



Norman Today

Summer, 2001
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FREE
With Membership

Womble—Norman

By Shirley (Shewmake) Manning

Womble, (Norman) is the youngest member of the group of small towns which make up Montgomery County. By all accounts it is a town which truly sprang up overnight. A town whose forefathers gave little thought or planning as to how the town would grow or be managed. It was on one man's "whim" that a sage field along a little traveled road, near the Caddo River, would become a town. A town which would have an affect on the lives of hundreds upon hundreds of people.

There were three Womble brothers, all living in the Black Springs area when the Fort Smith—Gurdon Railroad started its long treacherous path from the small town of Gurdon, up through the mountains and into western Montgomery County.

The builders were so sure of the completion of their road that they had maps drawn and reproduced in area newspapers advertising the new railroad and the towns which sprang up, or grew in its path.

Black Springs was intended to be directly in the path of the new roadbed, but something happened that would change the course of history.

One man thought he might gain financially by holding out for the "right price," when he was approached by the railroad to donate or sell land for a right-of-way. He did not! In fact, the owners were so dis-

Continued on page two--



The first graduating class of Caddo Valley Academy, 1924

(Courtesy of the late Cora Cox McKinney)

Mrs. Orton, teacher/sponsor; Fay McCaskill; Adele Holmes; Cora Cox; Tillman Witherspoon; Bernice Montgomery, Effie Bates

CVA—Norman High School

Like the town with two names, the school also had two names, but to further complicate things, they were not the same names given to the town.

In 1911, Dr. John T. Barr, Sr. came to Womble on what he thought was to be a temporary assignment as a minister for a Mission Church of the Presbyterian faith. That temporary assignment lasted fifty years.

At that time there was one school in Womble, the Public School, "on the hill." It had been constructed in 1909, but burned and was rebuilt immediately. This time of brick.

In the 1920s Dr. Barr felt children needed more education than the grade school could offer. A scholar himself, he valued an education and saw it as the answer to the poverty that engulfed the area. His answer to the problem was to go to the Presbyterian Synod of Arkansas and gain their permission and help in

WOMBLE

grunted over the entire episode that they stopped--right in their very tracks (railroad tracks--that is.)

Walter and Oscar Womble seized the opportunity. Seeing that the railroad had no intention of coming one step further they hurried down to the terminus of the line and bought up the property--a sage field.

Once a corporation was formed and the appropriate papers filed, the men began to lay out a town--so to speak. There apparently weren't any real surveys done, only lines drawn on blueprints, which represented the lots and blocks, streets and alleys.

Three official plats were filed in the Montgomery County court house, one was called the "Reservation," another called the "Square," and the third, presumably the "final" plat of Womble.

The town was incorporated in 1907, and the name was changed to Norman in 1925, supposedly in honor of an Oklahoma woman who made substantial contributions to CVA.

Years later surveyors and local land owners are still scratching their heads trying to figure out who owns what, and where the property lines lay.

My personal experience with professional people involved in such matters, was to watch them scratch their head and say, "It's a mess over there." They are correct.

But, alas, the good people who now populate the area are satisfied as to who owns what and are less concerned about a survey to match county records--and so, life goes on.

I found that once the town ceased to boom the founders forgot about lots and blocks and began to sell the land in acres, half-acres, and by footage--and thus creates the problem of proper survey lines.

What has all this got to do with me? Well, once again, I failed to set on my hands--both of them--and volunteered to head up an organization to try to save and restore the old CVA/Norman High School. A worthy goal, and a long overdue project, and one I shall love being involved in.

purchasing and converting the old Hillside Hotel into a boarding school for children living in Montgomery and surrounding counties. At first the school accepted only paid boarders, but in true Dr. Barr fashion he quickly changed that and accepted almost any student who was willing to abide by his Victorian rules. In the beginning all ages were accepted, but it wasn't long until only those who were ready for the 8th grade or higher were accepted.



CVA Academy 1924-25

The school was crowded, always filled to capacity with a waiting list. Dr. Barr once again approached the Synod and asked for help in building a new high school, the first state accredited high school in the county. The new CVA High School was opened in 1924, with the first graduating class that year. The school wasn't completed until 1925.

The school continued to operate as CVA until 1931, when it was leased to the Norman School Board with some stipulations, such as a Bible teacher was to be allowed to teach in the school, although there was no sectarian classes, nothing to slant toward any particular religion.

Public documents filed in Montgomery County show the official change wasn't until 1940; however, everyone living in the area remembers that the first graduating class of Norman High School

was 1931--while the last was 1971. The property was actually purchased by Norman School District #28 in 1961.

After the new high school was open and operational Dr. Barr saw another need, that of a home for children who for one reason or another had nowhere to go. Thus, the old CVA Academy became a home for children from various walks of life. I was one of those children, calling CVA home from February 1954 until September 1961.

During those years I formed many good and lasting friendships with "kids" who were like family to me. I wasn't the only one, just about everyone in Norman felt that way. One man told me he had to go out of town to look for a wife, because all the girls in Norman were like sisters. It was true.

So now we come to the year 2001 and look back and wonder what happened, why didn't anyone take care of the old school. We wonder why it was closed. Here we have two towns with no school and a school with no town. It is to the credit of the good people of Norman and Caddo Gap that the towns worked together, (as it is usually the school and citizens relationship to it that binds a town), to build a new school.

When consolidation came close, too close, the citizens of the two towns decided they would rather have a new

school, which they could both attend, rather than be forced to commute to Mt. Ida and Glenwood. This is why and how the Caddo Hills School was founded. It is a wonderful and beautiful small school, but it can never replace the love for the old Norman High in the hearts of those who went there for so many years.

After the Caddo Hills School District Number 28, (formerly the Norman District) sold the property it changed hands several times before becoming the property of Daniel Parker, a former CVA boy.

Daniel had big dreams, great hopes, and a burning desire to bring back something of what Dr. Barr had given him—a school that would help underprivileged children. However; finances and health were instrumental in the demise of Daniel's dreams and he was to pass away in 1999, without realizing his goals.

In the process, during all those years of vacancy the building suffered horribly. The climax was during the winter ice storm of 2000, when the roof partially collapsed and the ceiling of the old auditorium fell to the floor. Plaster has turned loose and fallen away, or been so water damaged that it has turned colors and awaits the right turn of events that it too will crumble and fall.

Something has to be done, and it has to be done now--if the building has any chance of survival.

The best carpenters in the area assure us it can be saved, there is no visible damage to the rock work, and the roof can be replaced. Although the timbers are water damaged and rotted, and will have to be replaced, it is possible. The entire roof will have to come off and a new one put one. An expensive project.

So, we are asking for your help. First we need to purchase the building. An Offer and Acceptance has been signed and we have until October 15th to raise the purchase price of \$6,500, plus closing expenses and liability insurance.

Then, comes the roof.

Efforts To Save Norman High School

Several people interested in the preservation of the old Norman High School building have organized, (and are in the process of incorporating) into a group called the Norman Historic Preservation Program. The goals of the group include the purchase of the old building and raising the necessary funds to restore it to its former glory.

Short term goals are to complete the purchase and to get the building in the dry, before it can suffer further water damage.

Plans are to board up the windows until a grant or financial aid can be obtained to restore them. The roof is another matter. It can't be "covered over" and left to fate. The building needs a new roof, now, or yesterday. So, all money and grants will be aimed at this project until it is completed.

In the meantime, the Program will concentrate on fund-raising, and cleaning up outside and inside the building, and the aspects of paperwork necessary to place the property on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Once the building is qualified for the Register it will be eligible to apply for grant money. Grant money can't be used for the purchase or to do some of the other necessary work, but it is expected to help in the restoration of the windows and inside the building.

The inside will be a much larger project and will take a period of what will probably turn into years. Our expectation is this will be a five-year project, at best.

As for long term goals, these will be decided by a Board of Directors. The current board has been selected because of their interest and their willingness to be involved. Future board members will be selected by the membership at large. Memberships are being offered on several different levels and anyone holding a membership and attending the annual membership meeting is eligible to vote.

We had to start somewhere, and it was

thought best to form a nonprofit corporation in order to qualify for grants and other aspects of financial assistance.

The Bylaws and Incorporation papers will guide the organization in its attempt to best serve the board and the community at large. Changes to these official papers can only be made through the passage of resolutions by the Board of Directors.

My personal experience in founding the Main Street Mena project, and having listed five properties on the National Register of Historic Places, provides me with the experience to undertake the organization of this board, and work with the project as a whole.

Long Term Goals

Although; as I said, the Board of Directors will be the authority to decide what the long term use of the building will be, we had some ideas and goals in mind when we founded the Program.

As one person put it, the building has a nostalgic effect on those of us who lived in the area and went to school there during its active years. However, once this generation has passed what would make future generations want to save the building, other than it is a "neat old building?"

We feel that the founders of the first schools in the county had good and honorable goals—to help children.

Therefore; we entertain the idea of recreating the school as it would have been in the different periods of its life--as a workable and usable museum. Several of the rooms would be decorated and furnished as they would have been in the 1920s, 1940s, 1960s, and/or other years. The library would be furnished and usable as a local history and genealogy library, (with special dedication to Miss Eunice Byers).

In addition, since all the rooms would be functional, classes would be held to introduce children to the cultural aspects of days gone by. They might have the opportunity to learn everything from how to make lye soap, dipping candles,

canning a jar of green beans, air drying a bag of peaches, to playing in a washboard band.

They might also have the opportunity to learn charcoal art, weaving, oil painting, dance, note singing, and much more. Not only would this furnish the kids with "something to do," it would make the area known throughout the state for its wonderful contribution to education.

By becoming a museum as well as an educational center the Program would be eligible to apply for many different types of grants, which could be used in various ways.

We hope this quick overview--not meant to cover every aspect of the Program--will answer your questions, satisfy your curiosity and encourage you to donate your money and your time to this worthy cause.

You will find a Membership Form below, which we hope you will take the time to fill in and mail along with your check and watch *Your* project grow and reach its goal.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT
&
PLEASE ACT NOW



Joffrey Putman and Shirley (Sells) Horn have a sad face as they realize the condition their old math room is in. The windows have been removed and some boarded up, some replaced with ill-fitting garage sale units.

The ceiling of this room has fallen in, and wet rusted plaster covers the floor, along with piles of junk.

The roof is falling in, and there are several places where the sky can be seen, like this one. I couldn't shoot other spots, because the ceiling is down on the floor and we couldn't get into the room. It's a dangerous situation.

We have obtained liability insurance--hope we never need it.



Norman Historic Preservation Program, Inc.
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ID
To be issued by office

Class
Year graduated, or would have graduated.

First _____ Maiden _____ Last _____

Address _____ City _____ St _____ Zip _____

Membership Type:

(Please mark the appropriate box and include check for that amount)

\$20 Regular Membership _____

\$100 Business Membership _____

\$1000 Lifetime Membership _____

\$_____ Donation _____ (any amount)

Membership includes:

Newsletters, Membership Card, Voting Rights.

With Lifetime Membership your name will be placed on a brass plate, mounted on a wooden plaque, to be permanently displayed in the building.

Comments--Suggestions--Ideas