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Robetha Masters Darby

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A First In Western Oklahoma: The Underground School

Robetha Masters Darby

It was every child's secret fantasy and every school administrator's nightmare. On April 9, 1964, as the cry "Fire!" echoed throughout the halls of the Duke School, this small community in Southwest Oklahoma was faced with reconstructing the entire facility. However, with the students safe and smoke still pouring from the rubble, it was first necessary to find a temporary location in which to finish classes for that year. The unharmed lunch room, bus shed, and community churches provided makeshift space for learning that spring.

Immediately following, plans were made to rebuild a permanent school in this progressive community. The late Mr. D. L. Boyer, superintendent at the time, spent many months of travel, study, and planning for the construction of the new school building. After visiting an underground school building in Artesia, New Mexico, school officials decided that such a structure was feasible for Duke.

The building which was occupied on August 16, 1965, contained 23,000 square feet of floor space--including fifteen classrooms, two offices, four rest rooms, a cafetorium, a workroom, and a mechanical room. The architect

for the project was William Appleby, Jr. of Altus. The contractor was Cuthbert and Hall of Elk City. The final cost of the building was \$280,418 or \$12.19 per square foot. However, a year later a gymnasium was added above ground at an additional cost of \$81,870.38.

The facility provides excellent shelter from tornadoes and nuclear fallout, as well as being completely fireproof. It has a capacity of 1950 and a protection factor of 300. Emergency generators complete its safety features.

The underground design offers a number of advantages which include more compact floor plans, fewer distractions from outside noise, and reduced maintenance and energy costs. Also, lighting is controlled, making darkness easily obtainable for projector usage. In addition, air flow is regulated and consists of 40% fresh air and 60% recirculated air which is kept in constant motion, which greatly reduces allergy problems.

Currently, the 20-year-old building remains in excellent condition. The present superintendent, Mr. Bill E. Morgan, and the 144 students invite anyone visiting in the area to tour the school. ❖