



Ela Hockaday (1875 - 1956)

Ela Hockaday was born March 12, 1875 to Thomas Hart Benton Hockaday (1835 – 1918) and Maria Elizabeth Kerr Hockaday (1838 – 1881) in Ladonia, Fannin County, Texas. She was the eighth of nine children and the youngest daughter born to the couple. Mr. Hockaday was born in Virginia but grew up in Maury County, Tennessee, southwest of Nashville. The couple married in Tennessee and began to raise their family there before first moving to Arkansas where he worked as a teacher before relocating to Texas prior to 1860. Once in Texas, Mr. Hockaday started a school. He was well educated and operated the school until he began to serve in the 6th Texas Cavalry during the Civil War. After the war, Mr. Hockaday seems to have mainly worked in farming his north Texas property.

The Fannin County Historical Commission has an extensive article on the interesting Hockaday family written by Laurine Pickard Garrison, the daughter of a later owner of the Hockaday property. Her fine article tells that Mr. Hockaday purchased about 287 acres of land in Fannin County in December, 1870 where he operated a farm and cotton gin. By then a number of the Hockaday adult children had established families of their own. His wife, Elizabeth died in 1881, after which Ela went to live with her older sister Emma in Bonham.

Ela was well educated, having attended school in Bonham, North Texas Normal College (now known as University of North Texas), Columbia University and University of Chicago. She began her teaching career in 1897 in Ladonia at the Sunshine School and later served as principal of Giles Academy and Jefferson Ward School in Sherman. She then taught at at two colleges in Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Normal and Oklahoma College for Women. She made the acquaintance in Oklahoma of Sarah B. Trent, another instructor, and the two took a break from teaching to buy a small farm near Falfurrias, Texas.

In 1913, Mrs. Garrison's article says, Ela Hockaday was contacted by telegram by Menter B. Terrill, her former instructor in Denton, Horatio Hearne Adams, Ruth Bower Lindsley and others to set up a college preparatory school for girls. A few years earlier, Terrill had come to Dallas and had established the Terrill School for Boys, one of the predecessor institutions of St. Mark's School of Texas. Adams and Mrs. Lindsley sponsored Ms. Hockaday's trip to Dallas for the meeting with the three and several interested parents. After they met, Ela Hockaday agreed to their

proposal and invited Sarah Trent, who is sometimes noted as a co-founder of the school, to join her. Ms. Hockaday interviewed several interested students at the downtown Oriental Hotel. Ms. Hockaday once said of Terrill, Adams and Lindsley, "They liked me, and I liked them. I stayed."

Sarah Basima Trent's obituary in the October 8, 1950 issue of the Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat tells more of her history. It stated that she had begun her teaching career in 1884 in a one room schoolhouse in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Her students included thirty Indian and two Anglo children. At age eighteen, she began to teach in the Creek Nation at a school that was held in the council house and later became principal of an orphanage there. She also served as superintendent of schools in Muskogee. After coming to Dallas and Hockaday, she remained there as a teacher and was connected to the school for the rest of her career. Her cousin Bess Trent was also a long time instructor at the school. When Sarah died, she was Hockaday's Dean Emeritus.

Terrill School for Boys was located at Peak and Swiss in Dallas and the first location of Hockaday was just around the corner, a former residence at 1206 Haskell Avenue. The two schools backed up to each other with their properties separated by a fence. Hockaday School for Girls began with ten students. After six years, the school had outgrown this location and in 1919 an announcement was made that it was going to relocate to a new brick building at Greenville Avenue and Belmont. Ms. Hockaday thanked six major benefactors of the school and the project: Charles Huff, Charles Kribs, Rufus Wilson Higginbotham, Mike H. Thomas, John T. Jones and Bryan T. Berry. Soon afterward, Ela invited a group of graduates to form an alumni association which still continues today.

The school consisted for many years as an upper and lower school as the enrollment continued to increase. In the late 1930s, a kindergarten and junior college program were added. Also during that decade, Ms. Hockaday was able to attract notable authors to come to the school including Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. In the 1940s, the first Board of Trustees was selected. In 1942, Ela cancelled her stock ownership and made a gift of her entire ownership interest to the school. She encouraged all the other shareholders to join her, which they did. The school became an independent not for profit entity governed by the Board of Trustees. In the 1940s, Ms. Hockaday also owned a small farm near White Rock Lake called Green Gates Farm. The students had outings there and also learned about farming and animal husbandry. The junior college continued in operation until the 1950s when it was decided that the school should go back to its original focus on the upper and lower schools. In 1952, the graduation speaker was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Her granddaughter Chandler Roosevelt was a student at the time. Over the years, there have been many future celebrities and daughters of well known families who have passed through the halls of the Hockaday School. Ms. Hockaday served continuously as Head of School (headmistress) until her retirement in that capacity in 1946, though she remained closely associated with the school for the rest of her life. At the time of her death, the enrollment was 425.

After her retirement, though no longer serving the school in an official capacity, Ms. Hockaday had the vision to move the school to a larger campus once again. However, the move to its current location in North Dallas was not completed until 1961. An obituary noted that she was active in the community. Her numerous contacts aided the funding of the school and its appeal to families locally and elsewhere. Ela was a member of the Dallas Philological Society, the Virgilian Society of America, the Dallas Woman's Club, the Texas Philosophical Society, and the Dallas Garden Club; she was a charter member of the Standards Literary Club.

She died on March 26, 1956. Her funeral service was held at First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, where she had been a member, and she was interred at Sparkman Hillcrest Memorial Park.

Sources:

Fannin County Historical Commission, Hockaday Homestead

Site: <https://www.fannincountyhistory.org/hockaday-homestead>

The Hockaday School: Campus

History: <https://www.hockaday.org/about/history/campus-history>

Hockaday Spring 2014 Magazine, "Hockaday

Founders": https://issuu.com/hockaday/docs/pages_from_sp2014mag-nonotes/28



Share this email with friends, invite them to visit our website at dallaspioneer.org, attend our meetings and join the group!

We have a number of upcoming events. Please check our [events page](#) page often and mark your calendars.

GET FUTURE POSTS BY MAIL

SUBSCRIBE

DONATIONS

The Dallas County Pioneer Association (DCPA) established in 1875 is a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization that operates on the generosity of people to take care of abandoned cemeteries and promote the history of Dallas County. It is operated by folks who have a passion for history and are volunteering their time and money.

Please consider giving to our mission by clicking the button below.

DONATE

Dallas County Pioneer Association | PO Box 12496 | Dallas, TX 75225 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!