

Discover the Gillespie County Schoolhouses

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A Fredericksburg-area non-profit works to preserve Gillespie County schoolhouses, nostalgic pieces of our region's heritage



The historic Meusebach Creek School was built during the 1930s and reportedly counted among its pupils children of freed slaves, making it perhaps among the first integrated schools in the American South. Photo credit: Pamela Price.

Story by Shawna Holly

Remember Laura Ingalls Wilder’s delightful autobiographical books about life on the frontier—and the television series they inspired, *Little House on the Prairie*? The stories centered on her childhood experiences on a rural family farm and in the one-room schoolhouse where she received her education.

In the old days, those one-room schools, or “country schools,” housed anywhere from just a few to fifty or more students, in various grade levels. Learning was a community effort, with older students often helping younger students with their lessons. Schools were not only

used for education but also as community centers and meeting spaces for town events.

Indeed, as the Wilder's books and the old television series revealed, those country schools were an integral part of American culture and social activity. At one point there were 200,000 such structures scattered across America. By 2014, however, that number reportedly had dwindled to just 200.

Yet a group of enterprising Hill Country folks have taken it upon themselves to give their own country schools new life. They're also working to transform the buildings back into the community and cultural centers that they once were. No longer dilapidated and neglected, twelve historic Gillespie County schoolhouses have been brought back to life as modern meeting places for community groups and 4-H clubs, performances spaces for local actors and actresses, and venues for wedding celebrations.

All thanks to the Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools.

The non-profit organization is comprised of over 500 members who describe themselves collectively as "former students of the closed schools and members of the community, interested in preserving the traditions of the schools, the community clubs, and the history of Gillespie County for future generations".

Intrigued by the organization's efforts to protect and preserve this piece of our region's heritage, we reached out to ask a few questions of the group's director at large, Jane Woellhof.

"In 2002, after a change in Texas law allowed historical schoolhouses in Texas to be moved from school district control to the County Commissioners Court, we took on long-term leases for the schools," wrote Woellhof in an email interview. "[We] must maintain, repair, and utilize the schoolhouses in a way to enhance the rural communities and to preserve their history."

It's a tall order for the group, keeping the old Gillespie County schoolhouses viable.

"Owning a house requires constant repair and upkeep," said Woellhof. "Leasing twelve historical schoolhouses is like maintaining twelve homes, requiring never-ending repairs and a watchful eye. Some schools have additional buildings, so the number under our care is actually twenty-one. You instantly see the need for fundraising and requests for grants!"

The group also seeks to keep the buildings accessible to old-timers and visitors to the area.

"We publish cycling trail and driving trail brochures so that people can tour the schools, by bicycle or car. Each of the four quadrant-tours are described by approximate length in miles, terrain, and difficulty for the cyclists and by estimated travel time for the drivers. The trail includes the twelve schools under our care plus five more that are privately owned or

are owned by the city of Fredericksburg, [Pioneer Museum](#), or [LBJ National Historical Park](#). We also host an annual fundraising Open House each April and a Bake Sale each December.“

They also recently launched a series of [rotating Open House events](#).

“These are hands-on learning events based upon activities that were common in country schools. Two that we’re excited about are an herbarium notebook and wildflower pressing event at the Willow City school that should take place at the peak of wildflower season next spring and a short school play at the Cherry Spring school to tell the story of their 28’ x 10’ painted school stage and curtain.”

It all sounds perfectly delightful, and not unlike the kind of school social that might have brought the Ingalls family to the schoolhouse for a bit of old-fashioned fun.

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Shawna Holly is a Boerne wife, mom, and blogger who shares her family’s adventures through life and the Texas Hill Country at [SowingSeedsTx.com](#).

Explore More

You’ll find detailed historical information for each of the Gillespie County schoolhouses on the [Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools website](#). You can also learn more through [this short video](#). Naturally, as the group is a non-profit organization, your [donations are welcome](#).