

Denton Senior High School

Denton, Texas

Historical Narrative researched and written by Nita Thurman for Texas Historical Commission (THC)
Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Application. Denton County. 1980

Denton's first public school was a three-story brick building with 12 rooms and an auditorium. Professor Morgan Looney was hired as principal and taught a four-month term that first year, which was all the city could afford. ⁸

Denton had 425 students enrolled when the school opened in 1884. ⁹

In 1908, the public school south of the square burned. The city built a second school at the same site. ¹⁰

The population was increasing, however, and the school was becoming increasingly crowded. After the John B. Denton College closed in 1912, city school trustees took over its building on Denton Street, west of the downtown square, for public high school students. That building housed all high school students until 1924, when a new Senior High School opened on the north end of the campus. Junior High classes remained in the old John B. Denton building. ¹¹

II. OVERVIEW

The new Denton Senior High School was built at 709 Congress Street, on the north end of the 10.7-acre campus. The school opened in the fall term of 1924 with an enrollment of 478 students. ¹²

Architect Wiley G. Clarkson of Fort Worth designed the building, one of dozens of schools that he designed during his career. The Classical Revival building includes elements of classical symmetry, with a full-height porch and staircase leading to the main entrance on the second floor. Windows are arranged symmetrically and dentil cornices

adorn the top on each side of the entrance. The words "Senior High School" were cut into the stone above the third floor windows at the main entrance.

Cost of the building and equipment was \$170,000. ¹³

On Thursday, Sept. 11, 1924, an estimated 2,000 people visited the new school at an open house and reception. Members of the faculty acted as a reception committee and piloted the visitors through the building. ¹⁴

"The windows in all three stories to the north were ablaze with light, the reflection of which brought out the dignified Lueder's stone trim that was used in construction. The leaf of gold letters designating the building Denton Senior High School also could be dimly seen in the gathering dusk" said the Denton Record-Chronicle of September 12, 1924.

The main entrance to the Senior High School was up a flight of steps, where the front doors opened to the main corridor on the second floor. Administration offices were located on the second floor east of the entrance. An auditorium with seating for 800 was at the center of the second floor, and a library with capacity for about three thousand volumes was on the west end. ¹⁵

In all, the Senior High School building had 68,310 square feet of floor space arranged into 21 classrooms that were grouped by subjects. The second floor also had a cluster of three rooms and a study hall for English, a music room, two language classrooms, a room for "typewriting" and another for shorthand and bookkeeping. ¹⁶

On the third floor were three mathematics classrooms and a study hall, a designing room, chemistry and physics laboratories, a science lecture room, two history classrooms, study hall, and girls' restroom. ¹⁷

The first floor was divided into two sections, centered by the gym and cafeteria. The east side consisted of two sewing rooms, food laboratories and storeroom, and girls' showers and lavatories. The west side held a manual training workshop, mechanical drawing room and boys' showers and lavatories. ¹⁸

New classes included hygiene, physiology, bookkeeping, home management and home nursing for tenth grade girls and stenography and typewriting for eleventh grades. ¹⁹

A.O. Calhoun, who was principal of the high school in the old John B. Denton building at the time, moved to the new building to become principal of the Senior High School. He served in that position for the next 33 years and retired at the end of the 1956-57 school year. Mr. Calhoun, who was always known as Prof., was the only principal to serve during the building's lifetime as a Senior High School. ²⁰

Students dedicated the 1925 Bronco, the first Senior High School annual, to Mr. Calhoun ... "because he understands us, he is interested in us, he loves us; because he is a real gentleman, a good sportsman, and a good friend." ²¹

Amos O. Calhoun was born June 19, 1891, in Gordon, Texas and graduated from Gordon High School with honors. He did undergraduate study at Texas A&M and Southern Methodist University and completed his Bachelor of Arts degree at what was then North Texas State College. He received his Master of Arts degree from Columbia University with a double major in chemistry and mathematics. ²²

Mr. Calhoun served 43 years in public education. He was principal in Denton schools for 37 years, first as principal of the high school in the old John B. Denton College building and then at the new Senior High School. He also taught in 20 summer sessions at North Texas State College. ²³

He lived in Denton for 50 years. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club and the Denton Chamber of Commerce, and a number of professional education organizations. He also was active in Boy Scouts and was a member and deacon of the First Baptist Church of Denton.²⁴

Prof. Calhoun closed his long career with the Denton school district at the same time the old building ended its career as the Senior High School. Students dedicated the 1956 annual to him, also.

"It is with a deep sense of reverence and respect that we, the Bronco Staff, Senior Class of 1956, dedicate the 1956 Bronco to Mr. A.O. Calhoun who has served as principal at Denton High School for some 36 years," the dedication says.²⁵

Mr. Calhoun died on July 13, 1973, and is buried at the IOOF Cemetery in Denton.²⁶

When the new high school on Fulton Street opened, the red brick building on Congress Street became Denton Junior High School. Dan McAlister was appointed principal there and served until his retirement in 1967. The new gymnasium on the campus is named in his honor. Mr. McAlister died on December 10, 1986.²⁷

Architect Wiley G. Clarkson, who designed the Senior High School building, was one of the most prominent Texas architects in the 1920s and 1930s. He headed one of the two large architectural firms practicing in Fort Worth during those years. He lived in Fort Worth and designed many schools and residences there, several hospitals including Harris Hospital, Cook Children's Hospital, and John Peter Smith Hospital; and downtown Fort Worth buildings such as the Sinclair Building, Sanger Building, the United States Courthouse, the Texas Christian University library, and more. He also designed numerous schools and other public buildings across the state.²⁸

In Denton, Mr. Clarkson also designed the Woman's Club Building and the Robert E. Lee Elementary school, which has since been razed. He also met Dr. Thomas C. Dobbins, who was president of the Denton school board while Denton Senior High School was being built, and designed Dr. Dobbins home at 915 West Oak Street as well as several other Denton residences.²⁹

Many of his designs in the 1920s show his strong preference for Classical, Gothic, Italianate, and Beaux Arts styling. In the early 1930s, he added touches of Art Deco styling to his work.³⁰

Mr. Clarkson was born Nov. 28, 1885, in Corsicana, went to public school there and attended the University of Texas. He also studied at the Armour Institute of Technology of Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago. He was a member of the Texas Society of Architects, which he served as president, and was a member of the American Institute of Architects. Wiley Clarkson died on May 5, 1952, in Fort Worth. His home was at 1417 Hillcrest in Fort Worth. He was 66 years old.³¹

The three-story red brick building that opened in 1924 as the Senior High School remains the core of the present building. As increasing enrollment demanded more space, school district officials added two wings to the building in 1953, a science wing on the west and a homemaking wing on the east. Each wing contains 5,886 square feet of floor space. The architectural style and materials used are the same as the original structure, so the additions appear to be a part of the original. Another wing was added to the east wing in 1997.

There have been other internal changes through the years. Classrooms are now located on the first floor replacing the original gymnasium and cafeteria. Administrative

offices are now in the east wing. The second east wing added in 1997 houses the school library. Other buildings have been added to the campus.

When the new high school opened in 1957 on Fulton Street, the old red brick Senior High School became a junior high school for grades seven through nine. Its name was changed in 1969 to Congress Junior High. In 1982, the school was re-named Calhoun Junior High honoring the former principal. In 1992, the school was changed to a middle school, with the name changed to Calhoun Middle School.³²

Other buildings have been added to the campus through the years. The math building, also called the South Building, was built in 1937. It was demolished in August 2008 and is to be replaced with a two-story building, scheduled for completion in May 2009. The Mounts Gym was built in 1947, with 13,090 square feet of space. The 4,000-square-foot band hall was built in 1974. A multi-purpose building added in 1976 has 14,294 square feet of space. The two-story McAlister Gym built in 1983 contains 39,700 square feet. The new library built in 1997 encompasses 5,869 square feet of space. The original Lueders stone windows on the north side of the 1924 building had to be replaced as part of the 1997-98 renovation. The auditorium in the 1924 building was renovated and returned to its original condition during the 1997-98 renovation. However, the windows in the auditorium as well as other windows on the east, west and south sides that were enclosed, probably around the late sixties or early seventies, remain enclosed. A 10,385 square foot Fine Arts facility opened in 2005, and the two-story Wellness-Jones Building, with 4,755 square feet, was built in 2005. Five portable buildings on the campus provide about another 4,600 square feet of space.³³ (Note: Junior High School was renamed Congress Junior High School in 1969-correction made

by Marker Chair Beth Stribling. Marker text is correct))

III. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The 84-year-old building on Congress Street was the only public high school for Denton for 33 years and is the only public school building of its era that remains in Denton. The Senior High School - the first separate high school building -- is located a few blocks west of downtown Denton, in the path of growth the city experienced after Texas Normal College and then John B. Denton College were established west of town.

The westward growth also brought construction of an area of luxurious homes along Oak and Hickory Streets between downtown Denton and Texas Normal College and just south of the high school campus. The most affluent of Denton's businessmen built showplace homes in the early 20th century in an area now designated as the Oak-Hickory Historic District. Two homes on Oak Street and one house on Hickory Street bear Texas Historical Commission Recorded Texas Historical Landmark designations. Dr. Dobbins, who was president of the Denton school board when the Senior High School was built, lived on Oak Street, as did other city leaders.

The school is located only a few blocks west of the downtown historic district, which includes the 1896 Denton County Courthouse and several other historic sites. The courthouse has Recorded Texas Historical Landmark and National Register designation. Other Texas historical markers on the courthouse grounds include Denton County, City of Denton, and the grave of John B. Denton. Markers around the outside blocks of the square include the original site of Texas Normal School and the Lacy Hotel. Denton's most famous outlaw Sam Bass once worked at the hotel's stable.

The old Denton Senior High School building is a classic example of the work of architect Wiley G. Clarkson, well-known in Texas for the dozens of schools he designed, as well as many other public buildings and private residences, during the 1920s and 1930s. The core of the building is the original Senior High School, as Mr. Clarkson designed it, and is relatively intact. Additions made to provide more classroom space have respected the original design.

Since it opened, the school has been home to literally hundreds of Denton students who have walked its halls, studied in its classrooms and laboratories, and graduated. Many Denton residents look back fondly on their days at the sturdy old building.

The Senior High School is the last standing testament to the dedication to public education of the men and women who founded the city of Denton. The founders planned schools on the drawing board before they began selling city lots. They continued their emphasis on education as the city grew, building more public schools and schools of higher education, that have formed the character of the city as it grew. Education is the most influential and the largest business today in Denton.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ Bridges, C.A. *A History of Denton, Texas, From its Beginning to 1969*; Texian Press, Waco, Texas, 1978. p 68.

² Bates, Ed F., *History and Reminiscences of Denton County*, McNitzky Printing Co., Denton, Texas, 1918; Terrell Wheeler, Denton, Texas, 1976, and Terrell Wheeler Printing Inc., 1989, pp 188-190.

³ Centennial Committee, Seely, Arthur J.; Wiley, Mrs. E.C.; and Brashears, Miss Willie; *The History of Early Denton Schools and Robert E. Lee School, 1871-1957*; p 10.

⁴ Bridges, pp 218-219.

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- ⁵ Bridges, pp 259-260.
- ⁶ Bridges, p 261.
- ⁷ Centennial Committee, p 11.
- ⁸ Centennial Committee, p 13.
- ⁹ Bridges, p 186.
- ¹⁰ Centennial Committee, p. 13.
- ¹¹ "2,000 Visitors Attend Opening of High School", *Denton Record Chronicle*, September 12, 1924, p 1A.
- ¹² Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹³ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹⁴ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹⁵ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹⁶ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹⁷ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ¹⁸ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924
- ¹⁹ Denton Record Chronicle, September 12, 1924.
- ²⁰ "Denton Educator Dies; Services Sunday for Amos Calhoun," *Denton Record Chronicle*, July 15, 1973, p2A.
- ²¹ *The Bronco*, 1925, Denton High School annual, fourth page from front, unnumbered; on file at Emily Fowler Public Library, Denton.
- ²² Denton Record Chronicle, July 15, 1973.
- ²³ Denton Record Chronicle, July 15, 1973.
- ²⁴ Denton Record Chronicle, July 15, 1973.
- ²⁵ Bronco annual, 1956, sixth page, unnumbered pages.

²⁶ Denton Record Chronicle, July 15, 1973.

²⁷ *A.O. Calhoun Middle School*, Denton Independent School District publication; Central Services, 1307 N. Locust St., Denton, TX 76201.

²⁸ Cohen, Judith Senger; *Cowtown Moderne. Art Deco Architecture of Fort Worth, Texas*; Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, with the Cooperation of the Fort Worth Chapter of American Institute of Architects, 1988; pp 19-20.

²⁹ Capps, Peggy; personal files, 915 West Oak Street, Denton.

³⁰ Cohen, pp 19-20.

³¹ "W.G. Clarkson Funeral Will Be Held Wednesday," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, May 5, 1952, Page 12.

³² *A.O. Calhoun Middle School*, DISD publication.

³³ DISD construction records, Service Center Annex, 230 N. Mayhill Dr., Denton, TX, 76201.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Wiley G. Clarkson's Index to Files of schools and other buildings/structures designed by the architect. Personal files, Peggy Capps and on file in Denton County Historical Commission office.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION DATES – DENTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL/CALHOUN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Denton Senior High school - 1924-1957/Calhoun Middle School

Denton Senior High School, which opened in the fall of 1924 at 709 Congress, became a junior high school in 1957 when the high school moved to a new location and building on Fulton Street. The junior high school was renamed Congress Junior High in 1968 and was renamed Calhoun Middle School in 1982

Dates of construction of the Denton High School/Calhoun Middle School Main Building and its attached additions:

Main Building (3 floors) – 63,310 square feet (north front at 709 Congress Street)	1924
Science (west) Wing (one floor) – 5,886 square feet	1953

Home Economics (east) Wing – 5,886 square feet 1953

Library (one floor) 5,869 square feet (added to east wing) 1997

Changes to 1924 Structure:

Enclosed south, east and west windows of original building, approximately late 60s or early 70s

Replacement of original windows on north front (Main Building remodel) 1997-98

Main Building remodel (included renovation of second floor 1924 auditorium) 1997-98

Additions to School Campus:

Math Building (South Building) – 12,480 square feet 1937
(building was demolished August 2008 and is to be replaced with a two-story building scheduled for completion May 2009.

Mounts Gym (1½ floors) – 13,090 square feet 1947

Band Hall – 4,000 square feet 1964

Multi-Purpose – 14,394 square feet 1976

McAllister Gym (2 floors) – 39,700 square feet 1983

Cafeteria/2 classrooms – 27,000 square feet 1997

Fine Arts – 10,385 square feet 2005

Wellness/Jones Building (2 floors) – 4,755 square feet 2005

Portables (4 singles) – 3,072 square feet

Portables (1 double – 1,536 square feet