A Glimpse At Carter / A School Not To Doubt

Byron Clancy
Ross F. Cooke

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A Glimpse At Carter

By Byron Clancy

Beulah, present Carter, was organized by a Holiness religious group and moved to its present location. Some early settlers were F. T. Alexander, William Stale, D. D. Hare, Jerry Osborn, and R. E. Winsett. In 1906, a college, Immanuel Bible School, was started in a three-story building located just west of the site of the present Carter Baptist Church. In the school were some fifty students and four or five instructors. They published a newspaper which was mailed on Route 2, Doxey, Oklahoma.

The town of Kempton was started in 1909 when the Wichita Falls and N.W. Railroad was being built through the Carter area. After a bitter fight between Carter and Kempton over Carter getting a depot, Kempton called it quits and was moved later in 1910 and 1911 to Carter.

In 1918, Carter had a population of about one thousand and was considered one of the best small towns in Oklahoma. The original town, usually called South Carter, was started about 1900 one mile south of the present Carter. The town was named for William G. Carter, an early-day resident. The post office was established March 5, 1900. Sometime later, a rural route was established.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This short filler is a sequel of sorts to Betty Jo Jenkins Denton’s poem “My Town Carter,” which appeared in the Summer 1986 issue of WESTVIEW. Although some of the Carter businesses have failed, education has always been a significant commodity in the town; and the school, which was started in early days, continues to flourish in K-12.

A School Not To Doubt

By Ross F. Cooke

The town, in and of itself, is uncomely enough—situated, as it is, nowhere. Oh, it can be located easily enough: Section 25, Township 15 North, Range 15 West, Custer County, Oklahoma; or more easily, 20 miles due north of Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford.

Thomas. Even its name fails to invoke interest. When once found, it doesn’t take long to ascertain that the community isn’t served by a major highway, railroad, bus, or airline. It’s nowhere. Likewise, because of its size—or lack of size—it will soon be noted if the visitor has any reason to note that the town is laid out and developed on a plan common to almost all small towns in Western Kansas or Oklahoma.

Actually, Thomas was unremarkable until 1922. It was in 1922 that the people of Thomas constructed a school building that was to exert a remarkable influence on its youth from that day forward. The building—its design, placement, grounds, and maintenance—is worthy of making remarks about.

Prior to 1922, the Thomas Public School was quite modern in the sense that it was divided into a primary, elementary, junior high, and high school. Not only was there a division of the school into chronological learning blocks; each block or school met in its own building. The primary school, for a while, met in a church building. The elementary school had its own building in the east part of town, the junior high was in the south part of town, and the high school was in the west. The Home Economics Department was set up in an unoccupied residential structure; shop was taught in an empty store building downtown.

When the bond measure to construct a new school building was presented, it was with the understanding that it would be of a design to accommodate the entire school system. The result was a two-story red brick building.

The building, in and of itself, was attractive. In its design was the concept of unity and functionalism that was to become the architectural mode of a quarter century later.
Those who devised the plan gave the various school levels their own space; but all, in a sense, were together. The family was secure, comfortably at ease. All was well. Even a full-sized gymnasium, which could also be used as a lunchroom and auditorium, was provided. The electors had been given the privilege of choosing the location of the building, and they chose the highest point in the town, which they called "The Hill."

From this vantage point, the student could survey the entire town and the whole of the surrounding area. Indeed, the student sitting at a study table in the library had a panoramic view that extended from the Bear Creek bluffs to the top of the old Ad. Building at Southwestern, to the water tower at Custer City and beyond. He could watch storms form and vent their fury. Summer faded into autumn, autumn turned to barren winter, and from winter bloomed glorious spring—all under his supervision. The concept of education being a process of widening horizons became a reality to him—the building saw to that. The building saw to many things.

A lovely modern building set in an empty expanse demands comparable landscaping. The demands were met by the community in the outpouring of donations that included not only money but trees, plants, and labor. Teams of horses along with fresnos, graders, plows, and harrows were provided. Any Thomas High School boy of the 1920's could handle a team as well as most of the implements mentioned. Under expert adult supervision, they had soon graded terraces, sunk flower beds, built rock gardens, dug a fish pond; in short, they had converted what had been a nearly barren area given over to goatheads and sandburrs into a flowering, cool, green oasis. An oasis that was so well maintained that it became a place apart. A place sought after for relief during those dark, dreary dust-bowl days of the depressing 30's.

From the beginning, pride in, and maintenance of, the building and grounds of the school became an intrenched characteristic of the community’s discipline. This characteristic didn’t come easily or naturally to the younger members of the student body, but beginning with Superintendent S. F. Babb the tradition was instilled into each individual with a vehemence that bordered on fanaticism.

As time passed and former students returned to the school as teachers and administrators, the pride felt for the school and its building was propagated to such a measure that the school as a society and the school as a building tended to become fused in the students’ minds. We were all proud and loyal to our building.

How proud and how loyal can be physically, tangibly ascertained simply by going up and walking through the building. Here’s a school building sixty-four years old that’s housing all twelve grades. The visitor will find a building that is as new, as well maintained, as free from vandalism as it was a half century ago. It takes a disciplined pride to achieve that sort of maintenance.

The visitor will also find a trophy case, the contents of which will tell all that anyone in Oklahoma interested in athletics will have heard of Thomas football and basketball. Anyone in Oklahoma interested in fine arts will have heard of the Thomas Band. It takes disciplined pride to make these sorts of achievement.

More importantly, however, is the intangible something that the student carries with him throughout his life. The school—the building and grounds—has become an ensign, an icon about which the student has rallied a certain respect. The Thomas High School graduate, who has spent any time at all in the school, holds a deep innate respect for all public buildings: He is loyal to his community, state, nation. He has respect for authority—We’re still almost afraid to walk on any public grass.

The good, but unremarkable, people of Thomas have somehow provided their children with a remarkable school.

We’re loyal to you, Thomas High!