

Ibarra Elementary School
Bryan, Brazos County, Texas
By: Elizabeth Martinez and Dorothy Hernandez
November, 2011

I. Context

In the summer of 1935 the Bryan School Board elected to construct a two-room, wooden school building for “Mexican children” of Spanish-speaking parents of the first four grades. The site chosen was on the Joe Batts property along the new route for Highway 21, on the west side of the city. Superintendent S.M. Brown and board members F.L. Henderson and Ivan Langford traveled to Austin to get necessary information from the state department of education. Construction was expected to be completed and classes beginning on time for the regular fall term.¹

The deed for the school property shows that J.W. Batts and M.G. Nall sold their remainder of Block 10 of the Henderson Addition to the City of Bryan for \$1,000, on June 20, 1935.² The previous year, these men had sold the State of Texas a strip of land through the edge of Block 10, for the planned Highway 21 cut-through,³ but it was not built until after 1940.

Miss Esther Price and Miss Stoneham, experienced teachers in Spanish and English, were assigned as the teachers for the new “Mexican school.”⁴ On the first day of school 22 children were registered at Ibarra Elementary. The number had grown to 39 and was expected to reach 70 by the end of the first month.⁵

The Ibarra School served children of Mexican descent from 1935 to 1949. Although

¹ “To Construct New School For Local Mexican Children,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 19 June 1935, pp. 1, 6

² Deed, vol. 89, p. 286, Deed Records, Brazos County Clerk’s Office, Bryan, Texas

³ Deed, vol. 86, p. 194, Deed Records

⁴ “Teachers Named For New School Near Completion,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 31 August 1935, p. 1, col. 8

⁵ “Schools Have 170 More Pupils Than First Week 1934,” Bryan Daily Eagle, 11 September 1935, p. 1, col. 8

records have not been found to verify the naming of the school, it was named for Reverend Guillermo Ibarra who served as the first pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista of Bryan, Texas from August 1922 until his death in April 1929. His daughter Berta Ibarra Montero wrote, "After the death of my father on April 10, 1929, the Ibarra Elementary School was built by the school district and dedicated to the education of children, mostly Hispanic at first, in Bryan. It was a fitting tribute to the memory of the man, a champion for Hispanics in many areas, including education. He himself had overcome the language barrier by studying and a strong, firm determination to succeed; and had proven that it could be done. He urged children and young people to get an education and become future useful citizens with happy, fulfilled lives. 'Education is the key to social development, achievement, and success,' he often said. Through his counsel and influence, Rev. Ibarra helped some young men go to college. He urged his own children to be 'top' students and never be satisfied with less. On rainy days, I remember, Dad would sometimes bring us a hot lunch to school, so we wouldn't get wet and risk getting sick and missing school."⁶

In a newspaper article written by Helen Chavarria about Hispanics in Brazos County, she included information from a study "Land Tenancy Under the Plantation System" by Joel Wallace Elliott. Focusing on the children of Brazos County, in his thesis of 1921, Elliott made reference to Hispanics only getting about a third or fourth grade education, but did not mention in his thesis where these children went to school. Mrs. Chavarria wrote, "a few people that I spoke to said that the reason for the limited education was the difficulty encountered getting to and from school. The schools were far away from their home and transportation wasn't available either in rural areas as well as in town. Apparently some Hispanic children were allowed to attend the white schools, however, there was a period in the early 1930s in which the majority of Hispanic

⁶ Montero, Berta Ibarra, "A Brief Summary of the Life and Ministry of Rev. William Ibarra," 30 March 1996

children had to attend Ibarra School, which was supposedly constructed for the purpose of segregating these children. Ibarra School was named after the Rev. William [Guillermo] Ibarra and it might be interesting to know that this writer attend this school in its latter years.”⁷

II. Overview

Ibarra School initially served children in grades first through fourth. In the beginning there were only two classrooms. One room was for the first and second graders and the other room was for the third and fourth graders.

The school principal was Mr. C.M. Bethany.

The first teachers were Esther Price and Philippa Stoneham, experienced teachers in Spanish and English. Other teachers who taught at Ibarra were Ms. Nell Averett, Ms. Mary Jane Nall, Ms. Avery, Ms. Drgac, Ms. Zuber, Ms. Burns, Ms. Fuller and Ms. Crnkovic. As is often the case, former students only remember the teachers' last names.

There was no bus transportation available to the students so they walked to and from school. Some walked long distances while others lived nearby. In the school building there were two bathrooms. One was for the girls and the other one was for the boys.

The majority of students remember that they took their lunch from home daily and they ate in the classroom or out in the playground. Those who lived nearby went home for lunch. One was allowed to cross the street and go to the store during their lunch time to buy something to eat or drink.

However, Rachel Medina said that there was a free lunch program when she was in second grade (possibly 1938-1939). She remembers the "good smells" coming from the kitchen

⁷ Chavarria, Helen, "Hispanics Bring Rich History to the Area," Bryan-College Station Eagle, 27 April 1989, sect. E, p. 13

as she sat in the classroom and that they gave the children grapefruit juice to drink. She also said that her mom had taught her to read in Spanish so when she tried to read English in Spanish, it just "didn't make sense!" She also recalls that third or fourth grade students would come to her, in first grade, for help interpreting what the teacher told them.⁸

Regarding the lunch program, Manuel Herrera Jr. said that his Grandmother Amalia Cortina walked to school with him because she helped to prepare the food for lunch and that they would eat in the classroom. But when he was in the fourth grade, they took their lunch and were given pears or apples to eat. He also remembers that Ms. Nell Averett, his fourth and fifth grade teacher, played the piano and every Friday they would remove the partitions separating the rooms to create one big hallway and they would join there to sing "patriotic songs". At the Christmas program, he sang a solo.⁹

Susie Velasco started first grade in 1937. She shared that the Release Program provided breakfast and lunch for the students. She remembers eating grits for breakfast and vegetable soup for lunch. They would place their food on plastic mats. She also said that this same program taught them how to knit. They were provided needles and yarn and knitted squares that were then taken by the ladies and knitted together to make quilts which were then sent to the soldiers. She also said she felt the teachers put a lot of their effort for the children to learn.¹⁰

Isabel Hernandez Robbins recalls that in the third grade, the teacher assigned them poems to memorize. There would be a prize for those that did. She memorized all the poems and received a beautiful pearl necklace.¹¹

The name of Ibarra Elementary was later changed to "San Jacinto Elementary School".

⁸ Interview with Rachel Vivero Medina, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 28 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center, Bryan, Texas

⁹ Interview with Manuel Herrera, Jr., by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 21 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

¹⁰ Interview with Susie Velasco, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 6 November 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

¹¹ Interview with Isabel Hernandez, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 29 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

Perhaps this occurred because San Jacinto Street ran in front of the school. Joe Ramirez, who attended school there from 1946 to 1951, said that when he was in the fifth grade he played on the winning San Jacinto Bullets softball team. They were a very good team and that year they beat all of the elementary school's softball team. They proudly wore their San Jacinto Bullet t-shirts. He also shared that Lupe Reyes led the cheers for the team and that she had written a song for the school but it could not be located.¹²

Then as today, recess was very important to the students. The playground equipment they enjoyed included monkey bars, swings and slides. Organized games included kick ball, baseball, Red Rover and Drop the Handkerchief. The girls also liked to play jacks.

Newspaper articles verify that Parent Teacher Association activities took place at the Ibarra School. The spring program in which every student took part included "dances and songs showing how the people of different nations came to America and how their citizens now are defending America." The Lamar Junior High Band, under the direction of H. Hugh Emerson, presented a concert to open the spring program.¹³

On October 28, 1942, it was reported that at the PTA meeting the fourth graders gave a play entitled, "Careful and Careless" and the second and third graders showed fire prevention posters which they had made and then all the pupils in the four grades sang a fire drill song. At the close of the program, John Buchanan, a Boy Scout, member of the Cherokee Troop 80, demonstrated the lighting and extinguishing of a campfire." Hercules Canales, PTA president, called the meeting to order and presided over the business session.¹⁴

Ibarra School was used to teach citizenship classes for Latin American residents of Brazos

¹² Interview with Joe Ramirez, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 28 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

¹³ "Program At Ibarra School Is Tonight," Bryan Daily Eagle, 14 May 1942, p.1, col. 6

¹⁴ "Ibarra PTA Holds Second Meet Of Year," Bryan Daily Eagle, 28 October 1942, p. 5, col. 3

County who desired to become United States citizens.¹⁵ Mr. Pete Rodriguez and Mr. Paul Rodriguez taught the classes. Rachel Vivero Medina verifies that her parents, Rafael and Nicolosa Vivero, attended these classes and became United States citizens.¹⁶

Boy Scout meetings were also held at Ibarra School.¹⁷ Leo Grimaldo was in this group under the leadership of Mr. Pete Rodriguez and Mr. Manuel Herrera. They attended meetings and also enjoyed camping trips at Lake Arrowmoon, near Hearne, Texas.¹⁸ Mary Grimaldo remembers that on Friday nights, movies were shown outside on the playground. The movie was projected on the school building wall for all to enjoy.¹⁹

III. Significance

Ibarra School was built for "Mexican children." Though they were all United States citizens, the majority spoke only Spanish when they started school. While they were in school they were not allowed to speak Spanish, English only. Philippa Lee Salcido Cook said they were told, "You're here to learn English. Don't speak Spanish."²⁰ They were punished if they were "caught" speaking in Spanish. Andy Herrera said, "I was going to get my mouth washed out with soap because the teacher thought I had talked in Spanish. I was so lucky because a little girl spoke up for me and told the teacher that it was not me and she believed her. It was true that I had not spoken in Spanish."²¹ Rita Perez stated, "If you spoke in

¹⁵ "Latin American Citizens' Class Will Be Started At Ibarra School," Bryan Daily Eagle, 11 March 1947, p. 1, col. 8

¹⁶ Interview with Rachel Vivero Medina, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 28 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

¹⁷ "Ibarra School Traffic Signs Now On Highway," Bryan Daily Eagle, 4 February 1947, p. 1, col. 3

¹⁸ Interview with Leo Grimaldo, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 3 November 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

¹⁹ Interview with Mary Grimaldo, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 26 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

²⁰ Interview with Philippa Lee Salcido Cook, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 26 Oct. 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

²¹ Interview with Andy Herrera, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 1 November 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center

Spanish, one had to stick out their hand and receive a couple of ‘pops’ as punishment. Having to sit on the bench, and not have playtime was a punishment no one wanted.”²²

Even though they may have thought that not being able to speak in their own language was cruel, the bottom line is that they did learn English and were able to continue their education and become productive, law-abiding citizens. They attained the language, skills and knowledge to complete the career of their choice or the job that would allow them to provide for the welfare of their families. The fact that they all spoke the same gave them a unity of oneness that helped them overcome the obstacles that confronted them.

It is also important to note that many of these students, men and women, served their country in the armed services.

It can be concluded that Ibarra Elementary School served children for 14 years, 1935-1949. It began teaching students in first through fourth grade and when needed, a fifth grade classroom was added. When renamed San Jacinto Elementary School, it continued to serve children for 11 more years, 1949-1960. The education and character building that occurred at the school is a testimony given by its former students.

The school building no longer exists and San Jacinto Park is located on the site where this history began. It is our desire that someday the park will be renamed Ibarra Park. This and an historical marker to commemorate the existence of Ibarra School will be a tribute to Reverend Guillermo Ibarra and the students who "lived" the history of the school.

²² Interview with Rita Perez, by Elizabeth Jo Martinez, 26 October 2011, filed at Carnegie History Center