

An Application for an Official Texas Historical Marker for
WOOSTER COMMON SCHOOL NO. 38
Baytown, Texas
(Replacement Marker for No. 10806, 1990)

By Trevia Wooster Beverly
and presented to the Harris County Historical Commission

I. CONTEXT

Wooster, Texas

Wooster, Texas was founded by Quincy Adams Wooster in 1893 on Scott's (aka Scott) Bay in eastern Harris County, midway between Lynchburg and Goose Creek. From 1894 until 1914 Wooster had its own post office. Until the 1950s, it was a pristine rural community, with its own school, a church, and several businesses when it was incorporated into the city of Baytown. Most of it is gone now, its homes and businesses having been devastated by Hurricanes Carla (1961) and Alicia (1983), followed by extensive subsidence, and later property acquisitions by Exxon.

Along Scott's Bay, with what would become known as Market Street, Q. A. Wooster platted the town of Wooster and subdivided it into home sites. Some were subdivided into acre lots and became known as Wooster Heights in the north section. When the 1930 census was taken, seventy-five families were recorded in Wooster Village. During the World War II years the population greatly increased due to its proximity to the Humble Oil & Refinery (now Exxon) and the Humble docks.

While the Wooster Heights area and the much later subdivision known as Lakewood is still intact, Wooster proper is practically gone. As homes were bought out, Exxon did not immediately remove them but left them to deteriorate. "Exxon hopes that by purchasing and demolishing these homes it can expand its so-called "greenbelt," a buffer zone of grass and other vegetation between its giant Baytown refinery and the homes nearby. Through the voluntary program, Exxon has purchased about 90 percent of the roughly 700 homes — mostly in the Wooster area, including Ashby Street and John A Street. Now it has set its sights on the eastern half of Shreck. About half of the houses are set to be sold within the year, a company spokesman said."¹ At this writing, all the properties Exxon has purchased to date have been cleared of buildings and debris. Along Wooster Street for example, the property on which the homes once

owned by John L. Wooster and several of his children stood were in the Exxon buyout. According to the Harris County Appraisal District site, only two individuals currently own property on Wooster Street. Along John A Street, individuals own two parcels; Exxon owns the rest. Arbor Street is on the west fringe and is mostly intact, as is North Street on the north side of Wooster proper and the Wooster Heights boundary. Exxon began the purchase of the remaining property on Arbor Street in August 2010. An 1898 house has been donated to the Baytown Historical Preservation Association² and will be moved to the Republic of Texas Park to be restored and used as their principal office and research facility for the Baytown Historical Preservation Association. This will enable another historical structure destined for the wrecking ball to be saved.

The Wooster schoolhouse is one of the very few remaining graces of the once-active community of Wooster. Wooster Common School No. 38 is the oldest known existing one-room frame schoolhouse in Harris County. It served the families along Scott's Bay, and in the town of Lynchburg. After it was abandoned and scheduled to be torn down, it was moved in 1986 to the present site at the Republic of Texas Plaza to serve as a living museum.

Schools in 19th Century Texas

Mirabeau B. Lamar is credited as the "Father of Texas Education" because of his 1830 proposal that the Congress establish a system of education in setting aside land for public schools and two universities.³ Lamar listed public education as the highest priority of government in his 1838 second inaugural speech, but not until 1845 with the establishment of a Special School Fund would a system of general education be implemented.⁴ After Texas joined the Union the Permanent School Fund was established by the School of Law in 1854.⁵

Prior to the mid-1800s, Texas schools were often provided by the fraternal order of Masons.⁶ In 1877, the Texas legislature gave the county commissioners' court the option of establishing a separate office of County Superintendent of Schools.

The era of the "community school system" evolved in Texas until the School Law of 1884 reestablished the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and charters for common school districts began to be granted. The biennial report of the state superintendent showed there were 10,169 rural common schools operating in the state for the school year 1904-1905.⁷

The Harris County Department of Education (HCDE)⁸ was founded in 1889 with approximately 900 students enrolled in the more than fifty common school districts in Harris County. This was the time of the one-room, one-teacher school.⁹ This agency was a new concept for administering free public schools and was responsible for oversight of the county's schools. Most of them were in unincorporated areas and residents came together to provide buildings, furniture and books, and HCDE's five-member board was responsible for hiring and paying teachers, establishing rules and duties for teachers, purchasing library books and contracting for buildings and furnishings.¹⁰ Families purchased their children's books, slate boards and slate pencils.¹¹ A single teacher in an "open classroom" concept taught all the children, usually grades one through five. The curriculum included arithmetic, reading, writing, and spelling. In this era of the one-room schoolhouse, students were also taught penmanship and hygiene. The exceptional teacher would often bring in other subjects such as history and geography, and some would introduce their students to poetry and music. Light came through the windows or from grease lamps or candles, and bathrooms were outdoor privies. Children brought their lunches from home.

The idea was that these schools be within walking distance of the children's homes. In this era, the one room schoolhouse was not isolated. Rather, they were also community centers of social activity.

. In May 1945, 167 Texas counties still reported county superintendents, but in 1978, the state legislature terminated state financial support for the office.¹²

II. OVERVIEW

Quincy Adams Wooster of Monona County, Iowa visited Texas in 1891 as a Traveling Correspondent for the *Monona County Democrat*. He was so impressed with this part of Texas that he went home to prepare his family for the move. His farm was sold at auction on Tuesday, October 20, 1891.¹³ With his business partner, Willard D. Crow, also from Iowa, Mr. Wooster purchased thousands of acres of land along Scott's Bay.¹⁴ He immediately began to advertise land for sale;¹⁵ Wooster and Crow continued to purchase and sell land through 1894.¹⁶ On January 20, 1893, he had the town of Wooster surveyed and platted,¹⁷ and named the streets. Weaver Avenue was name for Gen. James B. Weaver (Greenback party nominee) who he supported for president in 1880. Steinman Street was named for his son-in-law, Steve Steinman;

Shreck Avenue for another son-in-law, William A. Shreckengaust, and Crow Road for his friend and business partner, Williard D. Crow. The road, on which the old Rundell-Wooster home stood, was named Mapleton after the town where he lived before coming to Texas.

The next year, Wooster had its own post office.¹⁸ Quincy Wooster retained the John Rundell plantation,¹⁹ located on the western shore of Scott's Bay, for his private home.²⁰

Junius Brown was one of the early settlers to arrive from Iowa between May 29 and July 14, 1894.²¹ He settled on land in Wooster, part of the original James Strange Survey, overlooking Scott's Bay.

Active in school matters in Iowa and having children to educate, Q. A. Wooster immediately began correspondence to get a school. On May 13, 1894, he wrote his daughter Nellie in Iowa: *"I fully believe this coast country has a bright and prosperous future, and that I made no mistake in investing here. – Our school business seems to hang fire but I think we will pretty soon build a house. I have had some correspondence with the Co Supt but find he don't know much about this country on the bay – the last legislature [1893] made an entire revision of the school law and created the office of Co Supt – so all is somewhat new. But upon looking over the law I find it quite liberal and in some respects superior in my opinion to the Iowa law."*²²

In order to ask Commissioners Court to approve a school for Wooster, a schoolhouse needed to be in place to accept the children. Common knowledge throughout the community has credited Q. A. Wooster as the architect, and construction was accomplished by his son, John L. Wooster, his sons-in-law, Steven Steinman and William A. Shreckengaust, as well as Junius Brown's son and son-in-law, Bert Brown and Wesley Ernest Crow, all family related.

Architectural Description

Cypress was chosen for the frame and exterior siding and long leaf heart pine for the interior. The building had one window and a door on the front wall, and four windows on each side of the building. A riser, or stage, was at the north end where the slate board was located behind the teacher's desk.

Junius Brown donated 7/10 of an acre for the schoolhouse, near his own home at the corner of what was Market Street Road (later Bayway Drive) and First Street (later Arbor Street).²³

On October 8, 1894, Mr. Wooster wrote to his daughter Nellie, about the death of his young son, Elmer, saying that he had walked home from school "about a mile and a half..."

Another letter written by Elmer Wooster's older brother, John L. Wooster, gives more details but again repeats that young Elmer had "walked home from school."

On April 9, 1895, a petition for a school district to be approved was presented to the Commissioners Court.²⁴ It directed that "School District No. 17 be divided and School District No. 38 established. Scott [Scott's] Bay to the place of beginning so as to include the town of Lynchburg."²⁵

The Commissioners Court ordered, on June 13, 1895, an election for "Saturday the 25th day of June at the school house in said district no. thirty-eight. . . ." A newspaper account of the election was published in the *Galveston Daily News*, stating "A petition of Q. A. Wooster and others to have an election to see whether a district school tax of 20 cents on the \$100 should be levied was granted and election ordered for June 22, and Q. A. Wooster, W. D. Crawford [W.D. Crow], and W. A. Scheckengaust [Shreckengaust] appointed judges."²⁶ Other elections were ordered to elect trustees and to levy taxes. The tax passed by a vote of 5-0.²⁷ The first elected school board consisted of Quincy A. Wooster, Junius Brown, and John Wesley Crow.²⁸

On July 29, 1895 Harris County Department of Education census taker Mr. S.T. Sikes stated, "District No. 38. Wooster. *This district is in the extreme end of the County, located on a beautiful bay. They have a good frame building and the patrons have voted a local tax for supplementing the State funds, and the school is fairly well equipped with good furniture and apparatus.*"

In 1919 the Goose Creek School District was established and Common School District No. 38 was included. At this time, it served first through seventh grades.²⁹ David G. Burnet Elementary School opened in 1930 and children from first through sixth grades attended. The little schoolhouse closed and reopened several times. In 1937 it was moved to the new school and used as a classroom, lunchroom, and music room. At one time it was also used on Sunday afternoons for Sunday School lessons for the Wooster area children,³⁰ and continued to be used as a voting place until the 1930s.

In 1980, the Wooster Schoolhouse was retired permanently. It was acquired and relocated to the Republic of Texas Plaza in 1986, and restored. Desks and other items were donated by members of the Wooster, Brown and Crow families. In 2006, the building was acquired by the Baytown Historical Preservation Association and is part of a "living museum" complex, and used for tours of schoolchildren and the general public.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Wooster school is an original historical example of the era of the one-room, one-teacher school. Believed to be the oldest existing one-room frame schoolhouse in Harris County, this structure served the community as Common School District No. 38 until it became part of the Goose Creek Independent School District in 1919. It served first through seventh grades. The schoolhouse, within walking distance of the children's home, also served as a community center of social activity with box suppers, spelling bees, student plays and other entertainment, and served as a voting place. The building was heated by a wood-burning stove, and without running water; outdoor "privies" were used.

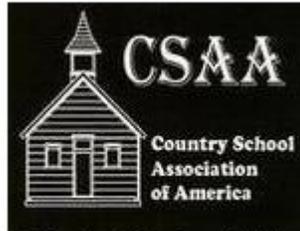
The genesis of this school originated with New Englander Quincy Adams Wooster, who settled on the western shore of Scott's Bay area in the fall of 1891. Having been active in school affairs in Iowa, he approached the Harris County Commissioners to establish a school for the children of the Wooster area and set out to see that it was well equipped.

Junius Brown, who also came from Iowa, donated the land. John L. Wooster, Steve Steinman, William A. Shreckengaust, Bert Brown, and Wesley E. Crow constructed the schoolhouse in 1894. The first elected school board consisted of Quincy A. Wooster, Junius Brown, and John Wesley Crow.

David G. Burnet Elementary School opened in 1930 and children from first through sixth grades attended. The little Wooster schoolhouse was closed and reopened several times. In 1937 it was moved to the new school and used at various times as classroom, lunchroom, and music room. At one time it was also used on Sunday afternoons for Sunday School lessons for the Wooster area children, and continued to be used as a voting place until the 1930s.

In 1980, the Wooster Schoolhouse was closed as an educational facility for a final time. In 1986, the building was moved to the Republic of Texas Plaza and restored. As part of a "living history museum" complex, the schoolhouse is used for tours by the third grade schoolchildren of the entire Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District. Each student is given a period slate board and chalk to take part in an "arithmetic lesson." Other schools also use the complex for field day trips, as well as Scouts and other groups. The complex is open to the general public.

In 2010 the County Schools of America Association recognized the Baytown Historical Preservation Association for its restoration and preservation accomplishment. The Wooster Common School No. 38 It is one of only four in Texas that the Association has recognized.³¹



Wooster School on CSAA
National Schoolhouse Registry



WOOSTER COMMON SCHOOL
DISTRICT NO. 38
On original site in Wooster, circa 1913.
© Baytown Historical Preservation
Association.

Current site at the Republic of Texas Plaza,
Baytown.
© Baytown Historical Preservation
Association.

Additional information about the Baytown Historical Preservation Association and the Wooster Schoolhouse, including interior photos, can be found at <http://baytownhistory.org/home.html>

The Wooster Schoolhouse is architecturally and historically significant, because it is the only remaining example of a 19th-century one-room frame schoolhouse indigenous to Harris County. It is in excellent condition, and is currently used for educational purposes. Both its original site and its second location, at David G. Burnet Elementary School, are now part of the ExxonMobil refinery complex, and most of the surrounding context, the area know as the Wooster community, served by the school has similarly been lost to the refinery. It is safe to say that, had it not been moved, it would not now be in existence as a teaching aid for our 21st century children.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

Additional information about the Baytown Historical Preservation Association and the Wooster Schoolhouse can be found at <http://baytownhistory.org/home.html>

¹ "Exxon buying homes for greenbelt," Baytown Sun, April 19, 2007. The photograph that accompanied this article showed the area where the Wooster School and David G. Burnet Elementary School once stood.

² <http://baytownhistory.org/>

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- ³ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Mirabeau B. Lamar," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/LL/fla15.html> (accessed June 11, 2009).
- ⁴ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Permanent School Fund," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/khp1.html> (accessed June 1, 2010).
- ⁵ Thad Sitton and Milam C. Rowold, *Ringling the Children In, Texas Country Schools* (Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1987).
- ⁶ The Cedar Bayou Masonic Lodge No. 321, A.F. & A.M. opened its hall July 7, 1876 and donated quarters on the bottom floor for the first public school in Harris County east of the San Jacinto River. Marker No. 10626 (1970).
- ⁷ Sitton and Rowold.
- ⁸ Trevia Wooster Beverly, application narrative for the Harris County Department of Education, Marker No.13042 (2005).
- ⁹ *Harris County Department of Education 1889-1989* souvenir program. George M. Crowson, Superintendent.
- ¹⁰ Souvenir program.
- ¹¹ The Texas Textbook Law providing free textbooks for all Texas school children was passed during Governor William P. Hobby's term, 1918 to January 1921.
- ¹² *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "County Superintendent of Schools," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/muc12.html> (accessed June 11, 2009).
- ¹³ Handwritten copy of notice of "Auction Sale" in possession of great-granddaughter, Trevia Wooster Beverly, Houston.
- ¹⁴ Harris County, Texas: portions of the Nathaniel Lynch League, August 19, 1823, vol 2 p. 6; James Strange Survey February 24, 1824 vol. 1 p. 175 and vol. 2 p. 520, and the William Hillbus Survey vol. 2 p. 116; Harvey Whiting, vol. 1 p. 267, and William Scott Aug. 19, 1824 vol. 1 p 167, vol. 2 p. 520. Abstract of Title from Mexican Government to Wooster Estate settlement in possession of Trevia Wooster Beverly.
- ¹⁵ *Chicago Drovers Journal, Kansas City Star, South Omaha Drovers Journal, and the La Porte (TX) Chronicle Weekly*. Trevia Wooster Beverly has copies of some of these advertisements.
- ¹⁶ A portion of land purchased east of the San Jacinto River in the Nathaniel Lynch League was surveyed by Tipton Walker August 1843. Recorded Harris County Probate Record F, pp. 244, 245.
- ¹⁷ Whitty, Surveyor. Recorded February 3, 1893 at 8:30 a.m., Harris County, Texas Deed Vol. 65, p. 275. No. 30154 Map of Wooster, Harris Co, Texas. Harris County Deed Records Vol. 65, pp. 874, 875.
- ¹⁸ Willard D. Crow appointed first postmaster at Wooster on March 29, 1894.
- ¹⁹ Original owner and builder, John Rundell, arrived here from Mississippi in 1841, purchasing the first 480 acres from Fannie Lynch, widow of Nathaniel Lynch. Located on what was later known as Brownwood Subdivision (no connection to the Brown family from Iowa), it had to be torn down after Hurricane Carla. Eventually 375 families in the Brownwood subdivision were displaced and in 1991 the peninsula became the Baytown Nature Center.
- ²⁰ Biography of John L. Wooster, Q. A. Wooster's son, *The Historical Encyclopedia of Texas*, (published for the Texas Historical Society, 1934), p. 528.
- ²¹ On May 29, 1894, C.W. Iddings in Mapleton, Iowa, writes a letter to Junius Brown in Ute, Iowa. On July 14, 1894, C.W. Iddings in Mapleton, Iowa., writes a letter to Junius Brown in Wooster, Texas. These letters are in the possession of Wybra Anne Wooster Holland, Baytown, Texas.
- ²² This letter and others are in the possession of Trevia Wooster Beverly.
- ²³ The land was formally deeded to Harris County (John G. Todd, County Judge) October 5, 1896. Harris County Deed Records vol. 94, p. 46.
- ²⁴ Harris County Commissioners Court Records. Vol. G, p. 225.

²⁵ Harris County Commissioners Court Records Vol. G, p. 237-239 for Friday, May 19, 1895, calling for all school districts to hold elections on the first Saturday in June 1895, listed all the districts and post offices. District No. 17 was White Settlement, Crosby P.O., and No. 38 was listed as Wooster P.O., Q.A. Wooster, J.W. Crow, and S. Steinman; voting place Wooster School House.

²⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, Fri, 14 Jun 1895, p3 c3. THE DAY AT HOUSTON. COUNTY COMMISSIONERS.

²⁷ Harris County Commissioners Court Records, Vol. G, p. 225, 226.

²⁸ Harris County Commissioners Court Records, Vol. G, pp. 454, 446.

²⁹ 8th grade on was achieved at La Porte. Walter Brown, Junius Brown's son went to the 8th grade there.

³⁰ "Wooster Baptist Church History," undated article, Wooster Baptist Church files. Mrs. Belle Roden was the Sunday School teacher.

³¹ <http://www.countryschoolassociation.org/>