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EDUCATION IN ELLIS COUNTY, TEXAS

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CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF ELLIS COUNTY

Ellis County, long celebrated as the banner cotton-producing county of Texas, contains an area of 918 square miles or 587,520 acres. It is situated in the northeastern part of Texas and is bounded on the north by Dallas and Tarrant Counties, on the east by Kaufman and Henderson Counties, on the south by Navarro and Hill Counties, and on the west by Hill and Johnson Counties. According to the 1940 census, the population was 47,773.

No county has less waste or untillable land surface. Its topographic features vary from those of a hilly section cut by streams flowing in a narrow U-shaped valley to those of level country. The more broken surface is found in the western part of the county, extending from the county line directly north of Midlothian down to Milford. In some sections hundreds of acres are found as level as a floor. These level areas are located principally in the southern section of the county, in the vicinity of Italy, along Chambers and Mill Creeks. However, there are other areas of similar topography throughout the county. Notably around Ennis is found a wide

area of a more sandy soil with level topography.¹

The county ranges in elevation from about 450 to 750 feet above the sea. There is a good supply of water easily obtainable from twenty to twenty-five feet underground. There are numerous creeks in the area. About three fourths of the county, including the southern and southeastern portions, is drained by Mill, Chambers, Onion, and Waxahachie Creeks. All of these streams come together at the southeastern edge of the county and find their outlet into the Trinity River. Likewise, in the eastern and northeastern sections, the Trinity receives the drainage waters within the county limits through Village Grove, Red Oak, and Bear Creeks, all of which become quite sluggish as they approach the Trinity.²

The soils of the county are derived from the Cretaceous formation and vary from sand to clay. This is not only the most important type of soil in Ellis County, but it is also the most productive soil of Texas' famous black-land belt. This land is adapted to general farming. Staple crops such as corn, oats, wheat, and barley are grown. But by far the greater portion is planted to cotton, which ranges in selling price from \$75 to \$125

¹F. Bennett, R. T. Burke, and Clarence Lounsbury, Soil Survey of Ellis County, p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 6.

per acre, depending upon location and improvement.

Ellis County's climate is comparatively mild. Summers are long and hot, but there is usually a breeze. While the winters are usually pleasantly mild, occasionally cold waves, known as "northers" to this section of Texas, are experienced. These, however, are of short duration and seldom do any damage unless they occur in the late spring.

Before the Texas Revolution, the region to become Ellis County was governed by Mexico and was included in the Milan Municipality of the Nacogdoches Department.³ To go back to the starting point for the very best indication of a settlement in what is now Ellis County, we must consider certain land grants that were given by the Mexican government. It is known that during the Empresario period Sterling C. Robertson obtained a land grant which included this county. No record can be found of a settlement here at this time.⁴

The first land grant in this area made by the Mexican government was to L. J. Chambers from the free states of Coahuila and Texas. The grant consisted of eight leagues located in the southeastern portion of the present

³H. Goodlet, "Thumbnail Sketches of Ellis County History," Waxahachie Daily Light, January 30, 1945, p. 2.

⁴H. Goodlet, "History of Ellis County," Dallas Morning News, August 17, 1936, p. 4.

county on the stream later called Chambers Creek. It was surveyed and recorded September 23, 1834.⁵

The next grant, which was made to Raphael Pena, consisted of eleven leagues in the northern portion. In the same year, 1834, a grant was made to Alexander de la Garza.

The first grant made by the Republic of Texas was in 1841, to W. S. Peters. It included at least one third of the territory of what is now Ellis County, or all the lands lying north of a line running due east and west. A second grant made by the Republic to Alfred Polk comprised 823 acres. Likewise a grant was made to Thomas I. Smith for services rendered in the Texas Revolution.

In 1850 the State of Texas granted two thirds of a league and labor to a Mr. Moatright. Six years later John M. Patterson applied for land and accordingly was granted 640 acres to be located in the vacant public domain and which actually was included in the present county limits. The remainder of the county land was in the public domain.⁶

From 1842 to 1850 early Texas settlers left their

⁵"Land Grants of Ellis County," Dallas Morning News, August 17, 1936, p. 5.

⁶Minutes of Commissioner's Court, Ellis County, A, 6.

eastern homes and faced the wilderness to open up this section of the country. One of the first of these was William R. Howe, who settled on part of a grant given to his father-in-law, Mayor Thomas I. Smith, in 1843. Mayor Smith himself moved to the settlement after his son and daughter had taken up the land. The Howe family came from Bucksport, near Marlin. Their nearest neighbors at that time and until the following autumn were at the falls of the Brazos. Other neighbors were at Bonham and Bucksport, the town from which the new settlers had come.⁷

The family consisted at first of the parents, two children, and their Negro slave, Rueben. Not long after the settlement was established, William Howe, Jr., was born. He is believed to have been the first white child born in North Texas.⁸

A two-room building was erected, enclosed in a vertical log stockade to keep out the Indians. Soon the Howes were joined by Mayor Smith, father of Mrs. Howe. To this two-room cabin Sam Houston paid his friend, Mayor Smith, a notable visit. Houston was in need of his friend's help in his fight against the removal of the

⁷J. Crawford and B. Porter, History of Ellis County, p. 81.

⁸"Early Settlers in Ellis County," Dallas Morning News, March 14, 1933, p. 2.

state capitol from Washington-on-the-Brazos to Austin. In honor of this visit a nearby creek was named Houston Creek.

In the latter part of 1843 the Smith and Howe settlement was swelled by Dr. Young and Archibald Greathouse and their families. The following unmarried men also came: Marshall Bartlett, W. J. Stokes, C. N. Patrick, J. P. McConley, and a man by the name of Waddell who drowned in Chambers Creek in 1844. This settlement, near the present town of Forrester, was established when Ellis County was a part of Navarro County. The first Navarro County Court was held at Howe's farm under a majestic pecan tree which still stands.⁹

What is believed to be the second settlement in present Ellis County was made by the Mayfields at Reagor Springs in February, 1844. Robert Mayfield writes of this settlement in "Reminiscences of the Earliest Settlement of Ellis County":

My father, Sutherland Mayfield, started with his family from Dyer County Tennessee in the year 1838. Quite a number came with him as far as Nachitoches, Louisiana where they scattered. My father came in to Nacogdoches Texas arriving April 1838 and remaining until October waiting for a train to be made up to journey to Washington County. The way was infested with Indians and Mexicans. We removed from Washington, seat of the government to the Brazos, remaining there until 1843. In February

⁹"Howe's Settlement," Ennis City Fair News, September 12, 1935, p. 6.

1844, we removed to what is now Ellis County settling at five springs known as Reagor Springs. Seven miles southeast of present Waxahachie. We built a cabin on ground cleared of Walnut timber and planted crops. Brother and I went back to the Brazos for a load of corn which lasted our family of fourteen two months. Then we lived on meat alone until crops were harvested.¹⁰

In March, 1844, a settlement was made on the upper Red Oak Creek near the present site of Ovilla, by the Billingsleys -- Jonathan, Samuel, William, and their families. They built a fort first of all. They were soon joined by James Sterrett, One McNamara, and the widow McCormick.¹¹ Below this fort James E. Patton, a future leader of county affairs, settled in 1844 with his nephew and his three sons -- James, Thomas, and John.

Among the most interesting of these first settlements was one made by James P. Apperson and John F. Flaherty near the present Peter Stout place at Grove Creek. These intrepid settlers brought slaves with them. Finding an area devoid of all turf due to recent fire, they pitched camp and planted a crop at once. There was no way of building a fence; so wild horses and buffalo were kept off the crop by a system of alternate watches both day and night.

¹⁰Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 17.

¹¹Ibid., p. 74.

The first settlement in the southern portion of the county was made by Jefferson Davis Jordan on Mill Creek four miles below the present town of Milford. This early settler's grave, marked by a Centennial monument, can be seen in the Milford Cemetery. "Uncle Jeff" came to Texas when a boy and fought through the Revolution. His settlement was established in 1845.¹²

Likewise, in 1845 there came from Arkansas Sidney Pruitt, Daniel Weaver, Robert Peaks, and their families. P. P. Smith and G. L. Hickey, both unmarried, settled near the Howe community. A. S. Jenkins settled on Waxahachie Creek three miles below Midlothian, and is believed to have been the first resident of this locality.

In 1846 came few new settlers, but notable among those who did arrive was Hans Smith, a politician from Arkansas. He at one time had almost been successful in opposing Thomas H. Benton for United States Senator.¹³ Talented and educated, he had a finely cultivated intellect and was a fluent and silver-voiced speaker. Smith settled on the south side of Red Oak Creek and opened the first dry-goods and grocery store in the county. Moreover, he was the first to plant cotton in the county and operated the first cotton gin.¹⁴

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁴R. E. Sparkman, Souvenirs of Historic Ellis County, p. 6.

Another future leader of Ellis County came to the locality in 1846 -- General E. H. Tarrant, who was to help organize and to name the new county. His settlement was made at the present Tarrant Springs on Chambers Creek. He was also a friend of Sam Houston's and helped entertain him on his previously mentioned visit to Chambers Creek.

Also, in 1846, a group from Franklin, in Johnson County, came to the present locality of Waxahachie for the purpose of prospecting. Among them was Ernest Rogers. They visited James Sterrett, who lived near Howe's settlement. Rogers, impressed with what he saw, decided to remain and selected a spot on which the Rogers Hotel is now located, as the site for his cabin. This was the first settlement on the site of the present city of Waxahachie. The Rogers home became a very hospitable center at which early pioneers gathered. A thoroughly public-spirited man, Rogers was to become a leader in future affairs.¹⁵

Another colorful pioneer figure and early settler was Captain R. D. Ap Rice. Born in Wales, he came while a young man to Chambers Creek, buying large tracts of land. He was a man of unusual culture and was highly trained in mechanics. Among his many investments were a

¹⁵Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 75.

group of sawmills on Chambers Creek which furnished much of the lumber that went into the construction of pioneer homes in this locality. He was also a surveyor. An old advertisement was found recently in the Dallas Morning News, placed in the paper by Captain Ap Rice, who sought cargoes for his boats, which he operated on the Trinity at this time. In an old cemetery three miles west of Italy is a headstone at the grave of his wife made with his own hands. It is ten feet high and made of solid stone brought from a granite quarry which is now the site of Bell Branch Country Club. The stone is in remarkably good condition.¹⁶

The early settlers of Ellis County came from the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky -- the greater number being from Tennessee. More than half of the present population are direct descendants of these settlers. There are a large number of Bohemians in the eastern part of the county. These, with a few Hungarians and Germans, compose the foreign element. There is, of course, a sizeable population of Negroes in the county, the greater percentage being found in the towns. In the beginnings of the county there seemed to be two distinct streams of settlement -- those coming from trans-Mississippi regions and those coming from older Texas communities.

¹⁶Ennis News, December 28, 1935, p. 6.

These last came from the falls of the Brazos and overland from Bucksnot near Marlin. The dividing line between these two tides of settlers was between Red Oak and Grove Creek.

In 1853 the Reverend Dickson, a Presbyterian minister from Georgia, opened a school in Milford. Most authorities agree that this was the first school in the entire county.¹⁷ In a personal interview with J. W. Rosson, Milford, Texas, this first school was described to the present writer as follows:

The first school house in Ellis County was a one-room log structure, located on School House Branch, a short distance from Milford. Colonel Wright, who was instrumental in bettering the conditions of the people in the community, donated this structure to be used for school purposes.

The territory of Ellis County was first a part of Navarro County, as previously mentioned, and was of course under the jurisdiction of Navarro County during that time. As has been stated before, the first Navarro County Court was held on the Howe farm in present Ellis County. Active in running the affairs of Navarro County was General E. H. Tarrant, whose name was subsequently given to the county of which Fort Worth is the county seat.¹⁸

¹⁷Biographical and Memorial History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 151.

¹⁸F. W. Johnson, E. C. Barber, and E. W. Winkler, A History of Texas and Texans, p. 792.

While serving in the legislature as a representative from Navarro County, he introduced a bill providing for the organization of Ellis County. The new county was to have the following boundaries:

Beginning on the west bank of the Trinity River at Robert H. Porter's house; thence in a straight line to Chambers Creek, at a point immediately opposite Mill Creek; thence south sixty degrees, west to a point thirty-seven miles on a straight line from the place of beginning; thence north thirty degrees west of the southwest corner of Dallas County; thence with the south border of said Dallas County to Trinity River; thence down said river with its meanders to place of beginning.¹⁹

General Tarrant likewise suggested that the new county be named for his friend, Richard Ellis. A Virginian by birth and education, an Alabaman by adoption, Ellis came to Texas in 1825 and located on a large plantation in the Red River section of Texas in what is now Bowie County. While not the greatest of the early Texans, he certainly filled a niche in the history of the state. Richard Ellis never visited the county which was named for him, for he died in 1849, the same year in which the Texas Legislature immortalized his service to the state.

Writers of Texas history have found much to admire in Tarrant.²⁰ He was a man of towering intellect,

¹⁹Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 77.

²⁰Ibid.

scholarly attainments, splendid character, and great courage. In March, 1836, he was chosen a delegate and later president of the convention which declared the independence of Texas and framed the Constitution of the Republic of Texas.²¹

The sponsors of the county had great difficulty in gathering the required number of signatures for the creation of a new county. Strenuous efforts were put forth. It is known that one man had to ride three days to obtain the last two names on the petition.²²

The names having been obtained, the county was created by an act of the legislature on December 2, 1849. The act creating the county directed that the county seat, when selected, should be called Waxahachie, and that provision was responsible for the origin of the county's present metropolis.²³

The further organization of the county was immediately under way. W. L. Mitchell, William Downing, W. T. Flaherty, George Younger, B. F. Hawkins, Norman Whittenberg, James E. Patton, and James Jackson were appointed commissioners to receive bids and donations for a county seat which was to be located within five miles of the center of the county.²⁴ An election was held at the house

²¹Z. T. Fullmore, A History of Texas as Told in County Names, p. 107.

²²Colonel W. E. (Bill) Cox, County of Ellis, p. 18.

²³Johnson, Barker, and Winkler, op. cit., p. 792.

²⁴Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 79.

of E. P. Rogers the first Monday in August, 1850. The Rogers place was selected to be known as Waxahachie, the county seat. The first County Court met August 19, 1850, having been organized by Judge S. C. Cross, the Chief Justice of Navarro County. An old record states:

It is ordered by the court, that S. C. Cross, Chief Justice of Navarro County, receive the sum of ten dollars (\$10) for his service in organizing the said County of Ellis, that the same be audited and allowed and paid out of the first money that comes into the Treasury of the said County.²⁵

On Monday, August 19, the first session of the County Court was held. William H. C. Bradford, the new sheriff of the county, opened the court. The session was held at the home of E. W. Rogers (there being no courthouse or place designated by law for holding court). The Honorable William Hawkins, Chief Justice of the county, presided. The following commissioners were present: Laiken Newton, Henry Temble, and James L. Berry. Present also was Benjamin F. Hawkins, clerk of the County Court.

It was ordered by the court that a courthouse be erected:

To wit a log house 16 x 18; 9 feet high to be rough hewed inside and out, cracks to be lined with clapboards one window in the end 2 x 4 furnished with clapboard shutters, door in each side to be faced and furnished with clapboard.

²⁵Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, I, 2.

Said house to be covered with three foot boards nailed to good ribs and said house to be built for \$59.²⁶

The contract for building this edifice was given to Elbert Newton and Newton Laughlin, who were very hard-pressed to build it within the specified sum of fifty-nine dollars. Materials for building the courthouse were hauled to Waxahachie by ox team. It was duly finished and the first District Court was held there in October, 1850. This was presided over by Judge O. M. Roberts, then District Judge. He pronounced the new courthouse to be the most magnificent in the entire Ninth District.

No account of the organization of Ellis County would be complete without further mention of two men who were influential in its organization, namely, the Hawkinses. William Hawkins became the first Chief Justice of the county and his son, B. F. Hawkins, the first County Clerk. It is doubtful that any resident of Texas ever held office as long as did B. F. Hawkins. The Hawkins family came to Ellis County in 1848 and settled near Midlothian. In 1850 they removed to Waxahachie and bought thirteen acres of land on what is now called Hawkins Street, paying one hundred dollars for it by splitting rails for Major Rogers. Through the years this fine family has served the county unselfishly, its descendants still

²⁶Ibid., p. 4.

being active in county affairs.²⁷

In going over the records of the county, one is interested in the everyday happenings in the lives of these early settlers. One of particular interest is the first marriage in the county, that of the widow McCormick and James Sterrett. Although this was the first marriage of two Ellis County settlers, the license was not issued in that county. James Sterrett had to travel to Franklin, Robertson County, to procure a license as well as a justice of the peace to perform the ceremony.²⁸ When Ellis County did secure a justice of the peace, it had one of capability as well as one possessing a sense of humor, as was evidenced in the person of David Mitchell. On one of the first marriage certificates he issued he wrote:

I do certify that the amiable, wooed, and beloved Miss Minerva E. Robinson is no more. On March 16, 1843, I executed the within on Wednesday night and changed her name to Mrs. Wright. May heaven's blessings crown their joys and fill their arms with girls and boys.²⁹

The first marriage license to be granted in the county was issued September 9, 1850, to James B. Garvin and Nancy Witherspoon, a daughter of one of Waxahachie's

²⁷Ennis Daily News, July 13, 1936.

²⁸Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁹Ibid., p. 37.

first settlers.³⁰

The first will on record was filed on June 30, 1849. It was made by Anne Sullivan and willed two Negro slaves to each of her two daughters.³¹

As in most pioneer communities, religion played a very important part in the life of Ellis County settlers. The first church service in the county is believed to have been held in a cabin three miles from Waxahachie in July, 1845. The presiding preacher was a man named Welch -- a Methodist itinerant. A year later a Presbyterian minister, Finis E. King, moved into the county limits in the community of Shiloh. A man of commanding physical appearance, his strong body stood him in good stead in this pioneer community. He had more than average intellect, and possessed an affable disposition and a conservative mind necessary in such a place. He set to work and vigorously established the first religious organization introduced into the social institutions of the county. This was a Presbyterian church, organized on July 25, 1847, consisting of twenty-five charter members. In the twelve years that the Reverend King remained at its head, the little Shiloh Church grew to a

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 5.

membership of 250.³²

Interesting also is the first application for citizenship in the county records. It was made by Francis Alhorn. The applicant had emigrated in the fall of 1851 from the electoral state of Hessen, a province of Germany. He came to Texas in 1853, and the following year came to Ellis County, where he immediately made application for citizenship. His good moral character was witnessed by John M. Andrews and George E. Parks.

In a remote rural section of the county stands one of its most interesting historical shrines -- and what is believed to be the oldest home still standing. It was originally a one-room house, which served as the ranch home of Mr. and Mrs. Addison Wardlow from Arkansas.³³ Logs accumulated and used in its construction were hewed from trees on the banks of Bee Creek, which traverses the ranch. Later the house received additions build of lumber which was hauled from great distances. This ranch was widely known for its large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep. The ranch house is located between Italy and Maypearl.

The beginnings of a county history can be seen in

³²Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 12.

³³Dallas Morning News, June 26, 1936, p. 16.

the simple everyday happenings in the life of a pioneer people. In all parts of the new county evidences of growth have been noted. From these beginnings the development of more than a score of small prosperous communities can be traced.

CHAPTER II

BEGINNINGS OF TOWNS AND SUBSEQUENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Certain evidence of the young county's growth is shown in the necessity for erecting a new courthouse in the early part of 1853. The contract for the second building, erected only three years after the original one, called for the expending of a great deal more capital. The first courthouse, it will be remembered, was constructed at a cost of fifty-nine dollars. The second one was to cost \$1,999. A contract was let to David P. Fearis, the lowest bidder, on March 28, 1853. The edifice was to be a frame building twenty-four by thirty-six feet. Two stories in height, it was to have a courtroom above and a hall eight feet wide as well as four large offices below. The building was to be surmounted by a cupulo. The court records specify that three good coats of paint should be put on both the outside and inside.¹

In the early days of the county the necessities of life were hauled in by ox carts from points twenty-five,

¹Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, III, 55.

fifty, or even one hundred miles away. Much was shipped from New Orleans to Houston, thence brought up the Trinity by steamer. Water travel was much easier and indeed faster than the ox-cart method.

The first community industry was the grist mill of Peter Stout erected in 1846 on Grove Creek. A year later an ox-tread mill was opened at Milford.

A. D. Marchbanks opened the first general merchandise store in Waxahachie as well as in the county in 1850. The building used was a clapboard shanty with a dirt floor. There were no shelves for the merchandise, and the entire stock consisted of a couple of boxes of goods, a barrel of molasses, and some sugar. But proud citizens of Waxahachie flocked here and poked joyfully into boxes and barrels to make their selections.² Incidentally, the freight on the original stock of goods was twenty dollars, which was more than the cost of the entire goods.

In these early days transportation was carried on by stage lines. There was a line from Waxahachie to Dallas, and J. H. Ellis ran a hack from Waxahachie to other county towns for a time. Otherwise there was no public transportation.

Grain was the county's first major crop, and corn was likewise planted. In the early fifties cotton was

²J. B. Herring, "Early Days," Ennis Daily News, July 14, 1938, p. 6.

introduced but very little was produced before the Civil War. The first cotton gin was located near Palmer.³ However, after the ginning, the cotton had to be hauled to Houston or Galveston. The cost was exorbitant, the hauling being done entirely with ox teams, and the round trip requiring from four to eight weeks.

By 1868, however, from 2,000 to 4,000 bales of cotton were hauled each year to Hempstead, where railroad connections were possible. When the railroad reached Calvert, the producers shipped the crop to Galveston by way of that terminus. The freight to Calvert was twelve and one-half cents a pound, two cents per pound going for government taxes and other charges, all amounting to thirty-eight dollars gold per bale. Fortunately the price was good, which fact overcame the cost of getting the cotton to its destination. When later the terminus of the railroad was at Bryan, the crop could be hauled there at a cost of from five to twelve dollars per bale, depending upon the season and the condition of the roads. Some farmers hauled to the Trinity and sent the cotton from there on flatboats. While this method was much cheaper except for the price of getting it to the river itself, it was slow.

During the Civil War large numbers of slaves were

³Ennis City Fair News, September 12, 1935, p. 4.

run into Texas from Louisiana and other southern states to avoid capture by Union armies. Many came to Ellis County. When the war was over, many were taken back, although a sufficiently large number remained to become quite a factor to increase the production of cotton. The high price of the staple, around twenty-three and three-fourths cents a pound, was likewise a determining factor.⁴

When, in 1872, the Houston Central Railroad built lines through the county to Dallas and five years later the Waxahachie tap was completed to Waxahachie, the cotton buyers flocked to the county. Waxahachie became known as the state's leading cotton market. From that time on cotton and Ellis County became synonymous.

By 1880 a tremendous cotton business had developed, that year the crop being 29,000 bales. In 1891 a record handling for one day was 1,100 bales. It was not at all uncommon for seven or eight hundred bales to be sold in one day.⁵ The grade of cotton produced was the highest grade of the short staple, which was much sought after both by mills in the East and by European manufacturers.

In the early days of the county the need for a bank became apparent. The nearest exchange was at Bryan and

⁴Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, pp. 144-145.

⁵Ibid., p. 145.

the transaction of business was accordingly slow and difficult, since Bryan was 160 miles distant, a good two-days' journey. As well as being a long trip, it was a dangerous one. In order to reach Bryan it was necessary to go through a section known as Deadline, a strip of post-oak country between old Owensville and Wheelock which was infested with desperadoes. The rate of exchange at Bryan was very high, often reaching two and one-half per cent.

Judge J. W. Ferris and W. H. Getzendauer formed a law partnership early in 1868. Seeing the need for a local bank, in July of the same year they opened an exchange and banking office. Outside of Dallas this was the only such firm in North Texas.⁶ Its success was immediate. Business poured in from Hill, Tarrant, and Johnson Counties as well as Ellis. This same firm still operates as the Citizens' National Bank in Waxahachie.

Apparent also was the need for a railroad. On January 8, 1872, a petition was presented to the county with the requisite number of freeholders signing it, in conformity with an act authorizing counties and towns to aid in the construction of railroads.⁷ The elections were to be held in the courthouse in Waxahachie on

⁶Ibid., p. 140.

⁷Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 186.

February 15, 16, and 17. This was to determine the willingness of voters to have ten per cent county bonds issued to the amount of \$40,000, which would be payable fifteen years from the date.

The first railroad through the county was the Houston and Texas Central. This line was constructed through the east half of the county in the year 1872, by-passing Waxahachie about a dozen miles. The city of Ennis was laid out as the principal station on the railroad.⁸

On September 1, 1872, the Southern Pacific opened the tap line to Ennis.⁹ In 1875 the act of incorporation of the Waxahachie tap line was passed by the legislature. The list of stockholders includes many builders of the county. Among them were J. W. Ferris, John G. Williams, C. D. Pickett, S. A. Clift, B. F. Hawkins, H. H. Dunn, W. L. Carrick, G. L. Adkinson, and J. F. Aldridge. The charter members met and elected a board of directors. An election was ordered to determine whether Waxahachie should take \$75,000 of stock for the proposed road.

In celebration of the breaking of the first ground for the railroad, a grand barbecue was held on June 14, 1875. A parade was formed and the line of march extended to the place which had been selected for a depot. Speeches

⁸Johnson, Barker, and Winkler, op. cit., p. 792.

⁹J. B. Herring, "Early Days," Ennis Daily News, July 14, 1938, p. 5.

were heard for hours. The first spade of dirt was turned by J. C. Gibson, who was the oldest member of the board of directors.

By September, 1879, the tap was in full operation. By October 31, 1879, 5,010 bales of cotton had been shipped over it.¹⁰

The county's growth went hand in hand with the growth of its towns. Early in the county's history a number of little towns sprang up in various sections of the county. Already mentioned is Waxahachie, county seat. Waxahachie received its name from a creek which passes through a portion of it and which in Indian tongue means "Cow Creek." The city was laid off by E. M. Rogers, its first citizen. It was incorporated in 1871 with the Honorable W. H. Getzandaner as its first mayor. An old Texas city, it established itself early as a city of churches and schools. Its present population is 8,655.¹¹ Today it is a commercial center with its wholesale houses, cotton gins, compress and cotton-seed mills. The city has also made a start as a manufacturing center, having a textile mill, a broom factory, Tyler's Fixture Corporation, and an overall and shirt factory.

¹⁰Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, pp. 181-183.

¹¹Texas Almanac, 1946, p. 403.

Milford, one of the oldest towns in the county, dates back to the early fifties. It is located on a beautifully rolling ridge half a mile from Mill Creek in the southeastern part of the county. The soil here is of the usual black-waxy type and is, of course, highly productive. In 1851 Colonel Arvin Wright bought 640 acres of land and with William R. Hudson and J. M. Higgins laid this off into town lots. The Colonel donated quite a number of these himself for the creation of a suitable school building.¹² William R. Hudson opened the first store, and he became the first postmaster as well. He built the first house in Milford in 1853.

When the Houston and Texas Central Railroad came through the county, the city of Ennis was established. It is one of the finest townsites in the entire county, situated as it is on the ridge of the black sandy-loam prairie. The site was selected in May, 1872, by W. G. Veale. It received its name from Cornelius Ennis, an early director of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad. An election was held in October, 1873, and the necessary twenty persons residing there who were qualified voters, voted to organize the town.¹³ It was incorporated

¹²Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 220.

¹³Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 206.

before the end of the year. Ennis derived its early importance from its railroad shops, which it still retains. A metal tag manufacturing plant and a poultry dressing plant as well as the usual business connected with the cotton industry make it a flourishing little city of 7,087 people at present.

Forreston is a very small town, but it is the site of the first settlement made in the county. Originally the townsite was known as Chambers Creek, so named for General Chambers who received the grant of eleven leagues of land here before Texas gained her independence. As has been previously stated, this locale was the county seat of Navarro County before Ellis County was separated from Navarro. Gradually it became known as Forest's Store because of the store which was owned by Captain Carr Forest and finally the term "Forreston" was adopted. Forreston today is a farming community and the center of much historical interest in the county.¹⁴

Between the two forks of Onion Creek generally known as Big Onion and Little Onion, about eight miles southeast of Waxahachie, is a rich and beautiful valley, unsurpassed in productiveness by any section of the state. The excellent quality of the land, added to the magnificent rural attractions, caused it to be named Garden Valley.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 235.

This valley, which is about two miles in width and eight miles long, runs in a southeastern direction. In its center is located the quiet little town of Nash, which was named for N. J. Nash, a county attorney. Crops rarely fail here and the little rural community is flourishing.

Ovilla, located on Red Oak Creek about ten miles northwest of Waxahachie, is only a small village but it possesses interesting surroundings, due to the fact that it is in the midst of the county's earliest settled sections. It is the locale of the Shiloh Church, the spot where the first religious service was held. The first and many succeeding camp meetings were conducted here. The name Ovilla is not of Mexican or Spanish origin, as one would suppose. It was a name invented by a Mrs. Mallory who put "O" before the word "villa" for the sake of euphony.¹⁵

Ferris, situated about twenty-four miles northeast of Waxahachie, is only a half mile south of the Dallas County line. The townsite was laid off by the Houston and Texas Central Railroad in 1874. It was named for Judge J. W. Ferris, a pioneer of Waxahachie. P. P. Mackey was the second settler in the town, the railroad having appointed him depot agent upon the opening of the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 229.

station there. A Mr. Straw built the first cottage there and N. J. Doty started the first store in February, 1874.

Italy is one of the youngest towns in the county but one of the most progressive in both business and education. Indeed, it is called the biggest little town in Texas. The first house was built in 1879 by the Aycock brothers and was used as a combination grocery store and post office. The town was incorporated August 16, 1891.

In the conflict of national power with that of the state and in the freeing of the slaves, this county proved how Ellis Countians would hold to the last in standing for what they thought was right. In February, 1861, when Texas by her convention decided to cast her vote with the South and secede from the Union, every citizen of this county stood with the state.¹⁶

During August, 1861, the cavalry regiment known as the 12th Texas Parson Brigade was organized. Among officers from Ellis County were Mullins, Rogers, Hogan, and Cox. The first victory of the brigade was under the command of Major E. W. Rogers of Waxahachie, who met the Union troops May 17, 1862.

In the County Commissioners' Court records one finds

¹⁶Crawford and Porter, op. cit., p. 10.

reference to a committee headed by W. T. Briggs to correspond with the Secretary of War of the Confederacy in order to purchase arms for Ellis County. Volunteer companies were organized within the county. Monies were appropriated at various times to provide blankets, camp equipment, and even the shoeing of horses for members of these companies who were not able to have their own horses shod. The records show the valiant efforts of these people to keep their slave and cotton empire intact.

From 1857 to 1876 the county as well as the remainder of the conquered South was under the rule of the "carpet-baggers."

The County Court, which had been named the Commissioners' Court, had its name changed to the Police Court of Ellis County. Records are so named until 1876, when the name was changed back to Commissioners' Court. The records explain how a special police force was placed in the county. It seems that the people of the county failed to furnish sufficient funds for the care of these officers. As a result an appeal was made to the Police Court. The court decided that claims of policemen should not be allowed. Thus we see with what spirit the unjust rule of these days was opposed.¹⁷

¹⁷Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, C, 360.

The carpet-bag rule at an end, development of the county went steadily forward. Railroad lines were completed into the county limits. The high price of cotton brought about an almost phenomenal development. Again the courthouse was outgrown and a third one was constructed. This one was to be built at a cost of \$15,000, in interesting contrast to the first such building constructed for fifty-nine dollars only forty-five years before. Ellis Countians were proud of the growth of their county and the new courthouse symbolized this pride. The following is a description of the building found in a contemporary newspaper:

The building is of Spanish design with a tinge of the Venetian. It is appropriate that such should be the design, our history being so closely interwoven with the Spanish. The plan is peculiar being neither round nor square and has thirty four rooms in the building. Each room is a corner or a semi-circle.¹⁸

The cornerstone for this building was laid July 4, 1895. A crowd estimated at fifteen thousand people was present for this event. A street parade was held and the inevitable barbecue was served on the grounds. The Ellis Countians, proud of their progress, were secure in the knowledge that their courthouse was as handsome as any in the state.¹⁹

¹⁸Waxahachie Daily Light, July 4, 1895, p. 3.

¹⁹Cox, op. cit., p. 6.

The young county came of age during this period of its history. The difficult days of the Civil War were over. With its towns prospering and foundations for economic development firmly established, Ellis Countians next turned their attention to building schools.

CHAPTER III

EARLY SCHOOLS

The pioneers in Ellis County, as indeed those throughout Texas, were vitally concerned with the need of providing a means of education for their children. In an editorial in the Waxahachie Light concerning the early activities of the pioneers, this concern is shown:

Regardless of the size of a town or city, the most important business is not banking, manufacturing, or selling of articles but the production of men and women.¹

Consequently, some provision for education was made early in every community. This was done frequently in connection with churches. The writer noticed in looking over records of early education that the Masonic lodges identified themselves actively with provisions for educational facilities. In the early days of the Republic, academies were developed throughout the state. A number of very fine academies were found in Ellis County.

One of the first laws concerning education in Texas was issued soon after the Republic was established. It said: "It shall be the duty of the Congress as soon as

¹Waxahachie Daily Light, October 21, 1913, p. 4.

circumstances will permit, to provide by law a general system of education."² This, of course, provided nothing definite but it was a beginning, and shows that Texas leaders were determined to remedy one defect in the Mexican rule of Texas; namely, failure to provide an adequate educational system.

Some of the early schools had names which have been quite lost in the modern records. Among these are "Buttermilk" and "Cornbread" schools. The former was situated on the property of Samuel Harpole, who settled on Hog Creek, near the present location of Italy. As paint was out of the question, the small one-room structure erected in his yard was given a coating of lime mixed with buttermilk.

The citizens of Milford were particularly education-minded. The first school in the county was opened here, at a time when only a few families had settled. Later a two-story stone building known as the "Old Stone School" was constructed. This was destroyed by fire and replaced with a two-story frame building which was declared unsafe in 1876.³

The Presbyterian and Baptist churches were then used in 1878 when the Masons and the community constructed a

²Frederick Eby, Education in Texas, Source Materials, p. 131.

³Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, pp. 222-223.

building to be used jointly. This was used until 1891, when a new school was organized. A committee was appointed to solicit funds up to one thousand dollars. Frank Hill, an educationally minded man, donated two and one-half acres and a well for the new building. The new school was to be called the Milford Academy. It opened September 14, 1891, with T. N. Elliott as principal and instructor in Latin, French, and natural science. This building was very fine for its time. It consisted of five rooms on the main floor, including a music room, library, apparatus room, and two halls. On the second floor was a spacious auditorium fifty-four by sixty feet.

As has been stated before, the Reverend Dickson, a Presbyterian minister from Georgia, opened the first school in Ellis County at Milford in 1853. The next year the Reverend D. G. Mollay and his wife started the second school in the county on Red Oak Creek, where the city of Ovilla now stands. The first school in Waxahachie began in 1857. It was taught by Mr. and Mrs. Mulkey, parents of the late Abe Mulkey, noted Methodist evangelist.⁴ It was located at the northeast corner of Jefferson and Hawkins streets and lasted through the Civil War. Italy's first school was known as the Houston Creek school which was taught by A. J. Lloyd.⁵

⁴Waxahachie Daily Light, October 21, 1913, p. 4.

⁵Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 207.

The Masonic Academy in Waxahachie was started in early 1861. The cornerstone of the building was laid in May, 1861. The academy was housed in a two-story building which stood on the site of the present Sims Library. Ross Davis of Waxahachie has in his possession a contract for this building which his grandfather, R. A. Davis, built. Professor Joseph Henesley taught the first session beginning in September, 1861. A Mrs. De Loache had charge of the music department.

One of the most successful of Waxahachie's early attempts at education was Marvin College. Scores of men and women over the country received their education at this institution. It was started at a meeting of the Methodist Church Conference held in Waxahachie in 1868 and presided over by Bishop Enoch Mather Marvin, for whom the college was named. Before the brick buildings of the institution could be completed, classes were started, being held in the home of H. D. Marchbanks.⁶

The first president of the academy was the Reverend J. W. P. McKenzie. The school was chartered May 8, 1873, by the 13th Legislature.⁷ A bell was presented to Marvin College by the citizens of New York City. It has been preserved and was in use until a few years ago

⁶Berry B. Cobb, "History of Marvin College" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, 1933), pp. 22-25.

⁷Eby, op. cit., p. 403.

by the Central Ward School of Waxahachie.

A number of very fine teachers instructed here, leaving their influence on the future citizens of the county. Among them was a Major Banks and his son Aubrey Banks who taught mathematics. Another interesting faculty member was a Mrs. Buchanan who had charge of a girls' dormitory and boarding school and also taught French and art. She was a woman of rare talent and great ability -- a truly grand Southern lady.⁸

The college suffered from a lack of funds in the late seventies. It was sold March 15, 1879, by the church. General L. W. Lewis was its last president. Under its new management the school was never financially successful. In 1880 140 students were enrolled; in 1881, 202; in January, 1882, 310; and in 1883, 358.⁹ The indebtedness continued to pile up until the winter of 1883-1884, when the city took over the building to use as a public school.

An interesting advertisement appeared in an old issue of the Waxahachie Argus, an early newspaper, concerning the Waxahachie Academy, one of the old schools of the county. It stated that the trustees of the said school

⁸H. Goodlett, "Thumbnail Ellis County History," Waxahachie Daily Light, January 30, 1945, p. 5.

⁹Cobb, op. cit., p. 101.

felt that they could then assure the public that Waxahachie had a school that was permanent. Parents might send their children to it knowing that they could continue under the best instructors until their education was completed. Here they might have the advantages of moral and social influence of the society in and around the school and of the health-giving prairie airs. The terms of tuition including spelling, reading, writing, geography, and arithmetic were three dollars a month. An additional dollar was charged for work in the higher branches of English and mathematics. Other courses offered were music on the piano, embroidery, and russet work. Incidental expenses for the month were expected to amount to about twenty cents.¹⁰

Mountain Peak was established in the fifties. In the seventies when it was considered one of the best schools in the vicinity, it was conducted in the Singleton residence. At Ovilla there has been a school since 1857. The Grove Creek school was opened in 1871. Valley Grove had its first school building in 1872; Ike, about 1875. Christian Chapel was established in 1881 as a school in a boxed house of one room, forty or fifty feet long. St. Paul, now known as Gardiner, was started in

¹⁰Waxahachie Argus, December 2, 1870, p. 5.

1887 in a two-room frame building, which was replaced some forty years ago by another frame structure. Of the eighty children in the district, some sixty attended. Schools in the communities of Buena Vista, Falls, Howard, Long Branch, and Oak date back to 1897.¹¹

Italy, the youngest town in the county, had good educational opportunities for the times. There were two first-class colleges (for those days) here. These were the Southwestern Normal College and Hope Institute. The former was founded in 1870 by Professor H. S. Parsons. Hope Institute was founded in 1879 and presided over by Professor A. T. Seitz. Hugh P. Gordon, writing in the Italy Sun in February, 1891, said:

At present each school has about two hundred pupils and a full corps of able and excellent teachers, who not only teach the young ideas how to shoot but keep strict watch over manners and morals of those intrusted to their care. One thing in particular has helped build up the schools of Italy and that is temperance, her citizens as a class being strictly temperate.¹²

Another early school of Italy was the Italy Institute, which was opened in 1879 by the Reverend L. C. Collier and Professor F. M. Godfrey. The building burned in 1888 and those gentlemen did not reopen the school.

¹¹F. Bryan, History and Development of Ellis County, p. 56.

¹²Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 211.

In listing the early schools of the county, we must not omit another very fine private one. This was the Lone Star Institute, taught by Mrs. Mollie Poe Wright. Mrs. Wright should be ranked among the county's finest early educators. Her school was attended by many of the Milford old-time citizens of today. The Lone Star Institute was distinguished by its thoroughgoing preparation of students to assume their rightful responsibilities in the society and in the business world of that day.

Some of the early educators who helped to build the schools of Ellis County may be listed among the most important in the state and even in the nation. About 1885 Dr. John Collier opened a school in the town of Waxahachie. He was assisted in the work of instructing by his daughter, Mrs. Mary Spears, an accomplished reader and a great teacher. She afterwards went to Dallas where she conducted a well-known girls' school in Oak Cliff. Later she directed the Mary K. Craig Study Club in that city.

Dr. Collier also brought to Waxahachie as teachers Misses Cassie and Mary Mason. Later in life they had a school of their own, the Castle, in Tarrytown on the Hudson, in New York.

Miss Mary Traylor came to Waxahachie fifty-four years ago as an art teacher. Her influence in cultural and artistic affairs cannot be overestimated.

It is true that the state of Texas aided the counties materially in their efforts to establish a system of education. Even in the early days of the Republic this assistance had started. On January 26, 1839, the following law was enacted:

Each county in this Republic shall have three leagues of land surveyed and set apart for the purpose of establishing a primary school or academy in each county.¹³

An additional league of land out of the public domain to be sold and the revenue used for educational purposes was granted in February, 1840.¹⁴

Almost as soon as the county was organized, the people of Ellis County were taking advantage of these offers of public lands by the state. On May 10, 1851, the Commissioners' Court ordered Emory W. Rogers to make the best contract possible with James E. Patton and Charles Cunningham to survey and locate four leagues of land for Ellis County to which she was entitled by the law.¹⁵ Accordingly the land was surveyed. In August and December, 1853, Patton and Cunningham were paid first \$216.75 and

¹³Eby, op. cit., p. 167.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁵Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 27.

later forty dollars for the expense of surveying this land.¹⁶

The county is indeed indebted to Colonel Patton for the judgment shown in the selection of these lands. He was a tall, angular man and most eccentric. At the time the survey was made he had no chains or chain carriers. However, this was no obstacle to him. Taking a piece of rawhide, he hobbled his feet together the length of a vara, and thus equipped he performed the duties of a surveyor and chain carrier.¹⁷ One record shows that he was paid three dollars for two days' service as a surveyor.¹⁸

It was decided that the school lands should be sold on twenty years' time with interest at the rate of ten per cent per annum. This was to be paid annually and in advance. It was optional with the purchaser, at the expiration of ten years, to pay the entire principal and receive his full acquittance thereof.¹⁹

All but five or six hundred acres of school lands were disposed of in 1878. From these lands, notes were executed which in interest produced about \$8,000 a year.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁷Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 74.

¹⁸Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 74.

¹⁹Ibid., D, 24.

This was used for paying teachers in the common free schools. It would operate all schools approximately two months per year.

One of the first constructive movements toward a better school system was the establishment of a board of examiners for teachers which was created in May, 1858.²⁰ The Commissioners' Court appointed G. S. Ransom, L. J. Stroop, and R. A. Davis as a board of examiners whose duty it was to examine all persons desiring to teach in Ellis County. That these early examiners took their duty seriously is shown by an entry made in the records during the same year saying that the statement of Julia E. Ponce be rejected since no certificate accompanied her statement that said teacher had ever been examined by the board.²¹

In 1840 the first school tax was voted by the state of Texas. The law stated that one tenth of the annual revenue be set aside for the benefit of the schools.²² Five years later the following law was passed:

The legislature shall, as early as practicable, establish free schools throughout the state and shall furnish means for their support by taxation of property; and it shall be the duty of the legislature to set apart not less than one tenth of annual revenue of the state,

²⁰Ibid., A, 151.

²¹Ibid., B, 54.

²²Eby, op. cit., p. 212.

derivable from taxation as a perpetual school fund which shall be appropriated for the support of free schools, and no law shall ever be made diverting said funds to any other use, and until such time as the Legislature shall provide for establishment of such schools in the several districts of the state, the funds thus created shall remain as a charge against the state passed to credit of the common school fund.²³

The county records show that E. M. Rogers, the county treasurer, received from the state treasurer \$312.58 for the year 1854 and for the following year the sum of \$771.00 from the perpetual school fund.²⁴

In 1874 a school tax was levied in the county. This was on taxable property; twenty-five cents on each \$100 of said property was stipulated for school purposes. John King, the county sheriff, was ordered to collect taxes and to turn over to the treasurer of the school fund such amounts as were due him.²⁵ Later in the same year it was ordered by the board of school directors that the County Court place the assessment of one-fourth per cent for schoolhouse purposes in the hands of the collector. This was to be done in such a manner that it could be collected at as early a date as possible and that each precinct be accredited with its proportion.

²³Ibid., pp. 212-213.

²⁴Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 310.

²⁵Ibid., C, 290.

A one per cent school tax was passed by the Commissioners' Court on September 28, 1875.²⁶ The court records state that after careful examination, the court had been advised to levy this tax to swell its public school funds.²⁷ Thus we see that the county, working with the state, made feeble beginnings toward the goal of establishing a creditable school system.

²⁶Ibid., p. 289.

²⁷Ibid., p. 454.

CHAPTER IV

BEGINNINGS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The finances of the county schools are a very interesting as well as necessary part of early county-school history. Patrons of the schools paid by subscription the tuition for their children's instruction. Provision was made by the Commissioners' Court for the orphans, children of widows, or of parents who were unable to pay tuition. These were classified as indigent children.

The county school money was supplemented by that given by the state which was provided for in the law of January 31, 1854. The law provided that

a sum of two million dollars of five per cent bonds of United States now remaining in the treasury of the state, be set apart as a school fund for the support and maintenance of public schools which shall be called Special School Fund and the interest arising thereupon shall be apportioned and distributed for the support of schools herein provided.¹

At intervals the money on hand was distributed to the schools. An entry in the County Court records in May, 1857, ordered that at the August term of court the school fund on hand be distributed. Incidentally, the state apportionment for the year ending October 31, 1857,

¹Eby, op. cit., p. 264.

was \$845.21.²

In the year 1858 records show that Peter Stout in one school district was authorized to draw money upon orders granted to R. H. Stern, a teacher in a common school in Stout's neighborhood. It seems that the said R. H. Stern had left the country. He had, however, been paid by the patrons the full amount for his services and there was more money left over from this disbursement. Peter Stout was authorized to make an equitable distribution of this said money among the patrons of the school.³

In the year 1860 the state fund increased to \$1,035.00. The sum for indigent children taught during that year amounted to \$290.74. The total number of days attended by these children was 3,876.5. A sum of \$703.27 was thus left to be distributed among the paying patrons whose children had been taught during the scholastic year ending August 31, 1860. The total number of days attended by these children was 41,097.⁴

That a deficit often existed can easily be seen. In March, 1877, the Commissioners' Court ordered a meeting of the trustees of those districts which were in arrears

²Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, A, 344.

³Ibid., B, 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 180.

for pay of teachers. The trustees were to be notified the amount due from their respective districts. They were then requested to call a meeting of the citizens of their districts in order to devise some plan to meet the said deficiency. The plan was to be reported at once to the Commissioners' Court.⁵

New tax rolls were compiled at regular intervals for assessing school taxes. In May, 1877, A. A. McMillany was appointed school tax assessor.⁶ It was his duty to make a list of all tax payers in each school precinct, giving a list of individual property and its valuation.

A more comprehensive report is seen in July, 1883, as follows:

Received from former Treasurer	\$ 1104.40
Interest on school land	7806.11
State School Fund	7248.00
Distributed in April	1840.79
This left on hand a sum of \$14,299.32. ⁷	

This last entry shows that money had been realized from school lands. A committee, consisting of H. H. Dunn, G. H. Higginbotham, and R. M. White was appointed in February, 1887, authorized to take the necessary steps for the legal investment of these funds which came from

⁵Ibid., D, 120.

⁶Ibid., p. 174.

⁷Ibid., F, 423.

the sale of school lands.⁸ Several years later the school fund had on hand a surplus. It was decided to invest this in five Ellis County courthouse bonds. The county judge was instructed to carry out this investment.⁹

The state per capita tax in 1894 amounted to \$3.50. The county tax at that time was fifty cents. There were in the county 116 districts containing an enrollment of 8,637 pupils. The amount used for that year in school financing was \$32,585.¹⁰

The county had been divided early in its history into school districts. This was provided for in a special term of court in July, 1854. There were to be eighteen of these districts whose boundaries were laid out. An election was ordered to be held in each district on Monday, August 15, for the purpose of electing three trustees for each district.¹¹

Just before the Civil War the state was divided into judicial districts. Ellis County became the 14th Judicial District. There was no county head of schools at this time, but over each of these districts was a district superintendent who received his office by appointment. He had the power to transfer teachers from county

⁸Ibid., J, 109.

⁹Ibid., M, 197.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 183.

¹¹Ibid., A, 157.

to county as he thought best. The average teachers' salary under this system was very poor, but it was somewhat supplemented by the state's allowing schools to charge three and four dollars per pupil for teaching those under or over age. An effort was made to raise the qualifications of teachers by requiring a knowledge of Latin and astronomy as well as higher mathematics for a certificate.¹²

Naturally, during the Civil War what had been accomplished to date, in the county and in the state as well, suffered a setback. During this period \$1,285,327 of the state school money was transferred from school funds to military funds.¹³ As the war went on more and more schools closed.

During the reconstruction period, education in Ellis County saw its darkest days. As a matter of fact, the National Bureau of Education reported the entire state of Texas as "the darkest field educationally in the entire United States."¹⁴ But the work started soon. The old judicial districts were abolished. In 1888 the office of the county superintendent of schools was provided for. The first county superintendent was elected in Ellis County in 1890 and his title was Superintendent of Public

¹²Crawford and Porter, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

¹³Eby, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 157.

Instruction. The term was to be for two years, the said official to be elected at each general election for state and county officials.¹⁵ This official was to receive all money for the public schools of the county as it was distributed by the state. This money he in turn was to give to the county treasurer to be properly allocated among the schools of the county. He also had power to license teachers and to dismiss those not of good moral character. N. Tricus was the first county superintendent of Ellis County. He received a salary of one thousand dollars per year and had approximately one hundred teachers under his jurisdiction.

Another act of reconstruction days was the division of the counties into school precincts. Ellis County was divided into five precincts which had the same boundaries as the justices' precincts. J. E. Smith, A. Trippett, and A. G. Wise were appointed trustees for Precinct Five; John A. Harlan, Wilson Cooke, and S. G. Stephenson, for Precinct Four; John Anderson, Stephen Mills, and J. C. Looney for Precinct Three; Jackson Bradley, Isaiah Gardner, and George Stiles for Precinct Two; and W. L. Rosson, I. R. Hudson, and A. Miller for Precinct One.¹⁶

The law of 1869 had definite influence on the

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Minutes of the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, C, 41.

development of county schools. The office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction was created. Local boards in charge of school affairs were given more control. A permanent fund was created, to be derived from income on permanent funds, two and one-fourth per cent of annual revenue from general taxation, a poll tax of one dollar assessed on every voter between the ages of twenty-one and sixty, and local taxation.¹⁷

A glimpse of county school history in the early eighties is seen in the following account of the Ennis schools. This was written in 1882:

In no city in Texas are there better facilities for educating the young than in Ennis. The board of Trustees have been unusually wise in providing necessary educational apparatus including maps, charts, globes and philosophical and chemical apparatus valued at \$1000. The primary department is unexcelled. The six teachers now in charge are all trained normal teachers and have made the teaching of children a study for years. It can be truly said that they are given more attention than usually falls to the lot of primary pupils. Besides doing the work laid down in books a great deal of outside work is required. For example -- every pupil in the Second and Third Reader not only reads his own book through but also a reader which is compiled by himself and his fellow pupils and is transferred to a chart. The searching for knowledge outside of that in books is characteristic of all departments.¹⁸

By 1908 the county schools had made quite a vast

¹⁷Eby, op. cit., p. 859.

¹⁸Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, p. 197.

improvement over those of the dark reconstruction days. In that year there were 122 common school districts and seven independent districts. There were 125 rural school buildings, making three districts with two buildings each. The value of county school property was estimated at \$104,859,000. The common school buildings consisted in the main of one-room edifices. However, in the small towns there were usually three- or four-room buildings. Coal was used almost entirely for heat.

There were 174 teachers in the common school districts. Six of these were women holding third-grade certificates. Twenty-three men and seventy-one women held second-grade certificates, while forty-eight men and nineteen women held first-grade certificates. Those holding permanent certificates consisted of two men and five women.¹⁹

Citizens and school men of the county seemingly were satisfied with the development of education after these valiant beginnings. However, educational progress was more or less stagnated in the entire state. The county schools operated, though there was no visible progress. The depression came with its subsequent economic recession in education. Then in the late twenties a change was seen. County educators with the help of public-

¹⁹Records in the office of the county superintendent, Waxahachie, Texas.

spirited citizens became inspired with the desire to bring the schools of Ellis County up to the standards of those of other progressive counties.

CHAPTER V

RECENT TRENDS

Ellis County has in recent years taken its place in the front ranks of all modern educational movements. Its educators, believing that the boys and girls of Ellis County are entitled to the best education the county can afford, have interested themselves in modern educational trends. Especially have they worked in cooperation with state educational officials on the possibilities of re-organization of public education in Texas in general and in Ellis County in particular.

The county has been very fortunate in the type of men who have served on the county board of education. This board, created by the state educational setup, is obligated to provide equal and adequate educational opportunities for the scholastics of the entire county. It has, under the law, the authority to divide the county into school districts, to locate high schools, to classify schools, to consolidate school districts when consolidation appears advisable, and to consider other problems relating to the conduct, maintenance, and discipline of

schools and length of terms.¹ Members of the board in Ellis County in cooperation with very able county superintendents have worked to make the county excel in educational opportunities.

Ellis County Institute was inaugurated September 30, 1927. Since attendance at these meetings was compulsory, the teachers received pay for their participation. The county superintendent was authorized to set dates for the meetings.² For a time these meetings were considered adequate for discussing and solving the problems of education and its improvement. However, in 1930, the county board endorsed the idea of substituting a supervisor for the institute in the rural schools. The board also went on record as unanimously favoring and recommending to the legislature that supervisors be substituted for institutes.³ Since that time the county has employed supervisors, working in cooperation with the classroom teachers. There have been four of these to date:

Mrs. Charles T. Cobb	1931-1936
Florelle Coats	1936-1939
Mrs. Mae Morris	1939-1944
Winnie D. Ellis	1944-

¹Public School Laws of Texas, 1935, Section 58, p. 20.

²School Board Minutes, Ellis County, September 1, 1927, p. 223.

³Ibid., August 8, 1930, p. 274.

Probably the most outstanding result of this supervisory work has been the testing program which was started in the county in 1939. The tests are given by the supervisor in all county schools, independent as well as rural. The first achievement tests showed marked deficiency in both reading and arithmetic. A corrective program has been inaugurated to remedy this situation. Careful graphs are kept on the progress of each child, and he is re-tested at regular intervals. Standardized intelligence tests are also given to aid in the proper classification of the child.

County teachers are justly proud of the county library. This was started by a former and extremely able superintendent, A. Dupree Davis, in 1926. At present the library consists of 10,097 volumes. A fee of five dollars a month is charged each school for the use of library books. Seventy-five books may be taken out by each teacher. The books are arranged in the library according to grade levels. A child who reads twenty books is given a reading certificate by the county. Oral or written reports are required on each book read. An average of about seven hundred books are checked out per month.

During the depression the library was staffed by the Works Progress Administration and supervised by the

state. In 1937 it was consolidated with the Sims Library of Waxahachie:

We, the county board realizing the worth and efficiency of valuable services rendered by the Sims Library of Waxahachie to schools of Ellis County do endorse proposed action of the county superintendent and library board of directors in merging facilities, materials and future resources of Rural School Circulating Library with facilities and resources of Sims Library under supervision of County Superintendent and the Sims board of directors.⁴

Visual education has not been overlooked in Ellis County. On August 11, 1939, the board voted to put in a program of visual education for the county schools. Equipment was purchased and a supervisor employed. Fred Huggins became the first visual education director at a salary of two hundred dollars a month.⁵ The equipment consists of four projection machines and a well-selected library of films including those for work in the primary grades, geography, history, industry, health, and literature.

In 1936, the board approved the appointment of an attendance officer to enforce the compulsory school law. Bill Rogers, a member of the sheriff's department, was selected at a salary of forty dollars a month to be paid out of the county administration funds, his term to begin October 1, 1936.⁶

⁴Ibid., June 4, 1937, p. 104.

⁵Ibid., August 11, 1939, p. 138.

⁶Ibid., August 6, 1936, p. 93.

Since 1936, however, truancy and delinquency problems have increased. For the last eight years the office of the attendance supervisor has been a full-time one and has been efficiently filled by Gus Ramage. It is the primary purpose of this officer to prevent truancy and juvenile delinquency rather than attempt to cure it after it has occurred. The result is that delinquency is now noticeably on the decline throughout the county.

The supervisor calls at the schools on regular visits. Cards are sent first to the parents of the truant. If no response is received, a visit is made immediately. Next a warning notice is sent. If there is no response to this, a letter is sent to the parent by the county attorney stating that the attendance officer has filed a complaint against the parent for failure to keep his child in school. Parents may apply for a certificate of exemption from attending school which is filled out and approved by the county superintendent. The present attendance officer states that he has not filed a complaint in seven years. The county has a correspondingly low juvenile delinquency record due to the fact that the children are in school.

The following is the program of the attendance officer for a typical eight-weeks' period:

A visit to every school in the county. Seventy-five calls and 29 addresses on value of education and inevitable result of staying out of school. Visit to 24 homes where 54 children had been absent from school. Interview in office with ten parents; five who were in need of clothing for children, three on account of sickness, and two with other problems. Fifteen conferences held with pastors, and welfare and social agencies. Positions secured for 3 mothers. Two physicians contacted and interviewed in regard to sickness of children. Attended one delinquency case in court as a witness.⁷

Among its most recent efforts to aid in creating educational opportunities the county has initiated a program for vocational education for veterans. On December 1, 1946, the County Board of Education elected Bob McCrady, a former county superintendent, as coordinator of the vocational school for a period of one year, beginning the first day of January, 1947, at a salary of \$3,600 per year with an additional allowance of fifty dollars for traveling expenses.

The county board has expressed the belief that with proper management and handling, this program can become self-supporting within a twelve-month period, and that all money which is now borrowed to pay teachers can be repaid with interest within this period.⁸ At present this latest program is too new to estimate its results.

⁷Report of Attendance Supervisor to the Commissioners' Court, Ellis County, November 22, 1941.

⁸School Board Minutes, Ellis County, December 13, 1946, p. 195.

By far the most absorbing problem of Ellis County educators, as elsewhere, has been that of doing away with many small rural schools. This is done either by consolidation or contraction. Bardwell, for instance, consolidated with the rural school districts of Maloney and Cartwright in 1930. This was the first consolidation.⁹ The common district of Laneview consolidated with Ennis Independent District in 1939.

A study of this movement can best be seen by an examination of Table 1, which shows how many small, inefficiently operated schools have been eliminated.

There were a total of sixty-eight common school districts in 1939. Only thirteen of these schools were taught in 1946-1947, the remainder having been contracted to larger districts.

Contraction involved the problem of transportation. It will be recalled that Bardwell became the first consolidated school. The first bus line in the county was inaugurated to run through the Maloney and Cartwright districts to Bardwell.¹⁰

The contraction of many small common districts within the county made transportation provisions by the board necessary. The minutes show:

⁹Ibid., August 5, 1930, p. 260.

¹⁰Ibid., 1939, p. 261.

TABLE 1 -- Continued

Number of Grades Taught in the Year											
1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
8	7	7	7	7	7	NS	Contracted to Midlothian				
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Midlothian				
7	7	8	8	8	8	NS	Contracted to Ennis				
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	Cont. to Midlothian			
7	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	11	11	7	7	7	NS	Contracted to Ferris				
7	7	7	7	7	7	NS	Contracted to Palmer				
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ferris					
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	5	5
7	NS	Contracted to Midlothian									
9	7	7	7	7	7	NS	Contracted to Midlothian				
9	9	9	9	9	9	Contracted to Midlothian					
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
NS	Contracted to Waxahachie										
7	NS	Contracted to Palmer									

TABLE 1 -- Continued

District No. and Name	Number of Grades Taught in the Year								
	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
27 Glendale....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
29 Crisp.....	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	7
31 Ebenezer....	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	8
32 Bluff Grove.	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7
33 Grove Creek.	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	7
34 Lone Elm....	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
35 Buena Vista.	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
36 Ozra.....	9	9	9	8	8	7	8	8	8
38 South Prong.	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7
39 Ray.....	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8
41 Bethel.....	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	8	7
42 Laneview....	9	9	9	8	9	8	9	7	7
43 Fairview....	9	9	9	10	10	10	9	9	9
48 Maloney.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
49 Howard.....	9	9	9	11	11	11	11	11	11
50 Nash.....	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	7
54 Boz.....	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
57 Auburn.....	9	9	9	9	8	8	7	8	8
58 Progress....	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	8	7
59 Bee Creek...	8	8	8	9	8	8	9	8	8

TABLE 1 -- Continued

Number of Grades Taught in the Year											
1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Italy					
10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	9	9	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
9	9	9	8	8	8	Contracted to Italy					
7	8	8	7	7	7	Contracted to Milford					
7	NS	Contracted to Waxahachie									
8	8	8	7	7	7	Contracted to Ennis					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ennis					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ennis					
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Palmer					
8	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Milford					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ennis					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Italy					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ennis					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Ferris					
7	7	7	7	7	7	Contracted to Forreston					

TABLE 1 -- Continued

District No. and Name	Number of Grades Taught in the Year								
	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
93 Pleasant Ridge.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
95 Lone Cedar.	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
96 Plainview..	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
98 Center Point	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
100 Turner.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
103 Hamrock....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
106 Loftin Branch.....	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	8
108 Sanderson..	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
110 Huff.....	9	9	9	7	7	7	7	7	7
111 Five Points	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	7
112 Valley Creek	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
114 Falls.....	8	8	8	6	6	6	6	6	6
115 Oak Branch.	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	8	8
116 Cartwright.	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
119 Onward.....	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7
117 Maypearl...	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11

*Compiled from School Board Minutes, Ellis County, 1927-1947.

NS -- no school conducted during the year.

In accordance with rural aid law as applies to transportation aid for children whose grades are not taught in home districts and in view of fact that no county board set up has been provided to conform to letter of the law, we the members of the Ellis County Board of Trustees do hereby set up and provide a temporary system of transportation which is composed for the most part of private conveyances, transportation to operate during school term '34-'35, or until a more satisfactory system can be set up in conformity with provisions of rural aid law. We pledge our cooperation to the Department of Education in the matter of providing a county wide set up of transportation which will be practical, sensible, and workable, taking into consideration existing conditions of school finance, geographic location and proximity of schools, roads and scholastic enrollment.¹¹

The pupils were transported largely by private cars, whose drivers were approved by the county superintendent. In 1935 there were thirty-six of these drivers, transporting seventy-nine pupils.¹² These drivers were paid, for the first four and one-half months of 1935-1936, a sum of \$369 each. Six buses were in operation for this same period and \$2,268 was paid for this type of transportation.¹³

As more schools have been contracted, more bus lines have been set up. The county schools are now served by an adequate number of modern buses.

In October, 1945, the first training institute for

¹¹Ibid., February, 1935, p. 270.

¹²Ibid., August 8, 1935, p. 60.

¹³Ibid., March 18, 1936, p. 85.

county bus drivers was held. It was compulsory that all drivers of county buses attend. From reports received from both school men and bus drivers, this institute was very profitable. It has been made a regular part of the county's educational effort.¹⁴

Thus, the history of Ellis County schools from their beginning to the present time has been told. And, it is true that in the light of these rude beginnings, much progress has been made. But here as elsewhere in our country much work is yet to be done in the field of education. County officials and educational leaders are working in full cooperation with the state Department of Education in plans for reorganization of the county educational setup. There is a renewed and inspired interest in education throughout the nation at the present time and it is to be hoped that those friends of education in the County of Ellis will avail themselves of this and provide better facilities of training for the future citizens of this historic county.

¹⁴Ibid., October 25, 1945, p. 189.

APPENDIX

TABLE 2

GROWTH OF SCHOOL POPULATION AND SUPPORT RECEIVED BY
SCHOOLS OF ELLIS COUNTY FROM THE STATE

Year	Scholastic Population	Amount Proportioned	Pro Rata
1870	No report	....
1871	No report	....
1872	1799	....
1873	791 (incomplete)	....
1874	No report	....
1875	3240	\$5174.30	
1876	3830	5645.50	
1877	2004	5615.42	
1878	2317	6903.00	
1879	2887	4168.00	
1880	2630	....
1881	3169	9502.00	\$3.00

TABLE 3

GROWTH OF SCHOOL POPULATION FROM 1885 TO 1900 AND
THE SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THE SCHOOLS OF ELLIS
COUNTY FROM THE STATE

Year	Scholastic Population	Amount Apportioned	Pro Rate
1884-1885	5039	\$24,290.00	\$5.20
1885-1886	5236	27,227.00	4.75
1886-1887	5519	26,215.25	4.50
1887-1888	5966	26,847.00	4.00
1888-1889	6003	24,012.00	4.50
1889-1890	6094	29,455.00	....
1890-1891	6653	29,938.50	4.50
1891-1892	6814	30,663.00	4.50
1892-1893	6875	34,375.00	5.00
1893-1894	7796	35,082.00	4.50
1894-1895	9310	32,585.00	....
1895-1896	10,848	43,392.00	4.00
1896-1897	Not given	Not ^g given	....
1897-1898	9696	43,627.00	....
1898-1899	9573	40,685.25	....

TABLE 4

ELLIS COUNTY RURAL SCHOOLS, 1946-1947

School Name	District	Accredited	State Aid
Bristol	9	x	x
Central High	16	x	x
Sterrett	17	x	x
Sardis	23	x	x
Lone Elm	34	x	x
Buena Vista	35		x
Ray	39	x	x
Boyce	40		x
Alma	46	x	x
Bee Creek	59		
Rankin	63	x	x
Byrd	68		x
Telico	81		x
Maypearl	117	x	x
Garrett	I. D. S.	x	x

TABLE 5

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF ELLIS COUNTY, 1946-1947

School	Accredited	State Aid
Avalon	x	x
Bardwell	x	x
Ennis	x	
Ferris	x	x
Forreston	x	x
Italy	x	x
Midlothian	x	
Milford	x	x
Palmer	x	x
Red Oak	x	x
Waxahachie	x	

TABLE 6
SUPERINTENDENTS OF ELLIS COUNTY

Name	Dates
Martin, Thomas	1898-1900
Criddle, E. D.	1900-1904
Brooks, J. S.	1904-1906
Winn, G. B.	1906-1910
Grafton, E. T.	1910-1914
Ely, W. S.	1914-1918
Olson, John	1918-1922
Davis, A. Dupree	1922-1934
Rogers, D. K.	1934-1938
McCrary, Bob	1938-1946
Wakeland, J. E.	1940-

TABLE 7

PUPIL ENROLLMENT, NUMBER OF TEACHERS, ATTENDANCE AREAS,
AND SCHOOLS WITHIN THE ATTENDANCE AREAS UNDER
THE REORGANIZATION PLAN

Schools within Attendance Areas	Grades to Be Offered	Estimated Enrollment			Number of Teachers Needed		
		Elemen- tary	High School	Total	Ele- men- tary	High School	To-
White Schools							
Attendance Area I:							
Midlothian....	1-11	852	217	1,069	25	8	33
Attendance Area II:							
Waxahachie....	1-11	1,410	835	2,245	41	30	71
Red Oak.....	1-7	391		391	11		11
Maypearl.....	1-7	407		407	12		12
Attendance Area III:							
Ferris.....	1-11	365	271	636	11	10	21
India.....	1-7	267		267	8		8
Palmer.....	1-7	259		259	8		8

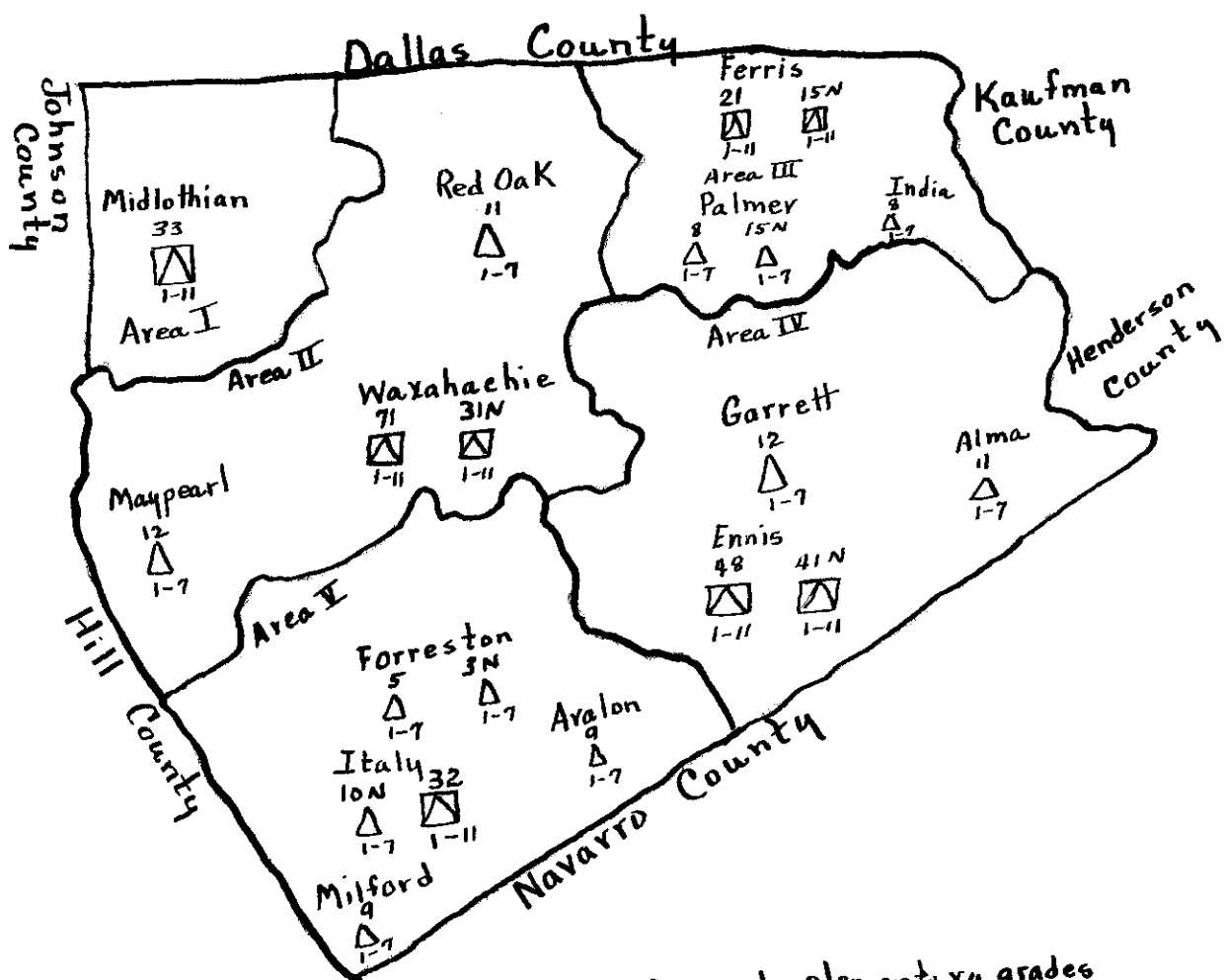
Schools within Attendance Areas	Grades to Be Offered	Estimated Enrollment			Number of Teachers Needed		
		Elementary	High School	Total	Elementary	High School	Total
Attendance Area IV:							
Ennis.....	1-11	1,342	800	2,142	39	29	68
Alma.....	1-7	372		372	11		11
Bardwell.....	1-7	359		359	10		10
Garrett.....	1-7	397		397	12		12
Attendance Area V:							
Italy.....	1-11	579	404	983	17	15	32
Milford.....	1-7	297		297	9		9
Forreston.....	1-7	177		177	5		5
Avalon.....	1-7	299		299	9		9
Total.....		7,773	2,257	10,030	228	92	320
Present no. of teachers							386

Colored Schools

Ennis.....	1-11	1,122	214	1,336	32	8	40
Ferris.....	1-11	498	37	535	14	1	15
Palmer.....	1-7	155		155	5		5
Waxahachie.....	1-11	895	182	1,077	26	7	33

Schools within Attendance Areas	Grades to Be Offered	Estimated Enrollment			Number of Teachers Needed		
		Elementary	High School	Total	Elementary	High School	Total
Forrestan.....	1-7	110		110	3		3
Italy.....	1-7	348		348	10		10
Total.....		3,128	433	3,561	90	16	106
Present no. of teachers..							61

Map Showing Proposed Re-organization



△ Building carrying only elementary grades
 ▣ Building carrying all grades
 Figures above symbols indicate number of teachers
 Figures below symbols indicate grades taught
 N immediately at right indicates negro school

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