



# ALONG THE ROAD

*One Room Schoolhouses*

GILLESPIE COUNTY, TEXAS

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This page: Crabapple school exterior.  
Opposite: Rheingold School and Community Center furnace.  
Previous page: Interior desks and blackboard at Crabapple school.

# “ THE DAYS OF RIDING A HORSE TO SCHOOL MAY BE LONG GONE, BUT MANY RESIDENTS OF TEXAS’ GILLESPIE COUNTY CARRY VIVID MEMORIES OF THEIR CHILDHOOD IN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES. ”

These schoolhouses, built by German immigrants, maintain their passion for learning and commitment to education today.

Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools (FoGCCS), a nonprofit, work hard preserving these priceless schools. Their website and trail guide feature a historical trail of seventeen country schools, twelve schools managed by the FoGCCS.

Just outside Fredericksburg, peek inside limestone and log cabin schoolhouses built in the mid to late 19th century, many with original desks, floors and textbooks. Enjoy the ride skirting across rolling hills with dozens of streams and grazing deer.

**Crabapple School (Trail A)** Pulling up to Crabapple School, a golden glow falls gently across a small village of limestone buildings. Inside the gate are two schools, a community hall and a teacherette (a small home for the teacher). One of the most stunning builds is the St. John Lutheran Church, built in 1897.

The school opened in 1878, and ten years later, another room was added. At the turn of the 20th century, the community added a new building that served as a schoolroom and church. There was only one teacher, and at the height of enrollment there were 40 students.

Inside the classroom, the wooden desks show minimal wear, a scar or two here and there. Each owns a shelf for books, inkwells and a folding seat. Period books stand at attention on the teacher’s desk while a generous but faded chalkboard stretches across the room.

Mable Schneider Wilke has vivid memories of her school days at Crabapple. “I read every book we had in the library. And I especially enjoyed playing softball. We had a league and visited and hosted other rural country schools on Friday afternoons to play softball.”

**Pecan Creek School (Trail A)** Not far away is Pecan Creek School, where Ruby Clark had the privilege of attending for four years, first through

fourth grade, when the school closed. Her oldest siblings attended Pecan Creek until 8th grade. It was a one-room schoolhouse with two outhouses and an attached cement slab that served as a stage.

Ruby’s older brother and sister rode a horse to school, while Ruby cruised in a Hudson driven by her 12-year-old-brother. “My brother had to crank the car while somebody put their foot on the clutch. It would fire up, and he would run and jump in the car. We were the first ones at school, and I would build a fire so when the teacher got there the classroom was very warm.”



**Willow City and Community Club (Trail B)** The Willow City School began as a one-room log cabin, then a two-story frame built in 1890. Two rooms served as classrooms, while the second floor hosts the pride of the community. A vintage, hand-painted banner is stretched across a generous-sized stage sharing the Hill Country’s finest with a stream coursing across a green pasture and the emerald hills in the background.

Frances Heimann, along with her mother and grandfather, rode horseback to Willow City School.

Each row was a different grade level, and Frances recalls how the younger students often learned a good bit from listening to the more advanced lessons.

“When I first went there, they still had wood stoves in the building, and during the winter our teacher would grill our sandwiches over the coals for a hot lunch.”

Patsy Hauptrief began school as the only student in first grade, so she was taught lessons from first and second grade. “I liked jump rope, baseball, flying our homemade kites and pretending we were participating in a rodeo as Willow City had a roping arena in the back area of the school grounds.”

**Cherry Springs (Trail B)** In 1885, Cherry Springs started as a two-room schoolhouse with grades first through ninth, and added a pavilion in

1935. Rosalee Sagebiel's grandparents were among some of the early Germans that moved to Fredericksburg. She attended Cherry Springs up until high school.

"I knew very little English, and I just learned it because the books were all in English. In the lower grades, we were very obsessed with our half of the desk. There was a line drawn on the top of the desk, the shelf and the floor, you dare not move your stuff across it, and we would swat them if they crossed that line."

**Rheingold School (Trail B)** Weaving through the back roads, little has changed with canopies of oak trees hugging green pastures that stretch for miles and miles. One of the finer builds, Rheingold School, began its journey in 1873 on two acres donated by William Gold. Locals supplied most of the labor and materials for a log house, a wooden frame school and a pavilion. The school taught first through eighth grade, and at one time Rheingold had one teacher and 74 students.

Thanks to the FoGCCS group, the log cabin has gone through an impressive restoration. Both the exterior and interior bring to life stellar craftsmanship drawn from the German settlers. Inside, the walls feature layers of thick logs and limestone mixed with mortar. The exterior presents a

medley of geometric-shaped stones, much like a life-size jigsaw puzzle. Inside the wood frame building, a vintage heater joins the original walls and ceiling. Today it serves as a community center for locals and FoGCCS members.

**Cave Creek School (Trail B)** The Cave Creek one-room school gained its name from the natural vistas throughout the trail, in this case, a nearby creek complete with natural caves. Students rode horses or walked to school when it first opened in 1881. A larger school was built fifteen years later and boasts a slate-blue tin exterior complete with a historic plaque. The original wood stove sits inside, along with tables for meetings and events.

Sometime in the late 1920s or early 30s, a stunning stage and pavilion joined the campus hosting elaborate celebrations at the end of the school year. The children performed on stage with graduation in the afternoon. Evening meals followed with picnics, men barbequed and the families brought side dishes. Adults then put on a play with a dance to end the evening.

**Luckenbach School (Trail C)** One of the older facilities, Luckenbach



This page: Meusebach Creek classroom. Opposite left: Cave Creek school classroom. Opposite right top left: Flag flying in the classroom at Luckenbach School. Opposite right top right: Log walls in the Rheingold school teacherage. Opposite right bottom: Exterior view of the Rheingold teacherage.

School, sits on two acres along Grape Creek purchased from Peter Pehl for only \$4.00. The community built the initial 16 x 15-foot log cabin schoolhouse in 1855, then a limestone addition in 1881. In 1949 they added another teacher and classroom. At times the older students would help the younger ones with grammar and math. During recess they enjoyed playing dodge ball, drop the hankie and kick the can.

**Meusebach Creek School (Trail C)** Massive oaks hug winding roads en route to Meusebach Creek School, while the acreage resembles a finely manicured golf course with emerald greens set against a deep blue sky. Built in the 1930s, the school still holds a vintage flair. Inside, a soft light beams through a wall of windows falling gently across the chalkboard and original wood floors.

The FoGCCS did a fine job bringing the past back to life with a spread of vintage tests, textbooks, and student chalkboards. Look closely at the period artifacts featuring literature books, a third-grade math workbook and a fourth-grade language book. The teacher's desk and student's benches have the usual scrapes with minimal stains. But the kerosene heater is in excellent shape and still used today for the group's meetings. Take a close look on the teacher's desk at a detailed model of the original setup

of school life in the early 20th century.

Atlee Locke lived close by and walked to school. He attended Meusebach from 1945 to 1950 and can still recall his daily chores of sweeping the floors. "I remember the first two years I brought in wood for the stove, and then they put in a kerosene stove that still works today."

**Here to Stay** Every schoolhouse brings to light days of old, from schoolhouse chores to the annual stage productions. Thanks to The Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools, stories and life in one-room schoolhouses are here to stay. Five hundred members strong; many are former students and were prominent contributors in the making of this article. Huge thanks to Jim Lindley, chair of oral history and alumni of Cave Creek School, along with Jo Jacoby Jenschke, FoGCCS president and alumni of Nebgen School, for their time and devotion in sharing these incredible schoolhouses. The trail officially opened in April 2006 and is open year-round. To schedule a visit or tour, visit their website and contact the person in charge of the school. Pick up a map at the Fredericksburg Visitor's Center or visit the city's Pioneer Museum.

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