

THE COMMON SCHOOLS

Common Schools came together to form North East Rural District

At the turn of the 20th century, the area that now makes up the North East Independent School District was mostly brush, rocks, rattlesnakes, and prickly pear.

A few hardy pioneers had already settled the area along Salado Creek and other areas where there was an abundance of water. Where people gathered in the region, there was a need for schools. Several single-room houses cropped up in the area. They were called the Blanco Common School, Salado Valley Common School and Coker Common School.

Others would follow in the years to come, and in 1949 seven common schools joined together with a total of 756 scholastics to become the North East Rural School District.

As the district of 135 square miles continued to grow in student population, the governing board of officials voted, on March 4, 1955, to become the North East Independent School District and to operate directly under the jurisdiction of the State Education Agency.

Salado Valley School served as NEISD's first central office

According to *The San Antonio Light* newspaper records, the Salado Valley School, located eight miles out on Bitters Road, was first constructed in 1901 on land donated by Ferdinand Krueger.

In 1938, Salado Valley would be upgraded into a modern facility for its day, with aid from WPA funds, a \$4,000 bond issue and with members of the school board assisting in the construction. Even though considered modern, the school lacked indoor plumbing and a cafeteria.

For lunch, most students provided their own or traveled back home, either by walking or riding bicycles. These rural students, rich in German and Hispanic heritage, living in the northeast county region on nearby dairy farms, would attend Salado Valley Common School for grades 1-8.

After the eighth grade, students completed their education at the nearby Alamo Heights High School or some other high school. This rural school, operated through the Rural



An early photo of the Salado Valley student body.



The original Salado Valley School was located on Bitters Road. Its children were primarily children of farmers.

High School District served students as an educational venue until the North East Independent School District was formed.

In 1955, the old schoolhouse transformed into the first central office for district administrators and continued to do so until 1958 when the building was razed for progress. In its place, a new administrative building was constructed and functioned as central office from 1959-1972.

Coker School was in operation prior to the Civil War

Early settlers and past records indicate that school was taught in the Coker Community prior to 1861.

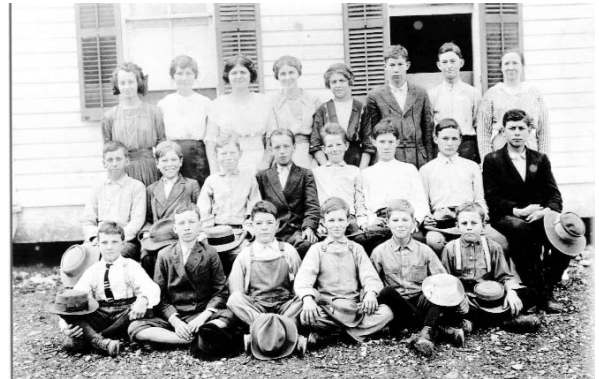
In the early days, school was

taught in different parts of the community in order to equalize the distance children had to travel to get to school. Students used slates and bought their own books. Parents paid a two dollar tuition to cover the teacher's salary, and when a child was absent, a certain amount was deducted from his/her tuition.

Between 1861 and 1904, Mr. J. Coker donated the land to build the old



In 1924, Coker School moved to this two-room brick building



Coker student body, circa 1920.

red Coker School located on San Pedro Avenue. Between 1904 and 1905, a two-story school was built and the old red Coker School became the teacher's residence. When both buildings burned to the ground in 1924, a tent was erected so the children could finish the term.

In 1925, a two-room brick and hollow tile school was built and later expanded to include the library and indoor plumbing. Gradually, as more and more families moved into the Coker community, additions were made and expansions undertaken to accommodate the growing population.

In 1954, the New Coker School was completed at its present site, and since that time, it has undergone many important changes.

After all these years, Coker's student population continues to grow as young families take advantage of the excellent educational opportunities offered through its educational programs.

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COKER PRINCIPALS

- Ms. Gladys Sirdevan, 1950-1958
- Mr. Norman Whisenant, 1958-1962
- Mr. O.K. Harris, 1962-1973
- Mr. David Dague, 1973-1976
- Mr. Rand Dyer, 1976-1979
- Ms. Kay Johnson, 1979-1991
- Ms. Betty Moseley, 1991-1997
- Ms. Glennie Lecoocke, 1997-2005

COKER STUDENT POPULATION

1936	80	1974-1975	880
1942	140	1976-1977	1040
1961-1962	534	1977-1978	1177
1962-1963	728	1978-1979	1216
1963-1964	548	2000-2001	763
1965-1966	642	2003-2004	776



Seay Common School student body, 1935, above, 1937, below.



Former student Hazel Richter recalls the early days at Seay School

Ms. Wietzel, teacher of the Seay Common School, began her day very early. She had to drive over several roads from Sommerset to Wetmore to her little one room schoolhouse just off of Jung Road near the railroad tracks.

The year is 1934 and her 33 students in grades one through eight would be looking for her as she made her way to school. Her car had wide running boards on either side, and as she made their way to the school, students would jump on the running boards and hang on for a ride to school. There was no bus service, and the children came by bicycle, horse, and foot.

Once at the school, she would unlock the door and start filling the big iron stove with wood. The kerosene lantern may have to be lit if it were a cloudy or dark day. No electricity ran through the small community at this time, as well as, no phone service, or indoor plumbing. A school nurse came twice a year, and a book mobile served

as a library.

A bucket would be lowered into the well outside the little schoolhouse, and a tin cup would be placed beside it for sharing drinks throughout the day.

There were two swings, which hung from tall telephone poles, and two seesaws that served the children at recess. Each child had an assigned seat of a wooden desk with a folding seat. The top of the desk had a space for the ink bottle and a carved out space for their pen points on wooden handles and their pencils.

The schedule would be written on the blackboard the first day of school, and they would keep that schedule. There were usually three or four children in each grade, so their instruction time for reading, writing and arithmetic would be scheduled in 15-minute periods throughout the day.

The children were from families in the area, or migrant workers making their yearly visit to the families to help with the planting or harvesting. Most of the families were of German heritage.

Everyone knew everyone else, and the families made their own entertainment visiting with one another or meeting at the school for a game of Bunco. The children had to learn to

recite from memory, and skits were put on at various times. Parents would attend these for a small fee to raise money for the school.

Interscholastic Contests were held twice a year. Volleyball and baseball accuracy, as well as music and art memory were tested.

In 1938, the original Seay Common School was sold to a family who turned it into a home adding a garage and shed, along with a porch. The class picture shows the children with their school wall in the background. The children had no special clothes for picture day and overalls and bare feet were perfectly acceptable.

When the Seay Common School was sold, a new one was constructed off Higgins Road and Stahl. This school building of one room was later moved to MacArthur to be used as a band hall or auxiliary building on the campus, when the Common Schools became part of the North East Independent School District in 1955.

-By Susan Westerman

Serna namesake dreamed of an education for every child

Today, school stands as a symbol of Ignacio Serna's dedication to education

Mr. Ignacio Felix Serna (1840-1912) lived a very interesting life. He was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and grew up on a sheep farm.

While tending sheep, in February of 1847, he was captured by the Buffalo Hump tribe of the Southern Comanche Indians.

In the summer of 1848, he was ransomed by an Indian agent, Major R. S. Nabors. Major Nabors and his wife raised Ignacio Serna as their own son.

After serving in the Confederate Army, Ignacio Serna married Frances Virginia Hines and the couple had three sons: Robert Angelo, Leon C. and Albert Ignacius.

Since there was no public school in the area, Mr. Serna hired a lady to come to their home to educate their sons. One of the most remarkable aspects of Mr. Serna's vision was his desire for all children to be educated, especially considering he had no formal education.

On November 14, 1876, Mr. Serna gave a tract of land to Bexar County to be used for a school. The school was established in 1877 near the current Perrin-Beitel and Austin



The Ignacio F. Serna family



Seay Elementary Staff, 1962

Highway intersection. Many students attended there and have fond memories and stories to tell about the Serna School. That property now has the U-Haul store on it.

The population exploded and in 1953 a new school, Serna Elementary, was built to accommodate the growth. The growth continued until the late 1970s and early 1980s. In May 1984,

Serna Elementary closed for a period of six years. Students living in the area were transferred to Northwood Elementary.

The District tried unsuccessfully to sell the property during the time the school was closed; however, the population began to grow in the area and in 1992 Serna Elementary was re-opened and remains open to the present date.

Do You Remember?

We are looking for more information concerning all of the common schools that formed the beginning of North East Independent School District. These schools were: Seay common School Blanco Common School, Olmos Common School, Lookout Valley Common School, Serna Common School, Salado Valley Common School, and Coker Common School. If you have information on any of these schools, please call Twain Tharp in Special Programs at 804-7131.