

Burleson's Gym and Lunch Room
Robert A. Griffith
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PREFACE:

This article is the culmination of interviews and research conducted from late 2007 to 2009. In March 2009, after a tip from the National New Deal Preservation Association, I secured a reel of microfilm from the National Archives in Washington D.C. containing more than five hundred documents, letters, contracts, architectural drawings, telegrams, ledgers, and other correspondence relating to the Public Works Administration's role in the planning and construction of the Burleson Gymnasium in 1935 and 1936.

As sources of that size go, it can be difficult placing so much information into a readable context, especially since written material on the BISD to-date has been sparse and, at times, factually inconsistent.

A complete bibliography is not presented at the end of this draft; however, detailed footnotes identify the precise source of information.

This article remains a work in progress and should be taken at face-value as an educated perspective on a compelling time in Burleson's History few, if any, have studied since these events took place.

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The Burleson which undertook the construction of a recreation center to serve the schoolchildren and citizens of the town in 1935 could not have been more different than the Burleson which has seen so much of its heritage wrecked in recent decades. The challenges of an uncertain economic climate in the 21st Century pale in comparison to the trials endured by the citizens of Burleson in the first-half of the 20th Century.

In a twenty-year span, the town suffered several disastrous fires. On the morning of February 20, 1895 "almost the entire business portion of the town" was destroyed by fire.¹ Another blaze followed late in the evening on January 21, 1902, wreaking havoc as "citizens of the town quickly gathered and by prompt and heroic efforts a number of buildings in adjoining blocks were saved. The streets were piled with all kinds of goods."² In January 1909, the Missouri Kansas & Texas Railroad Depot fell in cinders.³ Before the paint could dry on the new depot, tragedy struck two blocks to the south and east when the fifteen-room, two-story wood-frame Burleson School ignited about 8 o'clock on the evening of September 24, 1909.⁴ The local citizenry were all that stood in the way of the entire town going up in flames, and through their valiant effort the school was the only complete loss.

Six months before, the Burleson Independent School District was "Created by special Act of the 31st Legislature of the State of Texas, being Senate Bill No. 65, Chapter 43, approved and affective March 16, 1909."⁵ The first board of trustees included Lewis E. Griffing, William H. Haynes, Thomas E. Wilshire, Charles C. Taylor, Joseph D. Wilson, Dr. Spencer F. McNairn, and Walter H. Overton.⁶ These men were to influence Burleson's development well into the 1920s and '30s.

On June 1, 1909, three months before the schoolhouse blaze, the newly-formed district took out eight \$1,000 bonds.⁷ In the aftermath of the blaze, an additional \$25,000 in bonds was sold to the State of Texas to build the town's next schoolhouse.⁸ Standing two stories in brick with an elevated basement of concrete, the foreboding structure took the Irwin Construction Company six months to build.⁹ The school opened with great fanfare on October 22, 1910, even though the basement had not been completed.¹⁰ Dorothy Sells Zachary recalled the basement's purpose: "This is where the coal and kindling were kept. Natural gas came about in 1923."¹¹ The modern building, when first opened, did not have a single electric light, as electricity did not arrive in Burleson until the interurban line between Fort Worth and Cleburne blew into town in late 1912.

¹ "Conflagration at Burleson." *Dallas Morning News* 21 February 1895.

² "Fires in Texas." *Dallas Morning News* 22 January 1902.

³ "Burleson Section House." *Dallas Morning News* 13 January 1909.

⁴ "\$12,000 Fire at Burleson." *Dallas Morning News* 25 September 1909.

⁵ Legal Information Supplied by Applicant, Burleson Independent School District, 21 August, 1935.

⁶ Exhibit "A", Burleson Independent School District, Creation Of, 21 August 1935.

⁷ Exhibit "B", Financial Information Supplied by Applicant, Burleson Independent School District, 21 August, 1935

⁸ "Burleson's New School." *Dallas Morning News* 4 March 1910.

⁹ "Civic and Industrial Development." *Dallas Morning News* 16 March 1910.

¹⁰ "New School Opens," *Dallas Morning News*, 22 October 1910, 2.

¹¹ Burleson Historical Committee. Burleson—The First One Hundred Years. Taylor Publishing, Dallas, 1981. Pg. 191.

The school district did not experience the tremendous growth during the first quarter of the 20th Century as it did in the first decade of the 21st Century. In 1921-1922, the Burleson ISD “had 10 professional employees including the superintendent with an average daily attendance of 285 students in 10 grades.” That year the superintendent, G.S. Thomas, earned ten dollars more per month than the school principal, J.W. Norwood.¹² The district endured tough times during the Great Depression, with the sum of rural aid, the “sinking fund,” state & county taxes, and the maintenance fund totalling to cash on hand of \$565.97.¹³

As the Great Depression threatened to break the backs of the school district and citizens alike, a group calling itself the Burleson Progressive League organized to apply for Federal funds to build a new “air-line” highway between Tarrant County and Grandview, a modern sewer system and a “recreation building.”¹⁴ The following *Burleson News* article, reproduced in its entirety, demonstrated the commitment Burleson’s citizens were willing to make to improve the conditions in their town amidst the greatest uncertainty the United States had faced in more than a generation.

The initial meeting of Burleson’s new civic league was held at the school auditorium [Thursday, February 14, 1935] with an estimated attendance of 250.

The new league, sponsored by business leaders of the community, will have as its purpose, according to officials, the making of a better town and community. It is reported to be non-political.

At Thursday night’s meeting, Winston Taylor was elected president and Clayton Griffin, vice-president. Three committees were also appointed; Highway, Recreation Building and Sewer Committee.

The Highway Committee composed G.E. Bransom, E.M. Wilson, A.W. Haskew, A.H. Loyless, Eldo Bean, George Stone, Jim Baker and Mark Green, will work on the new air-line route to Grandview.

The Recreation Building Committee, composed of J.W. Norwood, Noble Clark, Clayton Griffin, Russell Shannon and Milt Norris, will work out plans for the new recreation building that is planned for Burleson.

The Sewer System is composed of A.W. Haskew, Harold Warren.

It is reported that Burleson has applied for a \$34,000 P.W.A. loan to be used to build a recreation building and sewer system. Both will be self sustaining according to officials of the new league, who also claim that the debt will be liquidated from revenue of each.¹⁵

Those cited in the preceding article include Winston Taylor, the son of founding trustee C.C. Taylor and owner/operator of the Big Four Company; G.E. Bransom, the son of Burleson’s first Mayor and an official with the Farmers & Merchants State Bank; E.M. Wilson, brother of

¹² Burleson Historical Committee. *Burleson—The First One Hundred Years*. Taylor Publishing, Dallas, 1981. Pg. 11.

¹³ Exhibit “A”, Statement of School Accounts of Burleson Independent School District, September 1, 1934 to August 8, 1935, 21 August, 1935.

¹⁴ “Considerable Interest Manifested at First Meeting of Burleson Progressive League.” *Burleson News* 21 February 1935.

¹⁵ “Considerable Interest Manifested at First Meeting of Burleson Progressive League.” *Burleson News* 21 February 1935.

another founding trustee, Joseph D. Wilson, and a long-time city alderman, business owner, one-time publisher of the *Burleson News* nicknamed “Good Roads” for his determination to see paved highways criss-cross Burleson; World War I veteran and school superintendent J.W. Norwood; Mayor of Burleson and one-time partner in Big Four Company A.W. Haskew; and A.H. “Poss” Loyless, former proprietor of the Loyless Interurban Drugstore. These men and their partners in the Progressive League constituted the leading citizens of Burleson during the first-half of the 20th Century.

The Progressive League met again in the auditorium on the top story of the Burleson School on Thursday, March 14, 1935 to an attendance of four-hundred.¹⁶ During the spring, the League met once a month. The *Burleson News* reported on April 4, 1935 that Milam Loyless, brother to aforementioned League member A.H. Loyless, had exhibited a drawing of the proposed gymnasium at the Farmers & Merchants State Bank.¹⁷

In August 1935, the Burleson Independent School District took the lead and applied for a grant from the Public Works Administration for “The construction and equipment of a public free school building to be used as a combination Auditorium-Gymnasium and Classrooms.”¹⁸ The Burleson ISD was represented by school board president J.F. Senter and the Fort Worth law firm Phillips, Trammell, Chisum, Bates & Edwards.

The next month, the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works issued a Field Report which estimated Burleson’s population in 1935 to be 1,575 residents, as compared to the United States Census estimate of 1,225 in 1910. Using that figure, the PWA assessed a valuation of \$517,000 on the taxable assets of the school district.¹⁹

The September report further stated that the Burleson ISD estimated the cost of building the gymnasium at \$18,000, whereas the PWA Engineer set a price tag of \$24,225.²⁰ A month later, documents show the firm of C.M. Love & Company of 314 South Henderson Street, Fort Worth, Texas, had been named the architects and engineers for the “Construction and equipment of a one-story, semi-fireproof combination auditorium, gymnasium and classroom school building” with an estimated cost fixed at \$18,181.²¹ C.M. Love & Company agreed to be paid \$20.00 per week for an inspector and 6% of the total cost of the project.²² Number-crunchers with the PWA offered a favorable view of the school district’s finances, remarking “The tax rate of \$1.10 per thousand of assessed valuation for debt service as well as the tax rate of \$5.40 per thousand for maintenance and operation appears satisfactory and sufficient to meet present requirements.”²³

As a result of the diligence of the Burleson Independent School District and an exhaustive investigation by the PWA, on October 23, 1935 Horatio B. Hackett of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works offered to provide a grant “in the amount of 45 percent of the cost of the Project upon completion [...] but not to exceed [...] the sum of \$8,181, and by purchasing, at the principal amount thereof plus accrued interest therein, from the Applicant, obligations of the description set forth below in the aggregate principal amount of

¹⁶ “Good Attendance at Second Meeting of Progressive League.” *Burleson News* 21 March 1935.

¹⁷ “Drawing of Gym Now On Display in Bank Window.” *Burleson News* 4 April 1935.

¹⁸ Legal Information Supplied by Applicant, Burleson Independent School District, 21 August, 1935.

¹⁹ Field Report, Finance Division, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 15 September, 1935.

²⁰ Field Report, Finance Division, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 15 September, 1935.

²¹ Approval Sheet for Non-Federal Projects, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 9 October, 1935.

²² Narrative, Audit No. 1, From J.M. Major, Assistant Project Auditor, 16 June, 1936.

²³ Field Finance Report, Approval Sheet for Non-Federal Projects, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 9 October, 1935.

\$10,000, less such amount of such obligations, if any, as the Applicant may, with the consent of the said Administrator, sell to purchases other than the United States of America.”²⁴ With that rousing declaration of legalese, Burleson had been given almost \$20,000 with which to construct their first public school building in a quarter-century.

The Burleson ISD called a special meeting for 9 o’clock on the evening of October 30th, 1935 at the Farmers & Merchants State Bank Building to discuss the Federal Government’s offer.²⁵ At the meeting, school board president Rev. John P. Senter and trustees H.L. Keen, Noble L. Clark, Milt J. Norris, B.W. Cobb, and W.B. Wynne issued this resolution:

A resolution accepting the offer of the United States to the Burleson Independent School District, Burleson, Johnson County, Texas, to aid by way of loan and grant in financing the construction and equipping of an auditorium-gymnasium and classroom building.²⁶

The work of advertising for bids on construction and setting up bank account to hold the project’s funds began before the project’s approval by the Burleson Independent School District. The *Burleson News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and *Texas Contractor* (Dallas, Texas) all advertised the project for bids.²⁷

A letter dated November 11, 1935 stated that the Continental National Bank of Fort Worth agreed to “accept from time to time for deposit the proceeds received by Burleson Independent School District” from “sale of its obligations designated as “Burleson Independent School District School House Bonds, Series 1936, to the United States, and will at all times keep such moneys in a separate account”.”²⁸ The Farmers & Merchants State Bank of Burleson supervised an account titled “Interest & Bond Fund Account B”.²⁹ Renowned printers Stafford Lowdon Company of Fort Worth were contracted to provide “stone engraved lithographed bond and paper stock” for the issuance of bonds.³⁰

Bids for construction of the gym were received from five firms: Harris & Haskew of Burleson, Wm. O. Garrett of Fort Worth, Abilene Construction Company of Abilene, Quisen & Andrews of Fort Worth, and C.R. Bigley of Dallas. Of these, Harris & Haskew came in with the least expensive bid, \$16,285, and an anticipated construction schedule of 90 days. Wm. O. Garrett of Fort Worth, on the other hand, estimated a cost of \$17,100 with construction lasting 120 days.³¹

A postal telegram sent on November 25, 1935 from the Texas Director of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Julian Montgomery, notified the PWA in Washington of the selection of Harris & Haskew to build the gymnasium.³² Wages for laborers

²⁴ Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works letter to the Burleson Independent School District, 23 October, 1935.

²⁵ Notice of Special Meeting, Burleson Independent School District notice signed by secretary H.L. Keen, 30 October, 1935.

²⁶ Certificate of Secretary, notice signed by secretary H.L. Keen, 30 October, 1935.

²⁷ Narrative, Audit No. 1, From J.M. Major, Assistant Project Auditor, 16 June, 1936.

²⁸ Depository Bank Acceptance Letter from Continental National Bank, 18 November, 1935.

²⁹ Confirmation of Bank Balance, Letter from G.E. Bransom to J.B. Major, Assistant Project Auditor, 15 June, 1936.

³⁰ Letter to Walter A. Koons, Counsel, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works from J.F. Fitz, Sales Manager for Stafford Lowdon Company, 6 November, 1935.

³¹ Tabulation of Bids, Audit No. 1, 16 June, 1936.

³² Postal Telegram from Julian Montgomery to J.G. Gholston, 25 November, 1935.

were, on average, 50 cents per hour for carpenter's assistants, gas-fitter's helpers, and most other forms of labor.³³

A detailed estimate for the project was issued by Arthur W. Haskew and Emmett E. Harris on behalf of the firm Harris & Haskew on December 3, 1935. Among the 24-item list of expenditures was excavation by team for \$151.50, steel for \$2,011.90, roofing & sheet metal for \$770.00, \$1972.30 for "gym equipment," and \$330.00 for two-coats of paint.³⁴

Governor James Allred of Texas threw his support behind the project in a February 3, 1936 letter to Harold L. Ickes of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, stating "If in your judgment it may be advisable to have enacted legislation to empower said Burleson Independent School District to issue bonds offered as security for the loan [...] I will recommend and cooperate in the enactment of such legislation."³⁵

The machinations of Burleson politics continued as normal, with the election of John Malcolm (J.M.) Scott to succeed Reverend John P. Senter as President of the Burleson ISD in May 1936.³⁶

Burleson wasted little time preparing for construction of the gymnasium. The district's attorney, Haynie E. Edwards, of the law firm Phillips, Trammell, Chizum, Bates & Edwards issued a letter on November 26, 1936 to certify "that all necessary authorizations, permits, licenses, certificates, and other approvals of Federal, State, county and municipal authorities for the construction of the project have been obtained."³⁷

Construction on the project began on Wednesday, April 1, 1936. A payroll summary from July 15, 1936 lists Harris & Haskew as the general contractor, with sub-contractors being Fort Worth Structural Steel Company, Lydick Roofing Company, and Acme Flooring Company, all of Fort Worth.³⁸

The project was not without complications. Two watchmen, F.M. Landers and Jim B. Parsley worked more than their allotted 40 hours per week on several occasions during construction.³⁹ The Final Report of the project, issued on July 22, 1936 states "On account of bad weather, 6½ days were allowed as non-working days by the borrower through his representative. One day was declared a holiday by the borrower on account of the funeral of a prominent citizen." This prominent citizen who Burleson chose to honor with a day of reflection was Dr. Spencer P. McNairn, a founding trustee of the Burleson ISD who practiced medicine in Burleson from 1900 until his death on June 17, 1936.⁴⁰

President J.M. Scott of the Burleson ISD appointed board members M.J. Norris, N.L. Clark, and Lawton H. Hardgrove to a Committee of Inspection to "visit and inspect the Gym & Class Room building which comprises P.W.A. Project Docket Texas 1481-H."⁴¹ On July 15, 1936, a day after construction on the project finished, the architects for the project, C.W. Love & Company of Fort Worth, issued a letter to the Burleson Independent School District recommending "that you receive the building from the contracts Harris & Haskew, of Burleson,

³³ Semi-Skilled Workers Pay Schedule, No Date

³⁴ Detailed Estimate Issued to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, signed by

³⁵ Letter from Governor James Allred to Harold L. Ickes, 3 February, 1936.

³⁶ Memorandum to All Sections from Julian Montgomery, State (Texas) Director, 12 May 1936.

³⁷ Statement Concerning Permits, Letter from Haynie E. Edwards, 29 November, 1935.

³⁸ Payroll Summary, derived from Audit No. 2, Docket No. Texas 1481-B, PW No. 412.601, 22 July, 1936.

³⁹ Auditor's Summary No. 1, Statement of Unadjusted Noncompliances, 16 June, 1936.

⁴⁰ Burleson Historical Committee. Burleson—The First One Hundred Years. Taylor Publishing, Dallas, 1981. Pg.

43.

⁴¹ Certificate of Appointment of Building Inspection Committee, Letter from J.M. Scott, 7 July, 1936.

Texas, as completed, according to the plans and specifications prepared by us.”⁴² That same day, Superintendent J.W. Norwood, supervising architect J. Milam Loyless, and the aforementioned board members returned a certificate of acceptance and owner’s occupancy, having approved of the building’s completion.⁴³

The district’s superintendent, J.W. Norwood and the vocational agriculture instructor, Ben Whitehouse rolled up their sleeves during the summer to build tables and cabinets for the basement, slated to house the forty-four students enrolled in the vocational agriculture department.⁴⁴

The *Cleburne Times-Review* and *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* carried banner headlines leading up to the gymnasium’s dedication on October 9, 1936. On that momentous Friday evening, a thousand people packed into the massive new building for its dedication. School Board President J. Malcolm Scott presided over the ceremony which drew County Superintendent of Schools I.B. Gaithings and the District Deputy State Superintendent, Mrs. Beulah Odom Cummings. Ben Whitehouse introduced the keynote speaker, Texas Attorney General McCraw.⁴⁵ McCraw declared to the assembled townspeople, “This building is a monument that time never can destroy,” continuing, “Nothing can destroy the deeds and influences of the young men and women who will receive their training here. This gymnasium represents much more than the \$20,000 spent in its construction,” he said. “It is a tribute to the citizens of this community and shows they are willing to go the limit that their children may have the best of opportunities.”⁴⁶

Sparing no detail, the *Cleburne Times-Review* described the gymnasium as “one of the most modern of the type in Texas,” in a front-page story on October 8, 1936 reproduced below:

The large auditorium, 122 x 68 feet, will seat approximately 800 people, the superintendent said. The floor is marked for basketball and volley ball courts, and at one end of the room is a stage, 37 x 16 feet, equipped with heavy red velvet curtains to close the opening. Other stage properties include a large back drop showing a woodland scene and background draperies. On each side of the stage are lockers and showers, the later having hot and cold water.

Under the stage is a basement room, which houses the vocational agriculture classes. Tables and cabinets in the room were constructed during the summer by Mr. Whitehouse and Mr. Norwood. The hot water heater is also in this room. Forty-four boys are enrolled in vocational agriculture classes this term.

At the other end of the auditorium is the home economics department, classes in foods being offered this year for the first time. The clothing units will be included in the course of study next year, Mr. Norwood states. The foods laboratory is equipped with three gas ranges and tables for 20 students per class. The tables were made by E.E. Harris of Burleson, one of the contractors for the building, and are modern in every detail. Ivory and green cooking utensils are included in the desks and cabinets and the ranges are also green and ivory

⁴² Letter from C.W. Love & Company to the Burleson Independent School District, 15 July, 1936.

⁴³ Certificate of Acceptance and Owner’s Occupancy, Letter from J.W. Norwood, N.L. Clark, M.J. Norris, L.H. Hardgrove, and J.M. Loyless 15 July, 1936.

⁴⁴ “Burleson Gym Program Fri.” *Cleburne Times-Review* 8 October 1936.

⁴⁵ “Burleson Gym Program Fri.” *Cleburne Times-Review* 8 October 1936.

⁴⁶ “New Burleson Gym Dedicated,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 10 October 1936.

colored. A large storage closet completes the department. The classroom being used this year by the foods students will be converted into the sewing room next year, he said.

The auditorium, which is heated by several large gas stoves, is equipped with side benches which will seat 350 persons. Two hundred and fifty steel folding chairs have also been secured and will be placed in the auditorium when needed.

Over 300 students are enrolled in the Burleson school this year, Supt. Norwood states. Instructors in the school in addition to Mr. Norwood are Dale Carter, L.R. Hudson, Olivia Bynum, Elizabeth Boyd, Meota White, Dovie Holtzclaw, Jane Rehm, Lillian Maxwell, Winnelle Rigby, and Ben Whitehouse.⁴⁷

The gymnasium not only served the school district, it served the community as well. Doris Jo (Wood) Haas, a lifelong resident of Burleson, recalls watching the building's construction in fifth grade. "It was a wonderful thing to us. In the summer time it became a skating rink. All ages came to watch or to learn to skate. At the south end was the Homemaking area. There was a kitchen, and I learned to sew in another room."⁴⁸ Haas continued, "The boys had FFA (Future Farmers of America) classes in the basement underneath the stage in the gym with Ben Whitehouse. The Senior Banquet, Graduation, piano recitals, everything took place in that building. About 1937 we started having fairs in the gymnasium. The gym would be full of tables of everything that people had grown in their garden or grown on their farm, baked pies and cakes or hand sewn clothes or quilts, etc. These would all be judged and blue, red and white ribbons would be given out. The gym was all we had. I graduated from high school there in 1941."⁴⁹

Following the outbreak of war in 1941, the editors of "The 1942 Elk" adopted a patriotic tone in their dedication "to those Ex-Students of Burleson High School who are fighting in the cause of democracy on land, on sea, and in the air".⁵⁰

Prepared lunches, taken for granted in recent decades, were alien to the children enrolled at the Burleson School in the 1940s. In 1943, Superintendent J.W. Norwood "prevailed upon his wife to organize and supervise [a lunchroom] for the school system." With space at a premium, the innovative Norwood, with Ben Whitehouse and his "shop boys" built cabinets and tables in the basement of the gymnasium to "accommodate about 100 students."⁵¹ However, the gymnasium held one drawback to being the school's lunch room. Frank Norwood, son of J.W. Norwood, writes: "Whenever it rained very hard, water would seep into the basement. Several times two feet of water would require closing down and bringing out the pumps."⁵²

In the midst of heavy fighting in Europe and the South Pacific in April 1944, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Warren proposed an idea to build a separate school lunch room as "a permanent

⁴⁷ "Burleson Gym Program Fri." *Cleburne Times-Review* 8 October 1936.

⁴⁸ Doris Jo Haas, interview by Dorothy Nash, written notes, Burleson, Texas, 2006.

⁴⁹ Doris Jo Haas, "Re: Nola Dunn News." E-mail to Robert A. Griffith, 12 Jan. 2008.

⁵⁰ Burleson Senior Class of 1942, *The Elk 1942* (Burleson: 1942).

⁵¹ Burleson Historical Committee. *Burleson—The First One Hundred Years*. Taylor Publishing, Dallas, Texas. Pg. 16.

⁵² Burleson Historical Committee. *Burleson—The First One Hundred Years*. Taylor Publishing, Dallas, Texas. Pgs. 16-17.

memorial to our boys in service”.⁵³ A community meeting raised \$965 “in less time than it takes to tell about it,” according to the *Burleson News*. “If the ballance (sic) of the work, even toward completion of the building was done as fast as this money was raised,” the *News* stated, “the building would be ready to occupy by the end of the week.”⁵⁴

On April 19, 1945 the *Burleson News* reported the formation of a committee composed of H.N. Warren, former School Board President J. Malcolm Scott, Letha Hardgrove, Faye Mercer, and Wynetta Baker to “draw up plans and arrange for financing” The committee “agreed upon a building that will consist of a large recreation” with “a lunch room large enough to seat all students at the same time, with a roomy kitchen modernly equipped throughout.” In the twelve months since Mr. and Mrs. Warren first suggested the school lunch room, citizens had raised half of the estimated \$9,000 cost of the building.⁵⁵

Their devotion and determination paid off. In 1947, the Burleson ISD opened its first separate elementary school (later named for long-time teacher Nola Dunn) and a dedicated lunch room. The Burleson School Lunch Room, at the corner of Ellison & Dobson Streets on the northwest corner of the property, boasted a spacious kitchen, dining room, and recreational area.⁵⁶ Early on, only one employee served meals, with parents and caring residents helping out. Later, Ethel Noe, Mabel Shannon, Opal Dunn, and Leona Hill were among the ladies who dished up made-from-scratch meals for the kids. In the late 1950s, Fridays were “Sandwich Day,” the only time kids could choose between tuna, bologna, and PB&J.⁵⁷

According to Frank Norwood, the lunchroom hosted the annual Junior-Senior Banquet, a festive event where “the junior class would honor the seniors and through decorations truly transform the building into an exciting place.” Norwood continued: “Many community dinners, Christmas parties, Lions Club functions and school functions were enjoyed by the citizens of Burleson but, basically the lunchroom was for the kids.” From its inception in 1943 until 1956, the price of lunch “ranged from 11 cents to a high of 20 cents. This included a hot freshly prepared lunch with homemade dessert and cold milk.”⁵⁸

“Record No. of 701 students enrolled in Burleson Schools,” read the headline of the September 4, 1958 *Burleson News*. The article continued, “The 1st and 4th grades are suffering most with 75 and 74 students respectfully, registered in these two grades. Supt. J.L. Hughes started out this week looking for class-room furniture which will be placed in the room now used as the office of the Supt. There are 407 students enrolled in the elementary school; 166 in junior high and 128 in high school.”⁵⁹

In 1959, the Burleson High School opened at 517 SW Johnson Avenue in the western part of the sprawling town, marking the first time in the district’s history all grades were not located on the same property. Still, the importance of the gymnasium and lunch room to the community were apparent in numerous articles in the *Burleson News*, including one from February 18, 1960 which began, “Citizens of Burleson are invited to a meeting of the Civic Club

⁵³ “Build Lunch Room as Memorial to Our Boys In Service, Suggested.” *Burleson News* 13 April 1944, 1.

⁵⁴ “Crowd Attending Program Tuesday Night Raised \$965 For Lunchroom Building,” *Burleson News* 30 September 1944, 1.

⁵⁵ “Drive Started to Raise Money for Memorial Recreation Room.” *Burleson News* 19 April 1945.

⁵⁶ Burleson Historical Committee, *Burleson—The First One Hundred Years* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1981), 16-17.

⁵⁷ Michelle Mercer Griffith, interview by Robert Griffith, Burleson, Texas, 30 October 2007.

⁵⁸ Burleson Historical Committee. *Burleson—The First One Hundred Years* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1981), 17.

⁵⁹ “Record No. of 701 Students Enrolled,” *Burleson News* 4 September 1958, 1.

Feb. 23rd in the Cafeteria Bldg at 7:30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to nominate candidates for Mayor and two Councilmen and to discuss other topics of interest to citizens of Burleson.”⁶⁰ On April 21, 1960 the *Burleson News* encouraged folks to visit the grade school gym for Family Night, stating, “Besides free cold drinks, coffee and cookies, you may play games of 42, canasta and checkers, or entertain yourself talking with your friends.”⁶¹

In 1964, the old three-story red-brick schoolhouse constructed as the first project of the newly-formed Burleson Independent School District in 1910 fell to the wrecking ball. The elementary school library moved into the front of the lunch room and doubled as a classroom as the student population continued to expand.

In 1977, forty years after its construction, the gymnasium underwent a significant remodel. The windows were boarded up and an air-conditioning system installed. Robert Griffith, a 2002 Burleson graduate, remembers ducking under scaffolding when a mural of a longhorn went up on the south interior wall of the gymnasium in 1995. Rubber-tile flooring went down about that time, as did blue carpeting on the bleachers. Music lessons, school plays, and the fall carnival kept the gymnasium lively. And when Principal Harold Moore retired in May 1996, several hundred Nola Dunn students surprised him by singing “Lean on Me.”

The Nola Dunn campus closed in 1998, only to briefly reopen as the district’s alternative school, Crossroads Learning Center, during the 1999-2000 School Year. When Crossroads moved to the Kerr Middle School Campus, the school underwent extensive remodeling and reopened in 2001 as the Academy at Nola Dunn.

Gene Harris, the son of E.E. Harris of the Harris & Haskeew firm which built the gymnasium spoke with Bill Hanna at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in February 2009: “The thing I remember more than anything is it had the prettiest polished oak floor,” Harris said. “Back in those days, everything was oiled down to keep the dust down. For several years, we were forbidden to walk on it with our shoes on. It was the prettiest thing you could imagine, with the windows all the way around that pushed out to provide ventilation. You didn’t have air conditioning in those days.”⁶²

The Gymnasium, home to decades of spirited basketball games, fall carnivals, physical education classes, graduations, celebrations, and even line-dancing lessons; and the lunch room, once the only place where students could eat together at a table, became firmly entrenched in Burleson life over the last sixty-plus years. A new generation of Burleson’s youth were learning, laughing, and playing in the oldest and most storied buildings in the Burleson Independent School District when the Burleson Independent School District decided to demolish the historic campus in favor of a two-story, \$22,000,000 new school building. Despite pleas from citizens to repurpose the buildings so they could continue their educational and community-oriented service, razing of the campus began on February 26, 2009. On March 18, 2009, the week of the district’s centennial, contractors demolished the old school lunch room when the school board rejected an offer by the Burleson Area Chamber of Commerce to utilize the district’s two oldest buildings for a community center.

⁶⁰ “Civic Club Meeting Called,” *Burleson News* 18 February 1960.

⁶¹ “Everyone Welcome to Jim Standrige “Family Night” at Grade School Gym,” *Burleson News* 21 April 1960.

⁶² Hanna, Bill. “In need of costly repairs, 1930s gymnasium is stuck in limbo.” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* 21 Feb. 2009.