

150 years of Tex

1854

Gov. Elisha M. Pease

calls on the Legislature to pass the Common School Law of 1854, which establishes the first public school system in

Texas. Enacted on Jan. 31, 1854, the law sets aside \$2 million in U.S. treasury bonds left over from the sale of land to create a special fund for public schools. The Constitution of 1876 renames the fund the Permanent School Fund and places strict guidelines on its disbursement and investment.

1865

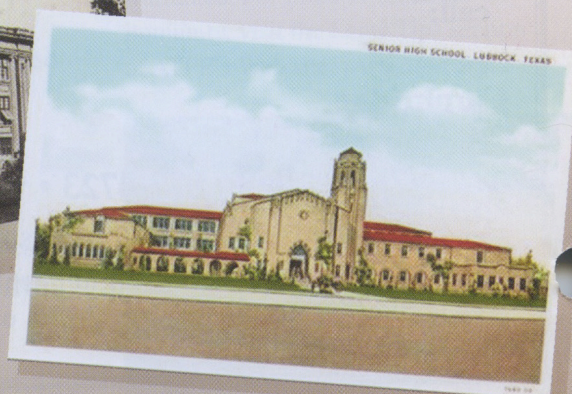
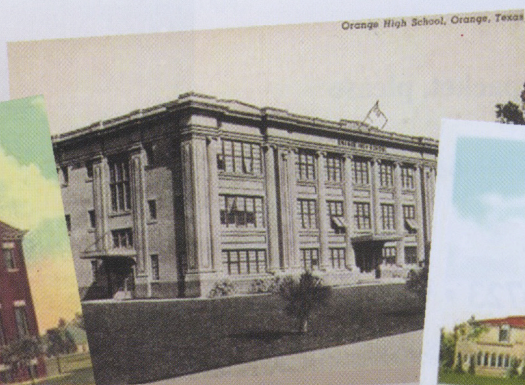
The U.S. government institutes the Freedmen's Bureau to supervise the education of black Americans after the Civil War. Operating in the South, the bureau

BY KATE JOHANN'S

In 1853, Elisha M. Pease ran for governor on a platform calling for the Legislature to create a fund to establish Texas' first public school system. The overwhelming majority of votes he received sent a message to the state that such a fund was the people's will. So the Legislature set aside \$2 million in treasury bonds from the sale of land to the U.S. government. On Jan. 31, 1854, the Permanent School Fund was created, marking the beginning of Texas public schools. Nearly 150 years later, Texas public schools are still going strong.

The history of Texas schools isn't completely pretty. For far too long segregation, discrimination and poor conditions were all too familiar. Schools have survived war, funding crises and education reform. But year in and year out, despite hardship, capricious political mindsets and other obstacles, the educators of Texas go to work every morning to provide the state's children with one of life's greatest gifts—knowledge.

In doing so, educators carry out the wishes of Texas' founders. In the Texas Declaration of Independence, written in March 1836, Texas revolutionary leaders charged the Mexican government with negligence regarding education: "It has failed to establish any public system of



as public schools

education, although possessed of almost boundless resources, (the public domain), and although it is an axiom in political science, that unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self-government.” Pioneers such as Stephen F. Austin, Mirabeau Lamar and A.J. Yates believed that the vast wealth Texas held in its natural resources would go untapped if its citizens were uneducated.

Today, more than four million students and half a million school employees on 7,380 campuses work hard to make sure that doesn't happen. Their efforts and the efforts of their predecessors deserve to be recognized in 2004, the 150th anniversary of the Texas public school system.

And there's a lot to celebrate. As Texas education historian Frederick Eby wrote on the occasion of the system's 100th anniversary in 1954, “Despite these grave weaknesses, however, a foundation of public education was laid in 1854 which was to outlast war, devastation, tyranny and reaction.”

So take some time in 2004 to remember with your students and fellow educators the lessons and triumphs of 150 years of Texas public schools. Here's to another 150 years ... and then some.

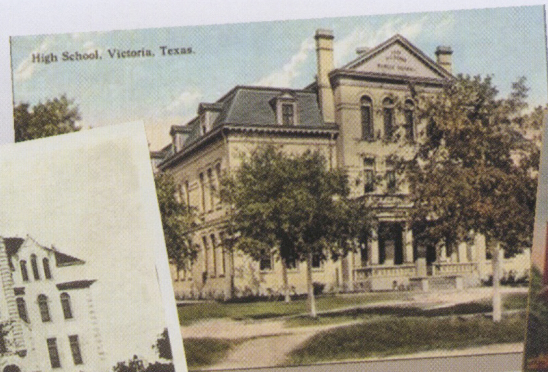
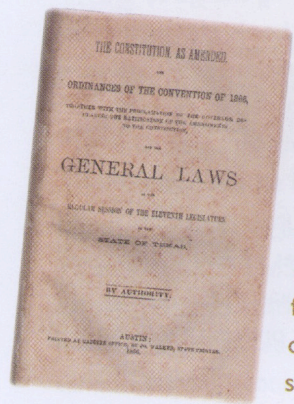
offers classes from the elementary to college levels in traditional subject areas as well as civics, home economics and vocational training. By July 1866, Texas has 90 Freedmen's Bureau-operated schools.

1866

The Constitution of 1866 legalizes the appointment of a state superintendent of public instruction

and requires public school teacher certification. However, because of the harsh politics and federal scrutiny of the Reconstruction era, the U.S. government

nullifies the Legislature's constitution.



CONSTITUTION: TARBTON LAW LIBRARY, UT-AUSTIN

1875

A Republican state government creates the “independent school district,” authorizing incorporated cities to provide education to school-age children under certain restrictions. Those in rural areas are not given this privilege, and it leads to disparity between urban and rural schools.

1876

The Peabody Education Fund, a Northern effort to bring educational organization to a South still ravaged by the Civil War, sends

Barnas Sears to Texas

to bring change to the public schools. He outlines a

strategy for improvement that includes local school boards led by competent superintendents, student classification by grade level and school board-provided teacher inservices. The Peabody Fund gives money to selected districts across Texas to follow this model, a plan that proves successful.

1879

Certification law establishes three classes of teaching certificates. The highest level, a “first-class certificate,” requires examination in “school discipline and methods of teaching.” Thus, state leaders acknowledge that peda-

gogical training as well as subject-area knowledge is necessary for good teaching.

Texas teachers organize the earliest incarnation of the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA), the first professional organization of its kind in Texas.

1884

The Colored Teachers State Association of Texas meets for the first time. In 1955, the organization drops “colored” from its name; in 1966, it dissolves voluntarily and aligns with TSTA after racial restrictions to TSTA membership are removed.

1893

Olga Kohlberg

persuades the El Paso Board of Education to open the state’s first public kindergarten.

1909

A constitutional amendment allows for the creation of school districts that lie in two or more counties. Rural areas must also now comply with districting laws urban areas already follow. School districts are now the system of school organization across Texas.

1912



The Debating and Declamation League of Texas merges with the Interscholastic Athletic Association to form the University Interscholastic League (UIL). In 2003, UIL is the oldest and largest high school association of its kind in the United States.

1915

Texas enacts its first compulsory attendance law.

1918

Annie Webb Blanton leads

“The Better Schools Campaign,” which pushes for a constitutional amendment to raise the ad valorem state tax in order to provide free textbooks. The amendment passes with a wide margin.



1928

Lyndon Baines Johnson earns his elementary teaching certificate and serves as principal and teacher for one year at the Welhausen School in Cotulla.



A constitutional amendment establishes a State Board of Education (SBOE) appointed by the governor with the Senate's approval.

1936

SBOE authorizes a statewide adequacy survey to assess conditions in schools across the state in an effort to reorganize and consolidate school districts.

1946

Sandra Day O'Connor, who later becomes the first female U.S. Supreme Court justice, graduates from El Paso's Austin High School.



1948



A district judge rules against the segregation of Mexican-American children in the public schools in the case *Delgado v. Bastrop ISD*.

1949

The Gilmer-Aikin Laws pass, providing the framework for the modern Texas public school system. The state's 4,500 school districts are consolidated into 2,900 more efficient administrative units. State-equalization funding supplements local taxes. A minimum salary schedule provides for higher salaries to attract and recruit teachers to the classroom. State funding is tied to attendance. Education specialists begin working in schools. SBOE increases from nine appointed members to 21 elected members. At the state level, SBOE, a commissioner of education and a staff constitute the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The laws also guarantee Texas children a minimum of 12 school years with at least 175 instructional days per school year.

1952

Barbara Jordan, who later becomes an educator and the first black Southern U.S. congresswoman, graduates from Houston's Phyllis Wheatley High School.



1954

Brown v. Board of Education, a U.S. Supreme Court decision, orders the end of school segregation for black students. San Antonio ISD is one of the first districts to comply.

1964

The Laredo United Consolidated School District begins Texas' first bilingual education program.

1965

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, signed by former Texas educator Lyndon Johnson, allocates federal assistance to schools serving economically disadvantaged children (thereafter known as Title I schools). The School Lunch Program begins.

Special education initiatives begin appearing in Texas public schools.



1967

The Prairie View Interscholastic League, the governing body for interscholastic competition among Texas' public high schools for black students, begins to integrate into the UIL.

1970

In *United States v. Texas*, a U.S. district court in East Texas orders TEA to assume responsibility for desegregating Texas public schools. All public schools are prohibited from assigning students to schools based on race, from discrimination in extracurricular activities and personnel practices, and from operating segregated bus routes.

Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District extends the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* to Mexican-Americans, recognizing them as a minority group that could be and was discriminated against, and ruling that such discrimination and segregation is unconstitutional.

1973

Gov. Dolph Briscoe signs the Bilingual Education and Training Act. It requires Texas elementary schools enrolling 20 or more students of limited English ability in a given grade level to

provide bilingual instruction, therefore abolishing English-only teaching requirements dating back to 1918. This ends decades of "no-Spanish rules" under which students who were overheard speaking Spanish were subject to fines (a penny for every Spanish word), forced to stand on a "black square" or made to write "I must not speak Spanish."

1980

The Association of Texas Educators and the Texas Professional Educators merge, forming the **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)**.



1984

House Bill (HB) 72 creates stricter attendance rules, guidelines for teacher certification and formulas to equalize school funding. HB 72 also enacts "no-pass, no-play," which prevents students who score below 70 in any class from participating in extracurricular activities.

In *Edgewood ISD v. Kirby*, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) files suit on behalf of Edgewood ISD against Commissioner of Education William Kirby, citing discrimination against students in property-poor school

districts. The suit charges that the state public school funding formulas violate the Texas Constitution. (For more on school finance, see page 29.)

1993

After lawsuits and much debate, the Legislature passes a school finance reform plan to equalize school funding. The controversial plan, known as "Robin Hood," gives property-wealthy districts five methods to transfer wealth to poorer districts.

2001

Texas begins aligning state education policy with mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act, which calls for increased accountability standards and "highly qualified" teachers.

2003

The 78th Legislature votes to sunset the current school funding system and replace it by 2005. A state committee conducts a study to define an "adequate education," and a special session on school finance is expected in spring 2004.

Voters narrowly approve a constitutional amendment to allow distribution of a portion of the Permanent School Fund's market value. Previously, only the interest could be spent; any capital gains had to be reinvested. ☺



BRISCOE, TEXAS S
MARY & ARCHIVES COMMISSION; POSTCARDS: WWW.TXGENES.COM

Celebrate schools' 150th

WITH TIPS FROM THE PAST

In 1954, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) published a handbook that offered ideas to schools and communities for celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Texas public school system. With the 150th anniversary of Texas public schools coming up in 2004, we thought we would share some of the ideas that have stood the test of time (and bring a few into the 21st century).

Take a look back during Texas Public Schools Week

When TEA wrote its *Centennial Handbook* in 1954, Texas Public Schools Week (TPSW) was only three years old, but now, 50 years later, TPSW is still "one of the outstanding activities centered in the public schools." Because TAKS testing is scheduled for the first week of March, when schools traditionally celebrate TPSW, the Texas School Public Relations Association suggests that districts choose another week in March 2004 to celebrate. The association offers kits that contain tips, camera-ready materials and more at www.tspra.org.

Find the oldest trustee, teacher and student

Fifty years ago, this project was said to have "considerable news value." Make it a class project to seek out, interview and recognize: your oldest school board member or the board member with the most years of service; the oldest teacher or the teacher with the most years of service; the oldest alumni of your district's schools; and/or the people in your community who have done the most for your local public schools. You might even find a school volunteer who deserves a nomination for the State Board of Education's Heroes for Children Award (www.tea.state.tx.us/sii/heroes/index.html).

See if you can get on TV

"Virtually every Texas community is now in range of a TV station willing to devote public service time to interest-

ing, well-planned programs," says the 1954 TEA handbook, and "radio programs featuring the school choir and band have great popular appeal." If these statements are still true in your community, contact local stations (or even your school paper or station) to find out if they will provide air time for a school production by the choir, band or drama group that commemorates the history of our public schools. And because it is the age of the Internet, why not create a class Web page that features the research, essays or poetry your students have created related to our public schools' 150th anniversary?

Party like it's 1854

The 1954 handbook suggests: "To recall the spirit of 1854, some communities may want to plan Centennial costume parties in connection with spelling bees, candy pullings, play parties (square dancing), quilting parties, corn-husking contests, hayrides and community singings. An old-time band concert in the park would help recall the period." If no one in your community knows how to pull candy or there's

no corn to husk, simply make Texas public schools' history the theme or focus of your annual community parade or festival.

Make school celebrations commemorative

"An ideal time for inspirational oratory about the 100th birthday of our public school system is the period of commencement exercises." If it was true then, why shouldn't the members of the class of 2004 celebrate that they are the products of 150 years of quality public schools? Other school celebrations are perfect occasions to recognize our schools' sesquicentennial as well. Make a special presentation during homecoming, or call a special assembly with a focus on history.

Don't leave out the sports

"The sensational development of high school sports in Texas since the founding of the University of Texas Interscholastic League (1912) is an aspect of public school life that is unmatched in popular appeal." If the writer of that statement only knew how right he was! High school sports remain a mainstay of Texas life, so their history might be an interesting topic for students to research for class projects. Some facts to find include the contrasts between 1854 and 2004 sports, the names of all-time athletic greats produced by Texas schools and the "firsts" in school sports. ☺

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- **The Texas State Historical Association** www.tsha.utexas.edu
Search the Handbook of Texas Online for articles on Texas history.
- **The Texas Historical Commission** www.thc.state.tx.us
- **Texas Public Schools Centennial Handbook** The Texas Education Agency (TEA) produced this handbook to help schools and communities celebrate the school system's 100th anniversary in 1954.
- **Texas High School Hotshots: The Stars Before They Were Stars** by Alan Burton