

# HISTORY OF VAN ISD



Swindall School  
(Prior to 1916)

researched and compiled by  
Linda Mays & Tommie Mayo

Texas Historical Commission  
Van Zandt County Historical Commission

---

## SWINDALL SCHOOL

In the 1880's, the area now known as Van contained a scattered collection of farm houses and a general store. There was no school located close enough for community children to attend regularly. Recognizing the community's need for a school, a local farmer, George W. Swindall, donated one acre for the establishment of a community school ca. 1880. Three of Swindall's children later attended the school. The community and the school came to be known as Swindall.

Swindall school's first teacher was T. W. Staton, and the school only employed one teacher at a time through the 1905-1906 school year. Two teachers were employed at one time when husband and wife John N. and Lucy Rhodes were hired in fall 1906. A third teacher was added in 1911. The Van School District was officially established by the County Commissioners Court in 1903. The district contained twelve and one-fifth square miles and two schools—Swindall and Spring Hill.

Although a post office was established in 1894 under the name of Van, the school continued to be called Swindall throughout its years of service. By 1915, Swindall School was well into its third decade of use, was in need of repair, and was no longer large enough to accommodate its enrollment. A bond was passed in 1916 to build a larger school approximately half way between Swindall and Spring Hill Schools, and both were closed at the end of the 1915-1916 school year. The new school opened in fall 1916 and was called Van Common School.

---

Texas Historical Commission  
Van Zandt County Historical Commission

---

## VAN COMMON SCHOOL

In 1916, Swindall and Spring Hill schools were consolidated to form Van Common School. Money raised with a bond election and state aid enabled the district to build a new school on five acres less than one mile east of Van. In order to reduce costs, community members agreed to haul at no expense 114 wagon loads of construction materials to the building site from the railhead at Grand Saline, 13 miles away. The school opened with 95 students and four teachers: Prof. E. C. Tunnell, Prof. E. R. Tunnell, Miss Eula Fowler, and Miss Lucy Brawner. The school served the needs of the community until a May 1928 fire destroyed the building. A June ballot measure approved the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$3,000. This amount and the \$3,500 insurance payment enabled the district to rebuild a school that was ready for the start of the 1928-1929 school year at the same site.

The 1929-1930 school year began with ninety pupils. However, the discovery of oil on October 14, 1929, less than a mile from the school, dramatically changed the school district as well as the entire community. School administrators and board members knew that they needed to plan ahead for massive community growth. Another contribution to the disruptions in the school district's operations was the oil drilling on school property, approximately 500 feet from the building. The school building was temporarily moved to an adjacent site, but an election was held in 1931 in order to secure funding for a greatly expanded school site to accommodate the population explosion that occurred as a result of the discovery of oil in Van.

Texas Historical Commission  
Van Zandt County Historical Commission

---

VAN HIGH SCHOOL  
1929 - 1947

The discovery of the Van Oil Field in 1929 brought about many changes within the community, including an influx of school-aged children that required the transition from a five-room rural school to a large, ultra-modern school campus. While other Texas schools were forced to make budget cuts because of the depression and later World War II, oil revenues enabled the Van schools, led by Supt. Jesse E. Rhodes and Principal C. C. Moore, to expand rapidly. The 1929-1930 school year had begun with 90 pupils, but the start of 1930-1931 brought 611 students.

In the summer of 1930 a gymnasium was built and was originally used as a temporary high school. After the approval of a bond by local voters, construction began on new Van schools in spring 1931. By the start of the 1931-1932 school year, a brick elementary school and a brick high school were ready for use. The temporary high school was converted back to a gymnasium after the completion of the permanent high school. The Pure Oil Company allowed the school to tap into its water lines free of charge, allowed the school to heat its buildings with gas from the gasoline plant, and also donated \$12,500 to the school district to help with expansion costs. A teachers' home was constructed in 1930 and was meant to entice the best available teachers to work within the district. A transportation program began during the 1931-1932 term with the purchase of three buses. An athletic park was completed in spring 1933 and a physical education-vocational building was erected in 1937. A second major building program that continued even during World War II was completed in 1947.

# 1930-1931 Temporary High School



## Van High School Graduating Class of 1930-1931



# Did You Know?

---

VHS student Helen Laverents wrote the words to the school song which was selected by the student body as its alma mater in 1931.

VHS was known as the Red Birds before becoming the Vandals.

VHS was the first school in the county to have electric lights on its football field. They were installed in 1935.

VHS had a lookout station on top of the gym building manned by adults and high school senior boys to document all airplane flights over Van during World War II.

VHS provided night classes in oil related subjects to Pure Oil Company workers during World War II.

VHS provided classes in home canning and sewing to community women during World War II.

VHS, during the 1930-1931 school year, was a wooden gymnasium divided into temporary classrooms.

The first faculty club was built in 1930 and was a two-story wooden structure located where the auditorium now stands.

In 1930, the elementary school building had to be moved 1,000 feet east to private property because an oil well was being drilled 500 feet from its location.

In 1930, Jesse Rhodes was hired as superintendent and C. C. Moore as high school principal to guide the Van school system development after the discovery of oil on October 14, 1929.

The Van school system is celebrating 131 years of continuous education. Swindall School became a part of the Van Zandt County school system in 1880 and was named for George W. Swindall who donated land for the school.

# VANDAL

---



# LEGACY