

## **Hugo's Million and A Half School System Founded Before Statehood**

unknown newspaper, Hugo, Oklahoma  
January 17, 1957

Hugo's present million and a half dollar school system, 55 [possibly 53] years old this month, was not ever thus.

In the beginning the first year's expenditures, records show, totaled \$2,300 for seven months terms. Four years later operational expenses for eight months was a little more than \$3,000.

Hugo's initial experience with education got off to a bad start, old records say. When the new Hugo Junior High school's cornerstone was laid, the old stone, sealed in 1906 was opened. From that was taken a copy of the March 8, 1906 issue of the Husonian, an early-day Hugo newspaper.

From that paper, which was returned to the old stone along with its other contents, was copied considerable information about early day events in Hugo, including a history of the schools.

According to the story, the history of Hugo public schools dates back to January 1902, "when an adventurer by the name of Martin but who introduced himself as Prof. W.D. Hoffman of Pennsylvania, struck town. He had been advised by federal school authorities to come to Hugo and see if he could work up interest in school matters."

Hoffman started the school in a little building on what now is Duke street, according to the Husonian story. It first was a subscription school and the man glibly talked of establishing a college within a few months.

"It afterwards came to the knowledge of Supervisor Ballard (not otherwise identified in the story) that Hoffman, or Martin, had stolen a diploma from a man named Hoffman who was a graduate of the State Normal of Pennsylvania."

The imposter had been granted a certificate in the Choctaw Nation upon the strength of this diploma and when he found his graft had exploded, he left town in a great hurry. The school was continued by Miss Mamie Smith, who later married C.O. Shull and is the mother of C.G. Shull Jr., still a resident of Hugo. Several of her grandchildren also live here.

The present school system was [unreadable] by the municipal government and was supported by a tax of ten mills voted at a special election held

during the early part of the R.L. Jones administration as mayor.

At this election who was chosen the first school board, one member of which, R.M. Pyle, still is living and a resident of Hugo. Other members of the original board were Dr. B.W. Caldwell, Red Thomas, E.L. DeWitt, R.L. Weddington and G.W. Herndon.

Doctor Caldwell was elected board president and Mr. Thomas was chosen secretary. The board employed as their first superintendent Prof. W.C. Taylor, his term being 1904-05. Rest of the faculty was S.P. Hendricks, principal; Miss Warner Hill, the former Miss Mamie Smith who, in the meantime, had married Mr. Shull and Mrs. C.F. Weddington, who had died here only a few years ago.

The following year Prof. J.L. Clark was the superintendent; Professor Hendricks continued as principal. Others teaching were Mrs. J. I. Clark, Mrs. E.I. DeWitt, Mrs. Weddington, Miss Fannie Morris and Mrs. Shull.

There was no change in the school board personnel until the fall of 1906 when Doctor Caldwell resigned. I.W. White was elected to complete his term.

In December, the same year, J.B. Marcan, now a retired Frisco railroad employee living in Hugo and T. Garner were elected to the board, succeeding Mr. Pyle and Mr. White. They were retiring from the board. White having completed Doctor Caldwell's term and Pyle finishing his own. Red Thomas continued as secretary of the board, but the presidency went to E.I. DeWitt, an original board member.

In the newspaper taken from the Junior High school cornerstone the writer stated, "Considering the complete disorganization of the schools at the beginning, occasioned by the different teachers having taught in different parts of the country, using different books and having different methods of teaching, and the crowded and scattered conditions of the school — which was unavoidable — the board has accomplished wonders and the schools are the pride of every citizen."

At that time, the city had issued *[unreadable]* worth of school bonds for the large [red brick school building](#) which was dismantled a few years ago to provide site for the Hugo Junior High school.