

Annie Webb Blanton of Denton County

Historical Narrative researched and written by Cerise Blair for 2011 Texas Historical Marker application for Denton County

**ANNIE WEBB BLANTON**  
**1870 -1945**

**I. CONTEXT**

Annie Webb Blanton began her 17 year teaching career at the North Texas State Normal College (now University of North Texas) in 1901, the same year the Texas legislature appropriated funding to establish the school as a state sponsored institution. The college had originally opened in 1890 as a private college, called Texas Normal College and Teacher Training Institution.<sup>1</sup> At that time it was located in temporary quarters on the northwest corner of the downtown square in Denton. In 1891, the first building was constructed at the present campus site at Hickory and Avenue B.<sup>2</sup> By 1901, under the leadership of President Menter B. Terrill, (President 1894-1901), North Texas State Normal College was established as a state school.<sup>3</sup> It had 781 students and by 1915, it had grown to 1,883 students.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of North Texas State Normal College was often attributed to William H. Bruce, president from 1906 to 1923. He was the first faculty member to possess an earned doctorate and was considered responsible “for laying the firm foundation on which the institution grew.”<sup>5</sup> By the end of Bruce’s tenure in 1923, the annual enrollment was 4,736, of which over two-thirds were summer school students. It was sixth in enrollment and third in size of faculty among all teacher-training institutions in the county, and was the largest in the southwestern U.S. In 1924, the legislature changed its name to North Texas State Teachers College.<sup>6</sup>

The North Texas State Normal College was the first of many normal schools in the state, primarily to train teachers, and also to augment the rising number of state universities and land grant colleges. The normal schools offered increased opportunities for students who wished to attend college and created a larger pool of faculty positions for aspiring professors. Blanton’s graduation from the University of Texas in 1901 coincided with this opportunity.<sup>7</sup>

When Blanton moved to Denton in 1901, the town had just over 4,000 residents. During the 17 years she lived there the town grew to almost double that size.<sup>8</sup> This small town, home of North Texas State Normal College, was also to become the home of a second state school. The Girls Industrial College, which was established in 1902, (later called the College of Industrial Arts and Texas State College for Women and now Texas Woman's University).<sup>9</sup>

## **II. OVERVIEW**

Annie Webb Blanton and her twin sister, Fannie, were born August 19, 1870, in Houston to Thomas Lindsey Blanton and Eugenia Webb Blanton. The family numbered seven children, four girls and three boys. Blanton and Fannie were the second and third born. Fannie died at age 12, the only sibling not living to maturity.<sup>10</sup> The family moved to LaGrange, Texas, (the childhood home of both Blanton's parents) where Blanton lived when her twin died and where she graduated high school.<sup>11</sup>

Blanton began her teaching career at age 17 in a one room school in Pine Springs, near Flatonia in Fayette County. In 1888 Blanton moved to Austin and became a teacher at Pease Elementary School, where she resided with relatives. In the evenings and summer, starting in 1890, she attended The University of Texas as a "special student" without credit for the courses she was permitted to take in the evenings and became a "regular" student her junior year. She graduated in 1899 with a Bachelor of Literature degree. Upon her graduation, she was promoted to the position of teacher of English at Austin High School.<sup>12</sup>

In 1901, Blanton was hired as a member of the North Texas Normal College faculty as a teacher of English. She held the rank of associate professor for her seventeen years in Denton from 1901-1918.

When Blanton first joined the North Texas teaching staff in 1901, 14 individuals comprised its first faculty; several had no college degrees, three held bachelor's and master's (Blanton was one of the three with a bachelor's, and one was a graduate of Yale. Eight of the 14 were women. From this group of women, Blanton developed a close circle of women friends, who influenced her personal and professional choices throughout her life. <sup>13</sup>

At the college, Blanton became a champion of gender unity, insisting that women prove their competence before being allowed equality, and used this philosophy to maintain generally cooperative relationships with her male colleagues, a characteristic which would become a key element to her future successes. <sup>14</sup>

From her association with the male faculty and administrators at the school she learned the value of affiliation and participation in statewide professional organizations: J. S. Kendall, president from 1901-1906, had been Texas' Superintendent of Public Instruction before coming to North Texas, and William H. Bruce, president of the college for almost all of the entire decade of 1910s, was a former president of the Texas State Teachers Association. <sup>15</sup> Both offices were later held by Blanton.

At the college, Blanton taught a full schedule of five English courses, which met five times each week, plus holding other administrative duties. She realized early on that a lack of proper English grammar education was a serious deficiency for the majority of the school's students, who were there to learn how to teach future teachers. She was the faculty assigned to administer the school's grammar examination to incoming students and saw the need for good textbooks. Between 1906 and 1910 she published three editions of *Supplemental Exercises in Punctuation and Composition*; and in 1909 she published *Review Outline and Exercises in English Grammar*, which became widely used in Texas and was used by other schools across the

country.<sup>16</sup> One-hundred – fifty schools in the state of New York adopted the book. In total, Blanton produced 37 works in 51 publications, representing 751 library holdings.<sup>17</sup>

She was held in high regard by the school's students and worked tirelessly in numerous school activities. Active in the women's Current Literature Club, she coached the debate team and established the *North Texas State Normal Journal* to aid students in developing publication skills. In 1908, the school yearbook, *The Yucca*, was dedicated to her in "respectful tribute to her justice, impartiality and interest in the students."<sup>18</sup>

Blanton resided in the immediate area surrounding the college. Several different references have been made regarding the actual location. An undated local brief from the *Record and Chronicle* reported "Miss Annie Webb Blanton was building a new modern \$5,000 ten-room home on the corner of Welch and Mulberry Streets. It is expected it will be completed in the early part of June."<sup>19</sup> A classified ad in a 1919 issue of the *Record and Chronicle* had her house and vacant lot listed for sale on West Hickory Street. The ad said to "apply at 52 Fry Street after 4 p.m. or old phone 477. Miss Annie Webb Blanton."<sup>20</sup> The above ad indicates she may have lived at one time on Fry Street.

From late June to mid July, 1913, Blanton was the subject of front page headlines in the *Record and Chronicle* when she was charged, arrested and jailed in what the headlines proclaimed as the Hickory Street "Lake" controversy. Blanton was charged for violating a city ordinance against obstruction of a storm sewer. One of the lots she purchased when she built her house was in the path of drainage from three small creeks, one of which had a drainage problem. She installed a pipe for drainage, which neighbors considered a poor solution.<sup>21</sup> The controversy continued for three weeks and culminated in her being charged and arrested on Thursday, July 10, 1913, for "obstructing a waterway." She made bond of \$100. "Sureties" for

her appearance before Denton's Mayor Bates on Friday morning was given by Prof. P.E. McDonald of the Normal faculty.<sup>22</sup>

Blanton's trial began on Friday, July 11 in the morning and ended in the afternoon after a main prosecution witness failed to appear. The defense claimed "vindication".<sup>23</sup> The city eventually fixed the drainage problem.

Blanton continued her advanced studies during the summers of 1901, 1913 and 1914 at the University of Chicago and at the University of Texas in 1910. In Denton she was affiliated with both the local and state Federation of Women's Clubs, the Daughters of the Confederacy, the Texas Parent-Teachers' Association, The Eastern Star and the Methodist Church.

One of her strongest commitments was to the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA). She was an active member by 1912 and attended every annual meeting while becoming familiar with the politics of the group. She actively encouraged other teachers, especially women at North Texas and elsewhere to join.<sup>24</sup>

By the time of the 1915 legislative session, women's enfranchisement had become an active issue. The governor of Texas during the 1915 and 1917 legislative sessions was James E. Ferguson, an opponent of woman suffrage. After his impeachment, Lieutenant Governor William P. Hobby became governor. In 1918 Governor Hobby signed a bill to permit women to vote in primaries. In seventeen days 386,000 women registered to vote in the Democratic primary held July 6, 1918.<sup>25</sup> Blanton was highly interested and followed the subject closely from Denton.

During World War I, many men left their teaching posts to serve in the armed forces. When the Texas State Teachers Association met in Ft. Worth in 1916, women assumed many responsibilities traditionally reserved for men.<sup>26</sup>

On Dec. 4, 1916, the *Record and Chronicle* in Denton reported that Blanton was elected to the presidency of the Texas State Teachers Association.<sup>27</sup> Some meeting attendees were not in favor of electing women. As speakers both for and against were heard, M. M. Dupree of Lubbock announced that he “wanted a man at the head of his table and a man to manage his children.”<sup>28</sup>

Blanton had attended the meeting with plans to support Supt. J. W. Beaty, superintendent of the Denton schools, but rose to give an impassioned speech protesting the fact that women had never been considered worthy of the presidency, always being left to be named second or third vice president, with no hope of moving higher. Rising to second Beaty’s nomination, she proclaimed “We have been thrown a sop in the form of the third vice-presidency, but we women don’t want that office!”<sup>29</sup> After the applause subsided, Blanton was nominated from the floor and the vote that followed gave her the office of President of TSTA. Over her own objections, the association elected Blanton by a comfortable margin over the male candidates. She became the first woman president of TSTA in the organization’s thirty-six year history.<sup>30</sup>

After she officially took office in early 1917, she fulfilled her duties while maintaining her position at North Texas. She planned and established a permanent fund to provide more secure financing, achieved constitutional revisions, laid the foundation for the development of the permanent school fund and began plans for the Texas State Teacher Retirement System. She also helped establish an official journal, *The Bulletin*.<sup>31</sup>

Blanton felt her relationship with North Texas President Bruce had become “uneasy” as she had heightened her outspoken advocacy of the suffrage campaign in Texas and her opposition to former Governor James E. Ferguson, political issues on which Bruce believed teachers should not take a stand.<sup>32</sup>

At one time she considered positions in the College of Industrial Arts and contacted President F.M. Bralley. A position at CIA would have allowed her to keep her home as well as provide a desirable teaching position. She waged a behind the scenes campaign but later ended her efforts to secure a position with the college.<sup>33</sup>

The Texas State Woman's Suffrage Association had taken notice of Blanton's abilities to lead and organize TSTA. In 1918, it supported her candidacy for the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction. This was the same year Texas permitted women to vote and hold office. Following this decision Blanton announced herself a candidate for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. She defeated incumbent Walter F. Doughty and Brandon Trussell by a large margin in the primary. In the general election in November, 1918, she was unopposed and was elected State Superintendent of Public Education, the first woman to be elected to a state office. She carried 251 of the 252 counties.<sup>34</sup>

The August 8, 1918 lead story in the *Campus Chat* at Texas at North Texas State Normal College, told of a student-led parade from the library to her home on West Mulberry where she was congratulated on her election.<sup>35</sup>

In November, 1918, after being elected to state office, Blanton resigned from North Texas, left Denton and moved back to Austin. During her tenure a system of free text books was established, teacher certification laws were revised, teachers' salaries were raised and efforts were made to improve rural education.<sup>36</sup> She was re-elected for a second term in 1920, when voters also passed the Better Schools Amendment, which she had proposed as a means of removing constitutional limitations on tax rates for local school districts. She served until 1922 and did not seek a third term.<sup>37</sup>



After leaving the position of State Superintendent, Blanton made an unofficial announcement that she would run as a Democratic candidate for Representative of the Thirteenth Congressional District in the special election on May 13, 1922, and in the Democratic Primary on July 22, 1922<sup>38</sup> She would seek the vacated seat of the late Congressman Lucian W. Parris, a victim of an automobile accident, whose term was to end March, 1923.

Blanton's legal resident was still in Denton, which was within the 13<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. In 1922 twelve counties covered 10, 882 square miles that made up this district. These counties were Archer, Baylor, Clay, Cooke, Denton, Jack, Montague, Throckmorton, Wichita, Wilbarger, Wise and Young. The district had a population of about 250,000 at that time.<sup>39</sup>

On April, 1922, she made an official announcement to seek the office after learning that the neither Gladys Edwards Parrish, wife of the deceased congressman nor her father, Dr. A.B. Edwards of Henrietta would run for the office.<sup>40</sup> Candidates running for the vacant position were State Senator Guinn Williams of Decatur, Judge S.A. L. Morgan of Wichita Falls, Orville Bullington of Wichita Falls and Blanton. Williams, Morgan and Blanton ran as Democratic candidates, while Bullington ran as an independent. W.S. Moore of Gainesville had recently withdrawn from the contest. Williams won the election and Blanton came in third in the special election held on Saturday, May 13, 1922.

Three days later, the *Denton Record-Chronicle* quoted Blanton as follows:

“The success of woman suffrage can not be gauged by the success or the failure of any man or woman in any election. It must be measured by whether in the long run, women use the ballot for the good of humanity. Perhaps my race may be of help to other women who in the future may seek these places; for before success is possible we must accustom our people to the idea of women members of these bodies.”<sup>41</sup>

She entered the graduate school of The University of Texas in 1923, and in August of that same year earned the degree of Master of Arts. She became an Adjunct Professor of School Administration in the College of Education for 3 years. In 1926 she took a leave of absence to complete the residency requirements for her doctorate at Cornell University. She was conferred the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

When Dr. Blanton returned to the faculty of The University of Texas, she was made an Associate Professor of School Administration and Chairman of the Rural Education Department. In 1933 she was promoted to the status of full Professor, the third woman at the University to attain this rank.<sup>43</sup>

On May 11, 1929, Dr. Blanton and 11 fellow women educators founded the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, dedicated to the purpose of promoting and honoring excellence in teaching.<sup>44</sup> She served as executive director of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society as long as her health would permit.<sup>45</sup>

She died on October 2, 1945,<sup>46</sup> and was interred at Oakwood Cemetery in Austin. She was survived by her brother, former Congressman Thomas L. Blanton.

### **III. SIGNIFICANCE**

Annie Webb Blanton's contributions to higher education began in Denton at the North Texas State Normal College in 1901. She was a member of the first faculty of the newly established state school and served as associate professor until 1918. During her tenure NTSNC was placed on the list of first-class accredited Texas colleges. She was one of few female teachers at the college that was published, having published three editions of *Supplementary Exercises in Punctuation and Composition* between 1906 and 1910 and *Review Outline and*

*Exercises* in 1909. She was elected as the first woman president of the Texas State Teacher's Association in 1916 and was the first woman to be elected to a public office as State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1918, where she served two terms. She later ran unsuccessfully for United States Representative of the 13<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, having kept her legal home in Denton even after she moved to Austin when elected Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Throughout her professional career, she held memberships in a number of professional organizations including the National Council of Administrative Women in Education, National Educators Association, National Sociological Society, National Department of Superintendents, American Association of University Professors, The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, Kappa Delta Pi, Phi Lambda Theta, Phi Gamma Mu, and an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa.

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After Blanton's election as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, several years passed before another Texas woman would be elected to a public office. Miriam A. (Ma) Ferguson became Governor of the state from 1925 to 1927 and from 1933 to 1935. Ann Richards was the first Texas woman in fifty years to win statewide office in 1982 when she was elected State Treasurer. <sup>48</sup>

One of Blanton's proudest legacies was Delta Kappa Gamma. She believed that by organizing women educators, she could help remove barriers to their advancement. On its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Blanton wrote, "Delta Kappa Gamma must have filled a felt need, or it could not have grown so rapidly". <sup>49</sup>

Denton County recognized Annie Webb Blanton's contributions to education as early as 1921, when two Denton County School Districts, Chinn Chapel School (1884) and the Hawk

School (1884) were consolidated to form Denton County's Annie Blanton School District.<sup>50</sup>

Today, Annie Webb Blanton continues to be recognized for her contributions in education in Denton County. Most recently, in August 2008, Denton Independent School District opened the Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School on Stacey Lane in Argyle, located in close proximity to the same area of the county in which the Denton County Annie Blanton School District was located.

In Edmund Franklin Bates *History and Reminiscences of Denton County*, under the title of "Carefully Selected Faculty for the Normal College," Bates reported "the utmost care is always exercised in selecting faculty. Character, personal influence for good, scholarship, ability, willingness to work and successful experiences are always considered. The Normal School is no place for a teacher weak in any one of these particulars..." Following this statement was the list of faculty for 1917- 1918. Annie Webb Blanton, B., Lit, *English*, was the only listed English teacher.<sup>51</sup> This would have been her last complete academic year at the college. In November 1918 she resigned and moved to Austin to serve as Superintendent of Public Instruction. She fulfilled all of the criteria and more for her position as associate professor during her 17 years in Denton. At NTSNC, where she was loved by her students, she became a teacher and leader in education and was recognized and respected across the state for her commitment and dedication to education and her leadership in elected offices that had never before been held by women.

#### **IV. DOCUMENTATION**

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<sup>1</sup> Richard S. LaForte and Richard L. Himmel, *Down the Corridor of Years: A History of the University of North Texas in Photographs 1890-1990* (University of North Texas Press, 1989), p.21.

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- <sup>2</sup> LaForte, p. 21.
- <sup>3</sup> LaForte, p 35
- <sup>4</sup> LaForte, p.42.
- <sup>5</sup> E. Dale Odom, *An Illustrated History of Denton County From Peters Colony to Metroplex* (manufactured in the United States of America, All rights reserved, 1996) p. 62-63.
- <sup>6</sup> Odom, p. 63.
- <sup>7</sup> Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, *Pioneer Woman Educator, The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton* (Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1993), p. 1
- <sup>8</sup> C.A. Bridges, *History of Denton, Texas from Its Beginning to 1960* (Texian Press, Waco, Texas, 1978), pp. 250, 327.
- <sup>9</sup> Cottrell, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>10</sup> Josie Champion, "A Brief History of the Life of Annie Webb Blanton" Travis County Historical Commission, unpublished paper. (no date), p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup> Champion, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Champion, p. 1.
- <sup>13</sup> Cottrell, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>14</sup> Cottrell, p. 23.
- <sup>15</sup> LaForte, p. 41.
- <sup>16</sup> James L. Rogers, *The Story of North Texas from Texas Normal College, 1890, to the University of North Texas System*, 2001, (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2002) p. 139.
- <sup>17</sup> WorldCat Identities, Blanton, Annie Webb 1870-1945, <http://orlabs.oclc.org/identities/lccn-n93-6435> (accessed May 18, 2010).
- <sup>18</sup> Cottrell, p. 26.
- <sup>19</sup> "Building \$5,000 House." *Record and Chronicle*, Local News Brief, (date unknown), Denton.
- <sup>20</sup> "Real Estate for Sale." *Record and Chronicle* classified ad, December 23, 1915.
- <sup>21</sup> "City Files Complaint Against Miss Blanton." *Record and Chronicle*, Denton, Texas,

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Vol. XIII, Number 283; *July* 9, 1913.

<sup>22</sup> “Miss Blanton Released on Bond.” *Record and Chronicle*, Denton, Texas, Vol. X111, Number 284; July 10, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> “Sudden Ending to City Court Case Friday Afternoon.” *Record and Chronicle*, Denton, Texas, Vol. XIII, Number 285; July 11, 1913.

<sup>24</sup> Cottrell, p. 28

<sup>25</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, “Annie Webb Blanton,” [http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/flb16\\_print.html](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/flb16_print.html), (accessed April 23, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Champion, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> “Miss Annie Blanton Heads State Teachers.” *Record and Chronicle*, December 4, 1916.

<sup>28</sup> “Teachers Pick Woman.” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Vol. XXXVL, No. 272; December 3, 1916. pp. 1, 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1916, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1916, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Champion, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cottrell, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Cottrell, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers, p. 140; and *Handbook of Texas Online*; “Woman Suffrage,” [http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/viw1\\_print....](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/viw1_print....), (April 23, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Rogers, p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*; “Annie Webb Blanton,” <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/fbl16.html>, (accessed June 26, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Champion, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> La Forte, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> “Two May Run for Congress Seat Vacated by Lucian Parrish.” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 30, 1922.

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- <sup>40</sup> “Miss Blanton to Seek Regular Term in Congress.” *Dallas Morning News*, April 6, 1922.
- <sup>41</sup> “Miss Blanton’s Statement.” *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 26, 1918.
- <sup>42</sup> *Champion*, p. 3.
- <sup>43</sup> *Champion*, p. 3.
- <sup>44</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Delta Kappa Gamma Society,” <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/vudl.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).
- <sup>45</sup> *Champion*, p. 4.
- <sup>46</sup> “First State Woman Superintendent Dies at 75.” *Dallas Morning News*, October 3, 1945.
- <sup>47</sup> Ruthe Winegarten, *Texas Women, a Pictorial History from Indians to Astronauts*. (Austin: Eakins Press, 1986), p. 143.
- <sup>48</sup> Winegarten, p. 143.
- <sup>49</sup> Debbie Cottrell, “Annie Webb Blanton: Woman Education and Politician.” Paper presented by Debbie Cottrell at the Texas Women’s Scholars Symposium, University of Texas at Austin, April, 1987. p. 10.
- <sup>50</sup> Bill Bradford, *The Hawks of Denton County, Texas*. (Ronjon Publishing, Inc, 2005), p. 5.
- <sup>51</sup> Edmund Franklin Bates, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County* (Denton, Texas: McNitzky Printing, 1918). p. 217.