

History of Education in Mansfield

Mansfield was home to many schools, long before there was a Mansfield Independent School District (MISD).

Mansfield Academy

In 1901, the citizens of Mansfield organized the Mansfield Academy Association and purchased the school grounds from the Commissioners' Court of Tarrant County. A new two story, red pressed brick building, trimmed with white bricks, was erected and used as the main building. There were two other brick buildings used for intermediate and primary grades. The main entrance faced Elm Street. The playgrounds south of the building were assigned to the upperclassmen. The primary grades played on the grounds that lay between the main building and two small brick buildings.



The campus was fenced with barbed wire and extended to the same boundaries as today. Architect WG. Clarkson designed the building and James T. Taylor completed the construction on October 7, 1901. The school was conducted by J. Henry Phillips and SV. Carmarck and others until the summer of 1909.

Phillips' Academy

The Mansfield Academy was also termed the Phillips' Academy because of the amazing personality and achievements of its head, John Phillips. A pupil could pursue regular or irregular courses at the Mansfield Academy. A special student had the studies of the different departments at his option, with the advice and assistance of faculty. Both sexes attended the school, and while no communication of a social nature was allowed between the young men and women, the very presence and discussion of both in school and in class was indisputably refining and strengthening.

While the Academy was non-sectarian, sincere religious training was offered to its pupils. As citizens, they were taught to respect the rights of others and to realize and meet their obligations. They were also taught, by precept and example, to render reverence and obedience to God. Sunday school and other Christian societies afforded opportunity for religious works. Services were held at the Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Christian Churches, and pupils were required to attend at least one service each Sunday. Those who were not members were advised to attend the Sunday school and church of their parents.

Organization

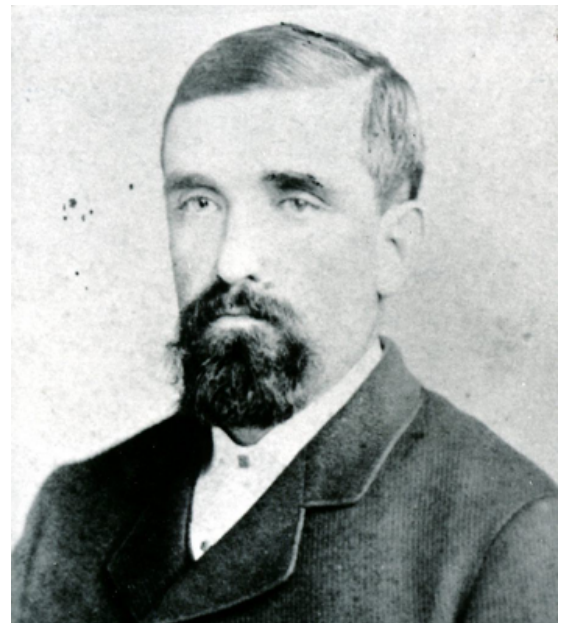
There were three departments, primary, intermediate and high school. The Primary Department embraced the work usually done in the first four grades. In the Intermediate Department, it was intended that the training would be so thorough, systematic, and painstaking that when the pupils reached the High School Department, they would maintain the desire and independence to learn more and work harder in selective fields of study.

In high school there were four classes, A, B, C, and D. The work embraced the schools of English, Modern Languages, Ancient Languages, History and Civics, Natural and Physical Sciences, Philosophy, Elocution and Oratory, Music, and Business. Pupils who made an average of ninety or above in the subjects of any school were distinguished in that school. It applied, however, only to those who remained in school until the close.

The Mansfield Academy closed in the summer of 1909, when the Mansfield Independent School District was organized.

Mansfield Male & Female College

Dr. John Collier was born in May 1834 in South Carolina. He received his education from Wesleyan College in Alabama and from the Cumberland University of Tennessee. In 1854, Dr. Collier became a licensed Presbyterian minister. By 1855 Collier, with the help of a Professor Ewing and a Mrs. Rowe, opened a college for both males and females in the forks of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers. On August 26, 1858, Dr. Collier married Mary Ellen "Mollie" Fowler. With the onset of war in 1861, Collier joined L.S. Ross's brigade and served as a chaplain and scout east of the Mississippi River. Without its leader, the college at the Brazos was eventually abandoned. After the war, Collier came to his father-in-law's home where his wife resided while he was away at war. Once there, Dr. Collier dreamed of opening another college.



Faculty

By September 1865, the Oakland College opened in Grandview with Jim Poindexter, Levi Fowler and Dr. and Mrs. Collier as the teachers. As the school dismissed for Christmas in 1866, Dr. Collier announced the college would be relocating to Alvarado in January of 1867. At the time, Dr. Collier was preaching alternate Sundays at Mansfield and Alvarado. Many Mansfield residents, including Peter Davis and J.T. Stephens, offered Dr. Collier buildings, boarding facilities and a home for him and his family. As a result, Dr. Collier moved his college to Mansfield, instead of Alvarado, and renamed the college, Mansfield Male and Female College. The Mansfield Male and Female College remained open until 1887 when Dr. Collier purchased Marvin College in Waxahachie and renamed it Waxahachie College.

Mansfield's First School

The Mansfield Male and Female College was the first real school in the town. Julian Feild donated the site for the college with the stipulation that the site only be used for educational purposes. The college was incorporated on May 2, 1871 by the Twelfth Legislature of the State of Texas and was empowered to confer degrees in arts and sciences. A two-story frame building at Fort Belknap was dismantled and rebuilt on the college site. This building was used for classes, church services, and lodging.

The cornerstone for a second two-story building was laid on June 24, 1875. In 1877, Professor Collier built a two-story brick and frame house on the west side of the school grounds for his family. Five small rooms on the second floor served as dormitory rooms for the female teachers and students. The house still stands today as the eastern section of the Blessing Funeral Home.



Faculty

The first teachers of the college include Dr. Collier, who taught languages and letters, Smith Ragsdale who was the professor of mathematics, NA. Barbee who was the professor of instrumental music and WM. Watson who was the professor of penmanship and commercial studies. Mrs. M.E. Ragsdale was the principal of the female department and Miss I.E. Quarles was the principal of the primary department. The college had two adjunct professors, J.A. Embry and James Robertson.

The college closed in 1887 when Dr. Collier left for Waxahachie. The main building burned in 1889 and the college property was deeded by Collier to the Board of Trustees, subsequently, to A.J. Dukes. The site is now home to the Mansfield Independent School District Administrative offices.

Closure

After the closing of the college in 1887 and until 1901, private schools were conducted, coupled with the public school. There were only three months of free tuition. Those attending a longer term paid tuition. The 1887 to 1888 school term was directed by SP. Render and D.C. Limbaugh. In the 1888 to 1889 term, a difference arose in the community, and the public school was conducted in the Church of Christ by Professor Sheppard while Professor Render taught a private school in the old college building.



The old college building burned in the spring of 1889, and on October 29, 1889, the property was sold to ED.L. Tims, C.F. Chrisman and J.H. Alexander as trustees of the Mansfield Male and Female College. For 1889 to 1890, Professor Lyles conducted classes in the brick building west of the college building. It is assumed this location was one of two small brick structures that were later torn down. On June 13, 1890, Dr. Collier's brick home and a fifty-three acre tract was deeded to A.J. Dukes. This transaction separated the site intended for school purposes from the land occupied by Dr. Collier's house. In September 1890, A.J. Dukes deeded the school property to J.H. Alexander, A.B. Pyles and WG. Ralston, trustees of the Mansfield Public Free School and to their successors in office. A new two-story building was erected and school was conducted as a public school until 1901.

Mansfield Independent School District

The District Is Born

On May 22, 1909, 191 Mansfield voters cast ballots selecting the first board of trustees. The trustees were charged with the responsibility of bringing the public schools into existence. The oldest minute books of the Mansfield Independent School District indicated that J.H. Harrison, NT. Smith, WB. McKnight, H.D. Stephens, William Rumph, J.G. Board, and A.E. Bryson were elected in that first public school board election.



At the initial meeting on May 26th, Dr. McKnight was named president, J.G. Board named secretary and J.H. Harrison was the treasurer. The board was not ready to act on a superintendent at that time, but employed Miss Allie House as principal of the music department. Miss Pauline Warner was offered a position in the high school department. On May 27, 1910, R.D. Fowler was elected as the first superintendent for the 1909 to 1910 school year. In the Fall of 1909 the schools moved into the academy buildings and prepared to open for the first session.

In 1913, Spanish was being taught to Mansfield public high school students. In 1914, the district approved the creation of agriculture, manual training and domestic service. In 1914, the principal of the Mansfield School was Mr. Hal S Lattimore. Mr. Lattimore was an excellent instructor in plane geometry. Furthermore, his coaching in basketball helped the boys' basketball team win the county and district championships in 1914. Also in 1914, Mr. and Mrs. Grow, formerly in the lumber business in Mansfield, donated two water fountains to the school.

Growth Pains

During and after WWI, the schools were desperate for teachers. Young graduates of Mansfield High School with teaching certificates were hired on their credentials as good students rather than on experience. Teachers included Ann Witherspoon Tip, Lillian Maclin, Agnes Harrison, Mary Smith, Dora and Dola Kerr, Elizabeth Davis Holland, and Miss Nannie Bradford. Davis was elected principal, but her only official duty was to ring the bell at noon. A crisis arose in April 1921. A meeting of the board and faculty was called to discuss a way of operating the schools for the full nine months, despite a money shortage. The faculty agreed to continue to teach on available funds, but the board made it known that offerings and contributions would be accepted so they could pay the faculty in full.

In about 1923 or 1924, the school had outgrown itself. The top floor was torn down and the lower part used as classrooms. Classes were also held in a one story frame building built on the south side of the building, and others in the Presbyterian Church which stood at the southeast corner of the school property, as well as others in the First Baptist Church which stood where the Central Baptist Church now stands.

The 1924 MISD School

On March 8, 1924, an election was held at the Memorial Hall for the construction and equipment of the first public school built by the board. The building was designed by WG. Clarkson and Company of Fort Worth and built by James T. Taylor. Cornerstone laying was held by the Masonic Lodge on September 15, 1924. The school housed all white students, grades first through eleventh, until 1953, when a new elementary school was built. In that year, students in grades ninth, tenth and eleventh occupied the building. When a new high school was built in 1963, seventh and eighth grade students attended the school. The 1924 school is pictured at top.

The 1940s

The Rock Gym, a 1940 W.P.A. project, began construction in May 1940, near the end of the Great Depression. Mansfield, like all small farming communities across the nation, was hard hit by the falling agricultural prices and the slumping national economy. School board records show that C.M. Love and Company was selected as the architects on April 19, 1939. They were instructed by the Board on April 23, 1939 to finalize plans for the building and file an application as a W.P.A. project. Mansfield School Board President, Charles J. Neeley, received a telegram in early February 1940 from Senator Tom Connally informing him that President Roosevelt had designated W.P.A. project Number 40541 to the Mansfield I.S.D. The project employed forty men, many of whom were Mansfield residents. Thus, a significant number of Mansfield households were affected. The population was given as 774 in 1940, so it may be assumed that approximately half the population was fed, housed, and clothed by this single project.

The 1950s to Today

In 1944, a bond election was approved to build two elementary schools. Erma Nash was to be the white school, and Willie Brown the African American school. It was not until 1953 that the building was completed and students attended the schools. In 1956, M.I.S.D. was integrated.



A bond issue for a new high school was passed on May 26, 1962. Clearing of the thirty five acre tract began in December 1962, and construction began in March 1962. The new two story, brick, air conditioned Mansfield High School, located at 1015 East Broad Street, was moved into on December 9, 1963. Students in grades nine through twelve attended the school. When a new high school was built, this building, with alterations, was renamed Mary Orr Intermediate and

later renamed Erma Nash Elementary School. The 1924 Mansfield High School presently serves as the M.I.S.D. Administrative offices. M.I.S.D. presently includes 22 elementary, 6 intermediate, 6 middle and 6 high schools and several other education facilities.

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