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Old School Museum: The Old School Museum is located next to Parker Hall at 111 West Houston St. in Dayton and is open Saturdays from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.

Dayton Historical Society: The Society has reconvened its monthly meetings effective June 28, 2021 at Parker Hall at 6 P.M. (the last Monday of each month) for a historical program presented by guest speaker(s). The program is preceded by a Society business meeting and followed by refreshments.

Dayton History News

History of Dayton Public Schools – Part

In 1952, Dayton educator Catherine (Katy) Griffiths spoke at the dedication of the original Woodrow Wilson Jr. High School (on Houston St.) as follows:

“A study of the history of the Dayton Public School system reveals some interesting facts and gives one an insight to the growth and development of the community in which we live.

Records of the Dayton Public School before 1900 are inadequate but it was at about this time when Dayton took its first step toward the education of the children and built a school house where the Dayton saw mill formerly stood.

A teacher was secured to serve the few pupils who were able to attend.

Due to the bad roads on rainy days and the lack of a drainage system, water covered the ground around the school house a great part of the year and many students could not get to school.

Because of the unsatisfactory location of this school, a new school house was proposed to be found or built in the east part of town where drainage was better.

In 1901, a school site was bought from the Lowery Estate for \$90 with a down payment of \$10 and a note for \$80.

The location is the southeast corner of the old campus where the present

elementary building stands. This is the land bounded by Hwy 90, Main Street, Houston Street, and Cleveland Street.

A house on this lot served as the second school building and two teachers were employed at that time.

In 1907, the school became independent by a vote of the people. A two-story brick building was erected, the present east end of the elementary building.

This building served the community until 1924, but during this time additional class rooms were required to take care of the increase in enrollment.

To provide more rooms, in 1918, the second story, which was originally an auditorium, was made into class rooms.

The students who graduated that time held their baccalaureate and commencement exercised in the Baptist and Methodist churches.

In 1918, the district was enlarged by Special Act of the 35th Legislature under House Bill No. 55. This increased the valuation of the property a great deal.

The west end of the present elementary school was opened in the fall of 1924 and served as a high school building until spring of 1928.”

(speech continued – Part II)

History of Dayton Public Schools – Part II

“In 1927 by Special Act of the 39th Legislature under House Bill No. 313 the district was again enlarged to its present size of 243.22 square miles.

Consolidation with Linwood District No. 8, Greenville District No. 9, and Myrtle Ridge District No. 23 at this time increased the valuation to 2 ½ million dollars. (Real Estate \$1,826,185 and Personal Property - \$692,043).

Of the 12 small schools in the three districts added, only five of them remained open for several years. They were: Dugat, Greenville, Simmons Bottom, Myrtle Ridge, and Wolf Island schools.

None of these schools are in operation now, but students from all of these centers are transported to school in town by bus. The scholastic population at the time of consolidation was 953.

In March 1928, when another school, the present Jr. High, was put into use, a day of moving was declared. This gave the girls and women teachers a holiday while the boys and men teachers moved the furniture and put everything in place.

Another great step was taken when the gymnasium on the old campus was opened in 1936. In 1941-42 the band hall and vocational agriculture shop were added to this system.

It was at this same time that the first two brick buildings were joined and this intervening link added a few class rooms and a cafeteria to the system.

The cafeteria opened in February 1942 with Mrs. J. W. Baker as its manager and she served it successfully ever since.

The growth of the cafeteria which is now housed in the former Vocational Agriculture shop, as of this year, is easily seen from the number of students served there daily.

Approximately 560 meals have been served each day this year. As compared with 445 per day two years ago.

Banquets, special luncheons, and other entertainments are also prepared by Mrs. Baker and her staff of workers in the cafeteria.

The last structure built in this system needs no explanation as to its adequacy and usefulness to the students and community as well.

In discussing the growth of the buildings, I think it is also interesting to note the growth in other fields of the school system. With the opening of the first school only seven grades were taught.

Mr. Hill, who was enthusiastic about adding a High School was met with opposition during his first two years, however, in his third year, 1914, the school system was enlarged through the 10th grade.

The eleventh grade was added later in 1918 under Mr. E. K. Barden. The present system of 12 grades was put into effect in 1940 under Mr. Miller.

The valuation of the district during the past few years shows a steady increase with the 1951 and 1952 years

The real estate valuation of this year (1952) is \$11,387,700 and the personal property is \$2,236,665 making a total of \$13,624,365.”

(speech continued – Part III)

History of Dayton Public Schools – Part III

“The Parent Teacher Association was organized in the year 1916 with Mr. J. D. Spear serving as its first president. The value of this organization has been of great important in the growth of the school.

At one time, in the early 20’s, when it appeared that the school would not be able to run for more than 8 months, the P.T.A. worked hard and diligently to make enough money to pay one-half the salaries of the teachers for the ninth month of the year and the faculty donated two weeks of their own time.

Many purchases of importance to the school, such as the piano on this stage, have been made by this organization.

Today (1952) we boast of a faculty that has 42 members, including a Superintendent, in the white school, and 14 in the colored school. I would like to list for you some additional significant and interesting facts:

- 1934 – admitted to Southern Assn. of Secondary Schools.
- 1935 – Commercial Dept. established.
- 1935 – Lighted football field added.
- 1935 – Home Economics Dept. began.
- 1936 – First band director employed.
- 1939 – Band trip was made to Florida.
- 1939 – Travel Club approved and a trip of 33 people including students, teachers, and parents was made to the west coast in the summer of 1940.
- 1941 – Speech and Drama Dept. started.
- 1944 – Visual aids introduced.
- 1945 – Choral work began.
- 1947 – Safety education was added.
- 1947 – Summer recreation program started.”

About Speaker Katy Griffiths



Catherine Caroline Harbeck-Griffitts (1904-1976) was born 6 July 1904 in Davenport, Iowa to parents Otto Frederick Harbeck (1879-1955) and Clara Catherine “Carrie” Lamp-Harbeck (1876-1923).

She was the eldest of 3 daughters. Her younger sisters were Clara Melinda Harbeck-Scott (1906-1997) and Helen Mabel Harbeck-White (1909-2002).

Although Ms. Katy’s mother was born in America (Walcott, Iowa), her father and both her maternal and paternal grandparents were all born in Germany.

Katy’s husband was William (Bill) M. Griffitts (1906-1978) – son of Warren Smith Griffitts (1866-1946) born in Colorado County, TX and Frances “Fannie” Brownson (1876-1938) born in Lavaca County, TX.

Catherine, husband William and his parents are all buried at the Old Liberty City Cemetery. Ms. Katy’s parents are both buried at Forest Park Cemetery in Houston.



Katy Griffiths
Rice University 1927