

*(excerpts from "Texas' New Frontier: A New History of Cochran County: by Elvis E. Fleming and David R. Murrah and from <http://cochrancountytexas.com/schools/morton.htm> )*

## History of Morton School

The first school to be built in Morton was completed in January 1924. Classes began that January with seven students and by the end of May had grown to thirty-three students. Rupert H. McCasland was the first teacher, affectionately called "Mr. Rupert" by the Morton students. He was elected to public office on May 6, 1924, but completed the school term before assuming full time duties as the first county clerk for Cochran County. Wilson "Prof" Angley was hired as the new teacher in the fall of 1924. Angley's teaching certificate was the first recorded in the county.

The first basketball game was also played in 1925. The game was played outdoors on a dirt floor with the boundaries and lines marked in chalk. The Morton team competed against teams from Whiteface and Bledsoe in county championships. The Morton teams dominated the county championships during the 1920s and 30s. The county championships were abandoned in the 1940s as schools were grouped into districts. It was also during the 40's that tennis program at Morton schools was dropped; it would make a comeback in 1969.

In 1926 a group of eighth and ninth graders consisting of Olen Cooper, Floyd Miller, Ruth Miller, Ray Lytle, Hugh Lytle, and Hazel Lackey, under the guidance of Vesta Huggins, voted on school colors, black and gold; and chose the Indian as the school mascot.

In 1926 and 1927, a large brick building, complete with auditorium, was erected at Morton. The next year another brick building containing a gymnasium was constructed. The first bus used at Morton, in 1925, was

simply an open truck. Later, seats were added in the truck bed and students brought quilts on chilly days. The school was equipped with double desks and a jacketed coal-burning heater. No facilities were provided for meals and students brought their lunches.

In 1925, Bull Camp and Minnie Veal schools consolidated with the Morton School, thus forming the Morton Independent School District. Morton School had five teachers by the fall term of 1926.

A high school building went up in 1941 and in 1942 an elementary school was built one block south and west of the other schools. The elementary building burned down in 1946,

On March 19, 1946, a huge fire destroyed the elementary school building in Morton, causing damages estimated at \$118,000, according to principal D. R. Holliday. Morton and Levelland fire fighters were unable to control the blaze because of a shortage of hose and fireplugs. Local churches offered their facilities to the school until a new building could be erected. A month later, a \$100,000 bond issue was approved for a new building. Students were forced to attend class in other buildings around town, including churches. The first grade class was housed in the Masonic Lodge during this time, which had no bathroom facilities, so the teacher would walk the students across the street to the courthouse. By fall barracks were moved to town to serve as classrooms. A new building was built where the elementary stood and the high school was moved into it and the elementary took over the old high school building. For a few years the superintendent's office remained at the old high school building before eventually being relocated to the new high school. In 1949 the basketball gym was erected.

Construction on the new school began on November 1, 1949, and was completed in October 1950. Dedication ceremonies for the new building were held on October 30.

Six classrooms were added to the elementary building in 1951. In 1956, under superintendent John Barnes, a cafeteria, more elementary classrooms, a principal's office, and an administrative building were completed. Until then the old barracks were used as a cafeteria and band hall.

On December 20, 1963, Morton schools awarded contracts totaling \$400,000 for construction of a new high school building complete with a band hall, a small gym, industrial arts, vocational, and agriculture classrooms, additions to the gymnasium and cafeteria, and remodeling of the old high school building for use by the junior high school. Construction began in January and was completed in October 1964. Morton schools enrolled over 1,300 students for the 1964-1965 school year, according to then Superintendent Ray Lanier.

In 1978 an administration office, field house, weight room, warehouse, bus barn, and maintenance building were constructed with available funds. A regulation track was added in 1980. In 1983 more classrooms were added to the elementary, along with a gym and a library, and the buildings from 1926 and 1927 were demolished.

## Athletics

For most of its history, Morton school had trouble competing with the larger schools in the area. Only the 1952 girls' basketball team, which finished second in state, had given the school any statewide recognition in any sport.

In the 1970's, the Morton School District reached its peak in student population with more than eleven hundred students, and with the new growth came athletic success.

In 1970, the boys' basketball team won district for the first time in twelve years. Then the team defeated the Dimmitt Bobcats in bi-district play to advance to the regional AA tournament in Lubbock. There, the Morton Indians rolled through the tournament with wins over McCamey and Quannah to qualify for state for the first time in school history. Although they lost to Taft, they ended the season with an impressive 27-8 record.

The 1971 team rolled through district play with a 14-0 record, then won bi-district and regional championships to advance to Austin for the state championship for the second time in three years. Morton defeated Roma and Whitehouse to claim the boys state basketball championship. Senior Elton Patton was named all-state and head coach Ted Willock was named Coach of the Year.

The Indians won thirty straight games, stretching from the 1971-1972 season into the 1972-1973 season, before losing to Levelland on December 12, 1972. But the loss did not dampen another championship season. For the third time in four years, the boys team advanced to the state championship where they lost to Grand Saline 62=61 in front of 5,500 fans.

The Morton boys' basketball team continued with success throughout the 1970's and into the 1980's.

In 1973, the football team saw star player Larry Thompson named to the all-state team, the first such honor for the school. In the fall of 1983, the football team finished the season undefeated in district play to win the first district championship in school history. The Indians defeated Olton in bi-district and Wall in regional to advance to area finals, where they defeated second-ranked Hamlin 38-20. But they lost in the state quarterfinals to McCamey for their first loss of the season.

Even though Morton schools continued to experience declining enrollments, 1987 brought new success to the school's athletic programs. Both Morton boys and girls basketball teams advanced through district, bi-district and regional wins to advance to the state tournament. A rare occurrence for any school in Texas history.

It was only the second time to make it to state for the Maidens, and they defeated Poth 56-51 in the first game and won the state championship by defeating Paris 68-53 in the finals. The following week, the boys won their second straight state championship with an 84-72 win over Liberty Hill. The double state championship for Morton teams was the crowning achievement for the Morton Independent School District.