

Photo of the Month

Rocky Branch School



Rocky Branch School, 1988
Neg. # 25655

Education has always been considered an important community responsibility in Benton County. The first school in the area was established in approximately 1842, near what is now Siloam Springs. By 1860 twenty-five schools existed in the state of Arkansas with at least four of these schools located in Benton County. As the area recovered from the effects of the Civil War during the late nineteenth century new schools were opened, but varied among communities depending on population sizes and economic conditions. Schools typically ranged from large academies to small one-room public schools.

Rocky Branch School District No. 38 was known to have existed as early as 1877 and the school at Larue represents the one-room schoolhouse once found throughout rural Benton County. While another, earlier schoolhouse is believed to have existed at the site; the surviving structure was built in 1905 and stood on land currently covered by Beaver Lake between the Rocky Branch Recreation Area and Shaddox Island. As a community focal point, the school also served as a church as well as a place to gather for social events.

When considering today's large schools, the small classes and single teacher for all grades may seem far removed from our experiences. For example, the three students who graduated from the eighth-grade in

1919 were Eugene McGinnis, Mildred Bland, and Homer Boydston. By the late 1940s Rocky Branch School District and Shady Grove School District consolidated as the Rocky Grove School District due to limited funding and low enrollment. However, Rocky Branch was closed in 1954 when students began to be bussed to Rogers to attend school.

The recollections of Edgar Bland, a student in 1934-35, illustrate school life for children over the years at Rocky Branch. Bland recalled, "Hills and hollows isolated Rocky Branch from Rogers. Those hills and hollows also kept residents from earning an adequate living. I remember the road was rough and dusty, and I had to walk about a mile to school. In the winter it was cold. Students' seats were rotated so that everyone got a turn by the stove. We went barefoot 6 or 7 months of the year. We played mumbly-peg and Annie-over. We wrassled a lot. We all got pretty good at wrasslin'." Many of today's students might find the activities fun, but the conditions harsher than they are accustomed to in their daily lives.

When Beaver Dam was built in 1963, the school was moved a mile and a half south to save it from the flooding of the lake. Today the school is located 12 miles east of Rogers on the corner of Larue Road and Highway 303 off of Highway 12 East. Rocky Branch School as it appeared in 1988 is pictured at right. The Rocky Branch School Association worked to restore the schoolhouse to its original condition in 1994 and continues to provide for its maintenance and preservation for future generations.

School programs are currently offered at Rocky Branch by the Rogers Historical Museum. Students participating in the program spend the day at the site, complete with lessons, recess, and of course a spelling bee. After participating in the Rocky Branch program, youngsters will be able to compare and contrast the lives of schoolchildren long ago with their own lives today.