland
Seymour White

The trustees were given complete control of all school property and were empowered to make all rules and regulations for the government of the school. The purpose of the Institute, as stated in the charter, was "the promotion of useful knowledge and the advancement of the sciences."⁵

The first session of the Jasper Collegiate Institute opened in the fall of 1851 with Professor Marcus Aurelius Montrose as head and his wife as assistant. Mr. Montrose held a Master of Arts degree from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and had taught at San Augustine, Nacogdoches, Fanthorp,⁶ and LaGrange. He was a capable school man, and under his direction the school flourished. The Institute was co-educational, but every precaution was taken to keep the boys and girls separated. After an intermission or at the beginning of the day, boys lined up on one side of the building under the supervision of Montrose, and the girls lined up on the other side under the direction of Mrs. Montrose. When the students marched into the building, the boys sat on one side of a room, the girls on the other side.⁷

Montrose remained head of the Jasper Collegiate Institute for three years, and was succeeded by a Professor Shields, who served but a year or so. Professor J. B. Thornton followed Shields and was assisted by his wife. The Thorntons were capable teachers, but served the Jasper Collegiate Institute only a year or two before going to New Orleans to take charge of a school described as an "unmanageable" boys school. D. W. Steele, also an excellent school man, succeeded Thornton. Under his guidance, the Institute prospered, and many young people from neighboring communities attended as boarding pupils.

The Civil War all but ended Jasper Collegiate Institute, and Steele resigned in 1863. After the war ended, Elisha Seale reorganized the school and served as headmaster for a year. He was followed, in the order named, by George Rose, O. M. Marsh, Charles S. Douglas, W. R. Blackshear, and R. M. Humphrey each of whom, except for the last named, remained in the position but one year. Humphrey stayed three years, and under his leadership Jasper Collegiate Institute reached its peak, but at the end of his administration the school closed its doors, giving place to a larger and more efficient institution.⁸

The new school, known as Southeast Texas Male and Female College, was promoted also by a group of Jasper citizens. In order to obtain funds for erection of a building, a company was organized, and stock was sold to the public. When completed, the building was a long, two-storied house with one very large room on each floor. As the school grew, these large rooms were partitioned and new rooms added. The first board of trustees consisted of the following men:

Lipscomb Norbell	E. I. Kellie
W. H. Ford	Adam Adams
W. J. B. Adams	James Lee
G. W. Norsworthy	D. J. Henderson
P. T. Renfro	

The new college opened September 2, 1878. C. P. McCrohan was president; Mrs. McCrohan and C. P. McCrohan, Jr., were teachers of academic subjects; and Miss Lou Stegall was the music teacher. During the first session ninety-two students were enrolled—forty girls and fifty-two boys. In advertising the school McCrohan promised to include in the course of study the "solidity and severity" of the best universities of the North and

at the same time "retain all the desirable graces and accomplishments of the female colleges of the highest grade."⁹ To enter the collegiate department a knowledge of reading, orthography, penmanship, etymology, fractions, geography, and history was required. C. P. McCrohan, Jr., who was in charge of the business department, stated that it was his purpose to "initiate this college in the solidity and severity of its application and the practical relation to all details." Music, painting, and pencil and crayon drawing were included in the arts. Students who completed a given amount of Latin and Greek would be granted "Classical Diplomas," while students who fulfilled certain other requirements would be granted "Scientific Diplomas."¹⁰ The McCrohan administration lasted five years, and the school apparently was capably managed and staffed by good teachers, for it acquired an enviable reputation throughout East Texas.

McCrohan was succeeded as president of the college by S. H. Patrick, who, after one year, was replaced by the Peacock brothers, D. C. and Wesley. The Peacocks were graduates of the University of Georgia, and both were first-class school men. Under their management the College reached the height of success. Its fame spread throughout the country, and boarding students registered from distant places. Faculty members for the first year of the Peacock administration were:

D. C. Peacock, president of the Collegiate Department;

Wesley Peacock, principal of the High School Department;

Mrs. K. Octavia Tubb, a graduate of the National School of Elocution, Philadelphia, teacher of Elocution and Calisthenics;

Miss V. Yates, student of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, teacher of Instrumental and Vocal Music;

Miss Texana White, Primary teacher.

The Peacock regime lasted for seven years.¹¹

When the Peacocks left, the school entered a period of decline. A brother, J. H. Peacock, succeeded them, but he remained only one year and was replaced by E. E. Barker, whose tenure also was one year. John A. Smart followed Barker, but he resigned after a few weeks, and M. L. Moody finished the term in his place. During the session of 1895-1896, Charles E. Durham was head of the school, but after one year J. H. Gardner replaced him. Under Gardner's leadership, the College entered another period of prosperity. In 1898, J. H. Synnott and P. C. Scullin assumed control. Synnott and Scullin were graduates of Cumberland University and proved to be not only capable teachers but also popular in the community. When the school building burned on April 10, 1900, the citizens of Jasper assured both faculty and trustees that a new building would be ready in September. The people made good on their promise and erected a two-story frame building ninety feet long and eighty feet wide, "with broad walls, high ceilings, and perfect ventilation and lighting."¹²

School opened on schedule with the following teachers:

J. H. Synnott, President;

P. C. Scullin, Principal of the High School Department;

J. B. Synnott, Principal of the Grammar School Department;
 Miss Sadie Scarborough, Principal of the Primary Department;
 Captain E. I. Kellie, Military Tactics and Land Surveying;
 Reverend K. P. Barton, Chaplain.

The prescribed course of study for the senior year included mathematics (calculus, mathematical astronomy), science (geology, descriptive astronomy, psychology), English (logic, criticism, essays, debating, orations, Dante's *Inferno*), Greek (Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Homer's *Iliad*) or German (Goethe's *Faust*), Latin (Livy, Tacitus), and parliamentary law. It was stated that those who should complete "the course entire" would be granted an A.B. degree. There is no record, however, that any degree was ever conferred. The enrollment for 1900-1901 was about two hundred, of which number sixty were boarding students representing ten counties.¹³

Synnott and Scullin resigned at the end of the spring session in 1902. They were succeeded by P. I. Hunter, who had as his assistants T. H. Brady, E. A. Piffley, W. R. Blackshear, Mrs. W. R. Blackshear, and Miss Eva Dale.¹⁴ Professor Hunter remained as president two years and superintendent of the Jasper Public Schools for eight, for in 1904 the Southeast Texas Male and Female College became a part of the Jasper Public Schools.¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

¹Frederick Eby, *Source Book in the History of Education in Texas* (University of Texas Bulletin, The University of Texas Press, Austin, 1919), 237.

²*Ibid.*, 275.

³Commissioners' Court Minutes, Jasper County, Texas, Vol. A, 146.

⁴*Ibid.*, 198.

⁵B. W. Martin, *Some Early Educational Institutions in East Texas* (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1924), 286.

⁶Now Anderson, Texas.

⁷B. W. Martin, *Some Early Educational Institutions of East Texas*, 194.

⁸*Ibid.*, 195.

⁹*Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 204.

¹²*The Jasper News-Boy*, May 28, 1936.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Walter P. Webb, ed., *The Handbook of Texas* (2 vols.; The Texas State Historical Association, Austin, 1952), I, 575.

¹⁵*The Jasper News-Boy*, May 28, 1936.