

## Coker Cemetery History #34 – November 2017

by Bob Battaglia

At the Coker Cemetery Annual meeting held earlier this year, Butch Gerfers did a presentation on Coker School's 60th Anniversary at the current location on Heimer Road. He had previously given this presentation in 2015 at the request of the Coker PTA for the event. In the presentation, he included pictures of the school at the three locations:



It is believed that this was the first building used for the school until 1904 and also served as the church house and was located in Coker Cemetery.

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This wooden structure served as the second school from 1904 until it burned down in 1924 and was located across the Salado Creek from Coker Cemetery.



This brick building was completed in 1925 & later expanded. It was replaced by the campus on Heimer Road in 1954

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This building opened in 1954 and is how the school appeared in the early 1960's.

Below you'll find another glimpse back in time in Paula Allen's San Antonio Express-News article from June 18, 2017.

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## METRO

# Original Coker School served hero's kin

*My question is in reference to an old, three-room country elementary school by the name of Old Coker and its history. As far as I can guesstimate, it was close to where U.S. 281 and Wurzbach Parkway are today, but in 1955, it was out in the country. I was lucky enough to have attended the school in 1955-56. The principal, who also was my teacher, was a Mr. Fike. It had a small stable or barn where some students would ride in from local farms. At recess, we played around a creek that ran through the property. It was located in the recently created North East Independent School District. I rode the school bus from just inside Loop 13 at Vance Jackson Road for over an hour, as we picked up students from all the houses and farms. Any information you could provide would be greatly appreciated.*

Leopoldo Treviño

This was the third and last school serving an unincorporated community about 10 miles north of downtown San Antonio and thus far outside the city limits for most of its life. The Coker community grew up around the homestead of John "Jack" Coker, who came from South Carolina and fought in the Battle of San Jacinto, the deciding engagement in the Texas Revolution and the one we celebrate each year with Fiesta San Antonio.

For his service, Coker received 1,920 acres — a "first-



PAULA ALLEN

class headright," according to the Handbook of Texas entry on Coker, Texas — along the Salado Creek in 1841. His brothers Joseph and James followed and helped develop the settlement, eventually bounded by streets now known as Bitters Road, Nakoma Drive, San Pedro Avenue (later U.S. 281) and West Avenue.

Schooling children seems to have been informal during the first couple of decades.

"In the early days, school was taught in different parts of the community," apparently in an attempt at fairness "to equalize the distance children had to travel," says a history written for the 50th anniversary of NEISD, founded in 1955.

The teacher was paid by contributions from families — \$2 per child in 1861, says "The Coker School: 1862-1966," an uncredited history provided by NEISD. It's unclear how often that was paid. There were only about a dozen children attending at this time, says the history,



Courtesy photo

**The second Coker School, circa 1904, replaced a one-room school, which then became the teacher's residence, that was the first to serve the community founded by the Coker family.**

and since families could prorate tuition to subtract for absences, "One can estimate the meager salary paid the teacher for his services."

On land donated by the Coker family, a one-room red schoolhouse was built in the late 19th century on San Pedro Avenue. A two-story school, relocated across Salado Creek, replaced it around 1904, and the first school became the teacher's residence. Both of these buildings were lost to a fire Oct. 28, 1924, after which "A tent was erected so the children could finish the term," says the anniversary history.

The building you remember would have been the replacement completed in 1925 — originally "a two-room brick and hollow tile school," expanded in 1936 with a large room used as a library, a hallway and "two

indoor toilet rooms" with the school's first indoor plumbing.

With the city's growth trending northward, the number of students served by the school increased dramatically, from 80 students in 1936 to 140 in 1942. In 1949, the Coker school and six others were consolidated into a then-rural district that became NEISD in 1950. While figures for the 1950s aren't available, the community — no longer limited to the Cokers and their extended family — must have needed a school with more space. Coker School itself grew to 534 students by 1961.

"Additions were made and expansions undertaken to accommodate the growing population," says the anniversary history. "In 1954, the New Coker School was completed at its present site," with 12 rooms and

a cafeteria. The 1925 building was used for the fourth grade, says the 1966 history.

According to both histories, the principal when you attended was Gladys Sirdevan, who served in that position from 1950 to 1958 and went on to teach at Lee High School.

"New Coker" — that's Coker Elementary School at 302 Heimer Road — continued to grow as more new streets and housing were constructed around the campus. Renovations during the 1960s, '70s and '90s added classrooms, a new library, clinic, music rooms and computer technology.

"Sadly, none of the three older structures are in existence any longer," said Butch Gerfers, president of the Coker Cemetery Association. Gerfers attended the new school starting in 1958.

The Coker name also lives on in a street, Coker Loop, and the church, now Coker United Methodist at 231 E. North Loop Road, and the historic Coker Cemetery.

Anyone with memories or photographs of the old Coker School may share them with this column. All responses will be forwarded and may be published in a future column.

historycolumn@yahoo.com

Twitter: @sahistorycolumn

Facebook:

SanAntoniobistorycolumn