

Take a trip back in education history while enjoying the Hill Country scenery

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Day Trips: Gillespie County Country Schools

By Gerald E. McLeod, Fri., May 22, 2020



Photos by Gerald E. McLeod

Driving trails to the historic schools of **Gillespie County** follow scenic backroads around **Fredericksburg** and provide a peek into rural Texas education.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s German farmers organized one-room "neighborhood" schools. At its peak, there were 44 rural schools in and around Fredericksburg. In 1949, the Legislature consolidated independent schools into districts, which forced the schools to close.

Some schoolhouses were preserved as community centers; others were sold and allowed to fade into history.



The **Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools** (www.historicschools.org) maintains a history of a dozen of the schools and a map to 17. Once a month, before the coronavirus pandemic, former students would hold open houses at selected schools.

The self-driving tour map on the Friends' website is broken down into four trails. Each trail takes around 2.5 hours, depending on stops. All of the schools are closed to visitors, but most allow access to the grounds and peeking through the windows.



The construction of the schoolhouses ranged from stout limestone walls to tin siding now streaked with rust. The schools were originally heated by wood-burning stoves, drew water with hand pumps, had outhouses, and didn't have electricity. The **Willow City School** is the only two-story schoolhouse.

Generally, one teacher instructed grades one through eight. German was the first language for many of the students, but the classes were often multicultural. The **Meusebach Creek School** had five students whose parents were freed slaves. **President Lyndon Johnson** attended the **Williams Creek (Albert) School**.

The four driving trails converge in Fredericksburg but can be joined at other points. Each trail includes three or four historic schoolhouses and miles of Hill Country scenery.

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