

The Spirit of Waco

Paul of the New Testament: "Stir up the gift of memory that is within you."

You inherited the legacy of this sacred place, you are the keepers of traditions and curators of Waco memories. When you were in school here loyalties ran deep, and Waco School likely figured in your loves, somewhere along with love of home, of church or even of family. Waco School had about it an aura of warmth and sweetness, almost innocence, which made Waco High School, in experience and in memory, a place set apart from the world. Waco was cherished and loved by one class after another, who studied here, graduated and said farewell.

It is a place important in history both as to the small town and to the school. The school was small, even by standards of its day, and I say this in a complimentary sense. Be thankful for your heritage. At Waco you were individuals, rather than a mass of some kind of submerged personalities. You saw classmates and yours teachers saw you as a person made in the image of God.

The word "Waco" was unknown to this area until 1879 when George Kendrick returned from Texas to his home here. He liked the town of Waco, Texas, and suggested, this Indian word, for the name of the settlement here. Before then the place, if it were called anything, was called Ramsey's Crossing. This place is a unique place. The town was here before the civil war, when this was part of Lincoln County. It was named in 1879 by Mr. Kendrick and twenty eight years later it was incorporated in 1907.

The Carolina Central Railroad, later the Seaboard, now CSX, came in 1866. The Waco Post Office opened March 16, 1880. The Waco Baptist Church was organized as Capernaum July 9, 1842. It moved to its present location in 1886. This was the first church formed after the county, itself, was created (1841). The oldest grave at the Capernaum cemetery is 1847.

Waco High school was always ahead of others in the county. Waco had the first school library, the first activities bus, the first intercom system and the first school lunchroom.

Initially, the lunch room was in the rock community building, then known as the club house, where your trophies are today. You had dedicated teachers who were available and who stirred your imagination, Professors Cooley, Ware, Downs, Sellers, Spake, McCloud, Black, Camp, Mrs. Moss and Miss Margaret Kiser. ... I won't try to mention all the names. M.B. Clegg was the first principal. Others were Mr. Simpson, C.M. King, W.N. Pope ... W.H. Dodd. You can truthfully say Waco had a King and a Pope and a Kiser.

Present day, I think, neither students nor teachers are likely to be as moved emotionally by experience or by memories as they were in your Waco School days.

Love of school and teachers and love of classmates are sentimental virtues, and ours is not a sentimental age. Today we are more skeptical, more detached - the popular word is, "cool" and loyalty itself is a rare commodity. Modern students seem not to want to feel too deeply. Reasons may be the loss of Christian influence and the dangers of the present age. There has been change.

Muddy Fork Academy was a school of higher learning started in 1840. A school was established at Capernaum in 1842. Sylvanus Ervin opened the Normal Institute of Waco here in 1889. Waco School operated continuously here at this location, from 1880 until 1983, when the grade school closed. The High School was consolidated with Burns in 1960. The Waco, the county High School, that you know and love opened here in 1903. Consolidated with it were grade schools at St. Paul, Stubbs, Damerman and Beams. Waco High School was among the first and was certainly the largest high school, of the originals.

Local historian George Murray, class of '17, wrote, "Doctors, lawyers, ministers, missionaries, teachers, nurses and business men ... have been produced." Waco School also produced many soldiers, sailors, and airmen for two world wars, and many undeclared wars.

The essence of your Waco School experience transcends time and place. You have many distinguished classmates. We mentioned Sylvanus Ervin's starting Norman institute of Waco. Dr. Clyde Ervin is the son of Sylvanus and Mamie Putnam Ervin of Waco. He married Evelyn Miller of Waco. He went to school here and was principal here, at Waco. He spoke in chapel here at, Waco, in August, 1941. He spoke here, at Waco, at the 1950 graduation. Dr. Clyde Ervin served North Carolina as State School Superintendent from 1934 to 1952. Upon his sudden death in Raleigh on July 19, 1952, his body was brought back for burial at Waco in the old Capernaum cemetery. He was and is recognized as one of the great educators in America. He was surely pure Waco.

Sue Black Teal, class of '47, became a Spartanburg television personality. The class of '47 was the first class to go twelve years. There was no graduating class in '46.

Joe Goforth, class of '41, became manager of the Cleveland County Fair in 1977. Since then he has built it into one of the leading fairs in the country. He did this while most county fairs were declining and folding.

One can be impressed by the motivation and success of Waco graduates. Dr. W.A. Goode served in the North Carolina Legislature in 1903. Linda Cline Thrift was a student here, but too young to graduate before the high school moved to Burns. She is our Clerk of Court. Doris Browne Borders, class of '43, served as Register of Deeds. There are two Magistrates from Waco: W.H. Moss and Cecil Murray.

Waco's mayors J.Y. Hord, W.B. Carroll, A.J. Putnam, Ezra Miller, M.C.

Whitworth, Hill Carpenter and Horace Lutz are Waco graduates. Two Mayors of 'great' Lattimore: Ben Wilson was a student here and Rachel Sellers Lovelace, class of '53, were both mayors of Lattimore.

Colman Goforth, class of '43, served as county commissioner.

Raymond D. Hord is an energetic graduate who takes pride in Waco. He will be 104 years old 13 days from today. His date of birth is May 17, 1898. He is Waco High School's oldest living alumnus.

You have thoughts of many of those who went to school at Waco or at what would become Waco. They would be glad you are here today. You remember Mrs. Espie Black and Mrs. Pearl Murray who ran your lunchroom. You remember Deputy Clyde Barrett who would add spice to this occasion. Before him was Deputy John Hord. His brothers W.G. and Jesse Hord were in the sawmill business and had a cotton gin here at this school location. M.C. Whitworth and Yates Sperling were long term Waco School Board members. Coot Lutz, whose campaign methods are legend in county politics (Mayor, all complimentary), served many years on the County School Board. A.J. Putnam smelled the mustard gas at Ypres, France, in 1917, and Asbury Harrelson became the county's oldest living veteran of World War I. A.A. and Odus Barrett, Arthur Stroup and Marvin and Nelson Putnam, you recall as pillars of this community.

More than 100 years ago Ambrose Cline and then his sons, Ortha and Zeb Cline tilled this soil. Their farm was on Buffalo Creek. These Waco creeks appear on very old charts of this region. More than 150 years ago, Larkin, Thomas and William Kendrick had a brick yard here on White Oak Creek. Its home office moved to Charlotte and then to Monroe. Kendrick Brick is part of a merged company that exist today. All these generations would be glad you are here today.

Waco was not sophisticated, was simple, modest even in its time. It was a good place to study and a serene place to be. You have a love, a feeling of closeness, then and now, for you classmates, even though you may have nothing else in common, other than you went to school at Waco.

There were occasional storms, to be sure, but when perturbed, perturbed somehow in boyish ways.

In the early '30s there was a disturbance on the school bus as it traveled down Stony Point Road, the disturbance, caused by Frank Harmon. The bus was wisely stopped and some boys were asked to put Frank off the bus. John Goforth was among those who tried to drag Frank off the bus. When the bus proceed on its way, somehow, Frank was still on the bus and John was left standing on the old Stony Point road to walk home.

You will remember that your building was a two story building. It had an up

stairs. The doors and hall ways were standard size into and up the stairs. In the 1940s school, one day, routinely opened. When the early teachers and students entered the second floor they found a full size two horse wagon in the hall fully assembled with side planks. Some were suspicious of Buford Cline or some of his friends were somehow caught up in a resourceful Waco spirit. Some one worked, to take the wagon apart, then carry it up stairs and then reassemble it. The teachers, as always, treated the incident with gentleness and kindness.

For many years basketball games were played in a tin gym. Known as the tin can. It was later, about 1952, that a brick gym was built with heat, a score board and clock. That was true with most county schools. In 1950 the Waco Wildcats were playing a close exciting game. Waco was running, it was intense and fast. Only Moffett went to the basket with such speed that he crashed through the wall under the Waco goal. He went all the way through and fell to the ground outside the building.

Waco had many championship girls and boys basketball teams, and championship baseball teams. The Waco Wildcats were wild. Everyone supported the Red and White. When the Waco Wildcats played the Flying Five the roads between here and Fallston looked like the Paris Taxi Brigade of World War I. There were many victory celebrations, seldom was heard a discouraging word.

The little town was close at hand. School rules were surprisingly few and were leniently enforced. You had judgment and knew right from wrong. At times some of you would feel a need to walk to Mr. Putnam's store for candy, or a package of crackers or peanuts and a Pepsi, maybe even chewing tobacco. When you were inside the store and Mr. Dodd or Mr. King came in the front door, You had a way to come out the back door, cross the highway and cross the railroad and be promptly back on the school ground. These teachers did remind you of authority and power, they could punish.

You had an outstanding school newspaper, "Waco Echo" You had this newspaper, when most high schools and most colleges did not even have a newspaper. The "Waco Echo" had a gossip column which did stimulate discussion and it carried advertisements. It carried the school news. After Dr. Clyde Ervin spoke in Chapel here in August, 1941, the associate editor, Roy Carroll, class of '42, wrote a detailed report of that chapel service and Dr. Ervin's speech. The Waco Echo had a comic section, as such, it had jokes. From a copy of the May, 1950, edition; Max: "Here, catch hold of this wire." Kenneth: "I got it, now what?" Max: "Feel anything?" Kenneth: "No." Max: "Don't touch the other one, it carries 3,000 volts." The Intellectual Waco students appreciated this joke. Mr. Pope: "Harvey where were you when they gave out the brains?" Harvey: I was arguing about the ears they gave me."

You had the Glee Club, Beta Club, Drama, FFA, FHA, 4-H and other benefits that were a pleasure to you then and have served you well in life.

Jackie Black taught the class of '50 home make. The girls in the class cooked a meal for their boy friends.

The Russian Tea was so bitter, they could not drink it. The rolls were so hard they could not bite them. Their sweethearts threw the rolls against the floor to try to crack them.

What I have said is at least part of the picture of your old school and your Waco school days.

As you mingle and talk, refresh your memories of long ago. There may have been some one, teacher or classmate, you did not particular like, and maybe for good reason. Try to remember that person, when the person was at their best and know that the person was after all a fallible human being. You all have had successes, and some struggles and some disappointments. Love for classmates, teachers and school days is a virtue for you to enjoy. Do so with a sense of communion. Blest be the tie that binds. Have a fresh baptism in the faith of our fathers and a renewed reverence for your church and for God and for Christian values.

Honor the Waco legacy, keep the traditions and hold on to the Waco memories.

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