

—THE CLEAR LAKE—

DECEMBER 1991

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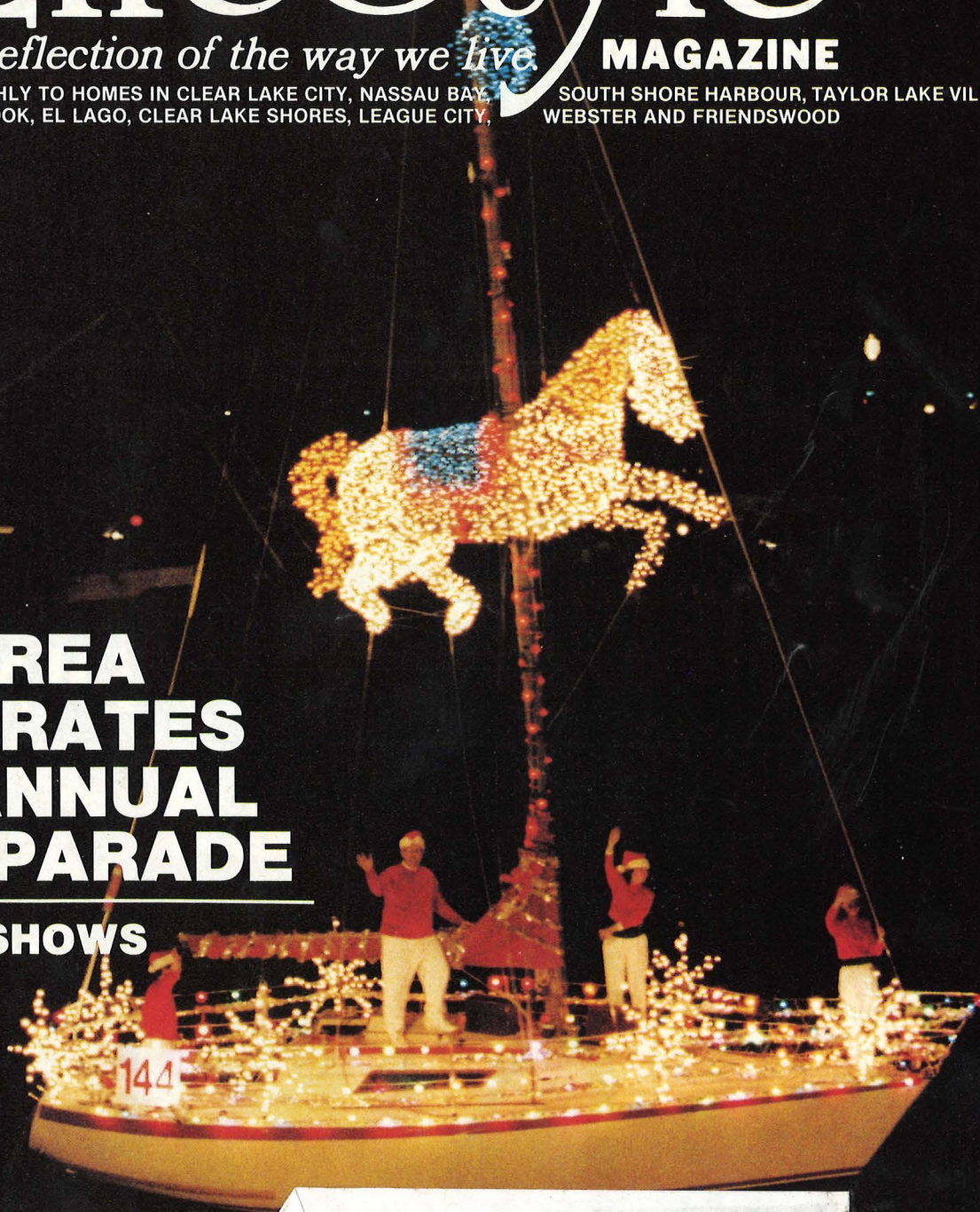
MAGAZINE

DIRECT-MAILED MONTHLY TO HOMES IN CLEAR LAKE CITY, NASSAU BAY,
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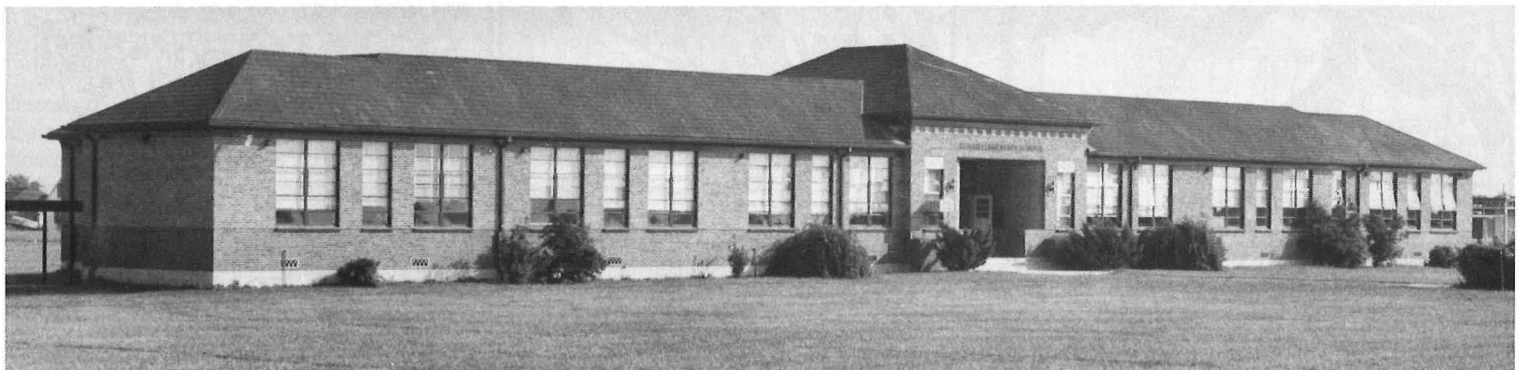
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FACE TO THE FUTURE, HEART TO THE PAST

The Story of the Kemah Schoolhouse



by Linda Rice

Kemah Elementary before it was renamed LaVace Stewart Elementary in 1965.

The first time hammer hit nail in Kemah for the sake of education was during the Civil War. A.H. Kipp and his new wife, Elizabeth Scobey Justice, constructed a small frame house out back of their home on the bay to accommodate the schooling needs of their children. The building was "fully equipped" with benches, slates and a water bucket.

Kipp, a New Yorker, married the widow Justice in 1857. She was the daughter of Robert Scobey of Wharton County, one of Stephen F. Austin's original three hundred colonists. Miss Scobey and Stephen Justice, also of Wharton County, were united in marriage in 1842 and became the parents of three girls in short order. In 1853 Justice gained 200 acres on Clear Creek by trading slaves for land. He and his wife had just completed a two-room home for their own family when, in 1856, Mr. Justice died. Kipp, who earned his living by boating goods to the settlers along Clear Creek, needed help with his two motherless sons. An arrangement seemed mutually beneficial, and after the couple took their vows, the three Kipp men moved in with the four Justice women.

During the early 1860's, the Kipp's sent one of Elizabeth Justice's daughters to a convent in Galveston in order to gain some education. She remained one year, after which she came home to become the family's teacher. Miss Justice taught her siblings, eventually seven in number, as well as other children nearby, including some slave children. It was at that time that A.H. Kipp built the area's first schoolhouse. Located between the current post office and Bel Road and directly on the bay by the Kipp home, the original building and its successors continued to serve the school children of the as-yet unnamed community during the Civil War and throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The 1900 hurricane which devastated Galveston also destroyed the Kipp schoolhouse. Further inland, the League City and Webster schools, which were spared the brunt of the storm, were gracious enough to

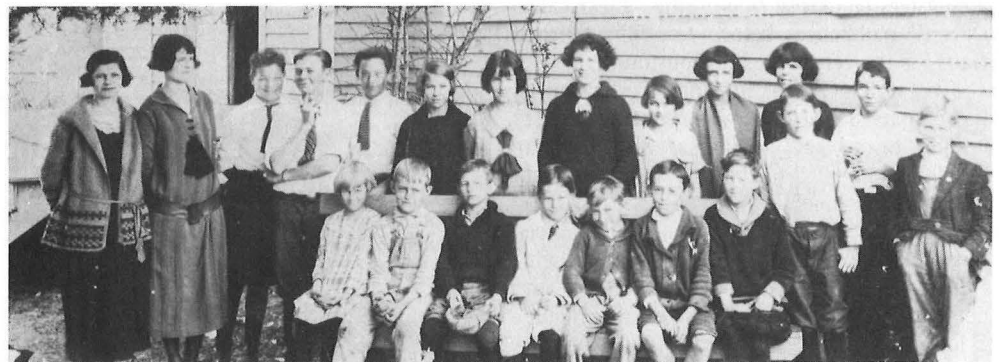
take in Kemah's and Seabrook's children until those communities could rebuild their own schools. A 1910 photo shows the happy pupils of the new Kemah building. The remains of this schoolhouse on the original Kipp site in the "Bradford woods" stood until well into this

the original location. Kathleen Bradford, granddaughter of the Kipp-Justice union, and Miss Eva Mae Swinney of Laneville, Texas, served as two of the first teachers in Kemah. A picture from 1921 shows Miss Bradford, newly married Eva Swinney Rice, and nine students. Kathleen

A 1921 photo of the first "official" schoolhouse in Kemah, built in 1912.



The class of 1924-25 shown with its teachers Eva Swinney Rice (L) and Kathleen Bradford (R).



century, although the county had built a new structure elsewhere by then.

The first "official" schoolhouse in Kemah was constructed in 1912. The citizens of the community went to the polls and passed a two thousand dollar bond for the building of a one story structure. At that time Galveston County operated the school under its jurisdiction. It was located at what is now the northeast corner of the Kemah park on Highway 146. That building still exists and today houses the Evelyn Stebbin's Gallery and Frame Shop, just north of

Bradford, incidentally, later went on to serve as the County Superintendent of Schools for Galveston County.

The next addition to the Kemah school facility was a one-room building constructed in the summer of 1946 behind the original two-room structure. This was a very timely decision because by the start of the 1947-48 school year enrollment jumped to 171 from 60. Mrs. Cecile Williams joined the faculty of Miss Nadeline Sellers, Mrs. LaVace Stewart and Mrs. Rice. Sellers and Stewart has been teaching together

by that time since 1936. Mrs. Rice returned to teaching in 1943 to pass the time while her two boys were off to war.

Perhaps the biggest change in the education of Kemah's children, besides the fountain that replaced the Kipp water bucket, was the consolidation of the school in 1948 with Webster, League City and Seabrook to form the Clear Creek Consolidated School District. Voters in the community overwhelmingly approved of the merger. The school board bought ten acres of land in West Kemah on FM 2094, the current location of the elementary school. It also acquired a barracks building from Camp Wallace near Santa Fe and transported it to the new acreage. Workers hurried to complete the project before school started, and they were successful. The new facility contained three large classrooms, three restrooms, teacher's lounge, principal's office, and a janitor's closet. Grades four through six met at the new location. Younger children were "stuck at the old school" on the highway. With the expanded tax base came opportunity for more teachers. The 1948-49 school year was the first year that Kemah Elementary had a teacher for every grade and a full-time principal. Mrs. LaVace Stewart had been a principal-teacher for years, but now she was able to concentrate on her administrative tasks fully.

During the first year of consolidation, joint PTA meetings were held four times a year, each school hosting once. When it came to Kemah's turn, the only facility large enough was the Methodist church, and it was barely adequate. It is said that much prayer went on that night because it threatened rain, and the children were waiting outside for their portion of the program. Evidently their prayers were heard because the skies held out. No one got wet.

The population of Kemah was in full bloom by then, and even with the additional barracks/classroom building there still wasn't enough room for everyone. It was so crowded that some first graders were bused over to Seabrook which had smaller classes. The bus driver was E.M. Chandler, and the bus was his laundry truck! Needless to say, before the year was out, plans were in the making for a new brick building.

This new building was finished, and students and staff took possession of it on March 8, 1950. PTA minutes for March 21 read: "The regular PTA meeting was held in the auditorium of the new school building." The "auditorium", now the quaintest little library in the district, was really the school gymnasium. The students just let their parents and teachers meet there once in a while for the necessary adult pow-wows.

Although the story of the schoolhouse in Kemah is the record of the efforts of many a forgotten man and woman, it can truly be said that its heritage is the legacy of Mrs. LaVace Stewart. Her tenure in Kemah began in the 1920's, the cream of her crop rising to the top with each passing year. She served first as teacher, then head teacher or teacher/principal, and finally, in 1948, assumed the role of full-time principal of Kemah Elementary which

she maintained until her retirement in 1965. Like most teachers, Mrs. Stewart wore many hats. She is known in Kemah as the "lady that taught boys and girls, attended to skinned knees and kissed away the pain of a hurt finger, or feeling. She solved the mystery of the lost book or what happened to the lunch money. She patched many a quarrel and even refereed first base, too!" Of all her roles in life, "wife, mother, teacher, principal, counselor, nurse, custodian," LaVace Stewart was, most of all, a friend. "Even if you didn't know her, Mrs. Stewart was 'your friend and mine'." Principal Clayton said recently at the October 21, 1991 dedication of the new school cafetorium.

Of course, the mark of any great man or woman is not what they did alone, but what they perpetuated. Some of us have a hard time influencing just our own children. LaVace Stewart not only touched the lives of those who knew her, but, through osmosis, her ideals live on even in the very woodwork of the school. The atmosphere at Stewart is so contagious

that, if it weren't so right, you'd have to quarantine the place. Those who teach and learn at Stewart Elementary have a right to brag, but they don't because they know they aren't doing it on their own. They have an advantage. They have history on their side. It seems as if "the spirit of education past" is right there making the job just a little easier, encouraging them on. And, if any of the "outlying" classes need a boost, they only need to stroll toward the main building and hear the voices of the past reminding them that their life's work is very important and worthy of their utmost effort. Every step you take on those beautiful wooden floors seems to echo with a certain indefinable stability. Its just almost like cheating to gain success there, seeing that you have so much help.

When they tried to name the community at the southern juncture of Clear Creek and Galveston Bay, they first chose a name that already had been taken. The name Kemah was settled on because it meant "face to the wind,"

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CCISD Board members and special guest Allison Stewart, son of LaVace, attended the LaVace Stewart Elementary dedication and open house held in October. From left, front row is Sherrie Matula, Allison Stewart, Margaret Snooks, Dr. Ronald McLeod, Dan Donaldson, and Gary Davis.

LaVACE STEWART ELEMENTARY HONORS FOUNDING PRINCIPAL AND FRIEND

LaVace Stewart Elementary held its cafetorium dedication and open house on Monday, October 21. This was a very special night for all who are a part of LaVace Stewart Elementary. Allison Stewart, son of LaVace, was the special guest attending the ceremony which paid tribute to a great woman who represents what this school stands for in the community of Kemah and in the hearts of those who have been a part of this wonderful school.

The cafetorium was completed in September. Just as the name indicates, this structure serves as a cafeteria and as an auditorium for over 500 students.

The highlight of the evening was the heart warming speech given by Stewart principal Michael Clayton about LaVace Stewart and what she was to "all her children".

The following is a poem written by Mr. Clayton to dedicate the new additions to LaVace Stewart Elementary School. He recited it at the Dedication Ceremony.



Principal Michael Clayton stands proudly next to a portrait of founding Principal LaVace Stewart.

Stewart Elementary School

*If you were a stranger,
and passed through these doors,
You'd say, 'It's just another school,
except for the hardwood floors.'*

*Except for the happy boys and girls you'd see
and, of course the teachers too,
I think you'd feel a difference
from schools all slick and new.*

*It might be the care they show,
to all who enter here;
Maybe it's the open hand and arms,
to the smiles that pull us near.*

*Except for the picture of LaVace—
she greets us everyday—
She inspires us to do our best,
and leads us on the way.*

*It must be that it's Stewart,
this atmosphere of love,
That seems to enter into our hearts,
like a gift from above.*

*Of love, and care, and excellence,
which makes us all stand tall.
No, Stewart's not just any school,
it's ours, it's home to all.*