

Odd Fellows University

c. 1972

Excerpts from "THE EARLY HISTORY OF BRYAN, TEXAS"
(M.A. Thesis, University of Texas, 1952)
by Lois Wilcox Manire, pages 136, 137, 138, and 139.

N.B. This thesis is available in its entirety at the Bryan Public Library reference desk,
and also at the Carnegie Library. Editor.

Page 136:

In 1870, the Odd Fellows University was established in Bryan, by the following men: T. T. Smothers, George Johnson, R. N. Blanford, William McIntosh, A. H. Wilson, C. A. Stern, W. H. Hall, J. M. Zimmerman, William Lambden, T. McCartney, G. I. Goodwin, H. Hardin, J. P. Mitchell, T. J. Beall, G. W. Castles, E. Littlefield, H. S. Newland, I. J. Kimbrough, T. D. Wilson, and Alexander McKee.⁸ It was incorporated under the name of Texas Odd Fellows University and Orphans' Home.⁹ Students of all ages, beginners to grown-ups, were accepted. The school was located on East 26th Street on the corner where St. Joseph's Catholic Church stands in 1952. The building was a two-story frame structure erected by the Odd Fellows. The faculty's salary was paid from the tuition of the pupils.

In 1873 the superintendent was Harry F. Estille. The principal was a Professor Blanford [see Editor's note 1 below], who was son-in-law of the Reverend Fisher of the Methodist Church; other teachers were a Mr. Pierrot, teacher of German, French, penmanship, and drawing; Mrs. V. D. Eaton, teacher of

⁸ H. P. N. Gammel, Texas Laws and Statutes, 1822-1897, VI, 552.

⁹ Ibid.

Editor's Note 1: Typed notes in the margin read: This spelling should be Blandford (cf. "Orceneth Fisher Pioneer Methodist Preacher", by R. E. Ledbetter, UT thesis 1938) Handwritten initials: DP, 9-3-71. The initials "D.P." most likely are those of Deolece Parmelee, who worked for the Texas Historical Commission for many years.

Editor's Note 2: Typed notes in the margin read: This apparently was the wife of the Rev. Fisher. --- the Ledbetter thesis is not conclusive on this point BUT the --couple were there) Handwritten initials: DP 9-3-71. See note above re: "D.P."

Page 137:

science and English; Professor Brown, Miss Sue McLelland, Mrs. Rebecca Fisher, [see Editors Note 2 below] teachers of music; Miss Ida Smith and Miss Mattie Stephenson, teachers of small children.¹⁰

Some of the pupils who attended the Odd Fellows University were Nellie Moore, later Mrs. B. F. Lemon of Bryan; Lizzie Mitchell (Mrs. G. W. Narrell); Mrs. W. R. Cavitt (Mary Mitchell), Mollie Wicker, Mrs. T. P. Boyett, Sallie Wilkerson, Mrs. R. G. Tabor; Josie Robinson, daughter of Colonel J. M. Robinson, one of Bryan's early mayors, later Mrs. Josie Sheets; her brothers H. C. Robinson and Sidney Robinson: [sic] Other pupils were John, Bert, Jim and George Castles.¹¹

Commencement exercises were held in 1873 in Cramer Hall which served as a city auditorium and was located just east of the Houston and Texas Central passenger station.¹²

The Odd Fellows' University was sold in the fall of 1875 to W. W. James, B. L. James, and Mrs. Eaton who continued the school under the name of the Bryan Academy.¹³ In the Bryan Eagle in 1929, H. O. Boatwright, as a former

Page 138:

pupil, gave a very interesting account of the Bryan Academy. He said that in the fall of the year when cotton picking was over he went to the Bryan Academy which was conducted by Professor W. W. James. A nephew, B. G. James, and Mrs. V. D. Easton were assistants. The following are his words:

Professor James, I feel sure, was the best teacher I ever knew. While his school was a one man school and he taught the primer to the beginners and astronomy to the advanced classes, he did both to perfection. Professor James also taught us to write. I still remember clearly many of the copies he wrote in my little copy book such as, "Trust in the Lord and do good and verily He will bring it to pass" and "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," and "Labor conquers all things."¹⁴

Some of Boatwright's classmates as given in this same article were Will Edrington, Will Davis, Charlie Davis, Hamp Davidson, George G. Kelley, R. J. and J. S. Ford, A. M. Rhodes, Octavius King, Guy Hill, R. S. Webb, James H. Webb, Pete McCoy,

¹⁰ Mrs. A. J. Buchanan, "In Early Days," undated clipping from the Bryan Eagle, in Mrs. A. J. Buchanan's Scrapbook.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Elmer Grady Marshall, the History of Brazos County, M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1937, p. 116.

¹⁴ Mrs. A. J. Buchanan, "Bryan Half a Century Ago," in Bryan Eagle, May 6, 1929.

R. C. Chatham, M. H. James, J. E. Covey, Paul Page, John Bishop, Will Bishop, Burton S. Castles, Oliver, John and George Tabor, John and Jim

Page 139:

Chance, Bill and Bob King, Sam Hill, C. A. Harris, Will Harris, Bob Astin, Tom Eaton, Walter McIntosh, Morris Mitchell, W. T. James, Dan Sims, Walter Downard, Green, Ruben and Joe Grant. Girls that attended the Academy were Carrie Eaton, Lillie Haswell, Lelia, Lizzie, and Annie Law, Rowena Boyles, Lou Ford, Emma and Laura Mitchell, Nannie Hall, Hattie Webb, Mamie Downard, Mattie Tabor, Ona Ward and others.¹⁵ Boatwright commented that in the academy the pupils received mental training and drilling that was valuable to them all their lives. He concluded by saying,

I know that this modern day is a day of specialists in all branches, but I fear sometimes that in securing so much special education, we have perhaps suffered for the fundamentals.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.