

Bull Creek's Pleasant Valley School

This is an expanded post of my history articles for the December 2017 and January 2018 issues of the Northwest Austin Civic Association (NWACA) newsletter

[\(http://nwaca.org/newsletter/\)](http://nwaca.org/newsletter/)

Part I, 1867 - 1932

Barkley's *History of Travis County and Austin* notes that schools and churches were the centers of communities during the years of the Texas Republic and early statehood. In a previous article I wrote about Esperanza School, a one room log cabin that was located at Spicewood Springs.

West of Spicewood Springs, two schools served the valley of Bull Creek, one, Oak Grove School, started ca. 1864 located on what is today Old Lampasas Trail, then relocated near today's Oak Grove Cemetery. Another, the topic of this post, was located west along today's FM 2222. *The Defender 1936*, a book about Travis County rural schools published in 1936, Texas' centennial, provides this history for what was known as Pleasant Valley School[1]; brackets are mine:

"The first school at Pleasant Valley was established sixty-nine years ago [1867]. It was a private school in a log house on the old Walden place. This was during the time when Indians were prevalent[2] ... Three years later there was a public school built on what is known [in 1936] as the School Flat. The land, about one and one-half acres, was given by Ewan Williams. The first trustees were Hugh Walden [of Walden's mill], Ewan Williams and Fendrick Smith. This school burned in 1885. After some dispute over land titles, the building was rebuilt, but it [too] burned in 1931. It was re-built the following year [1932] ... It was during that year that the school was standardized."

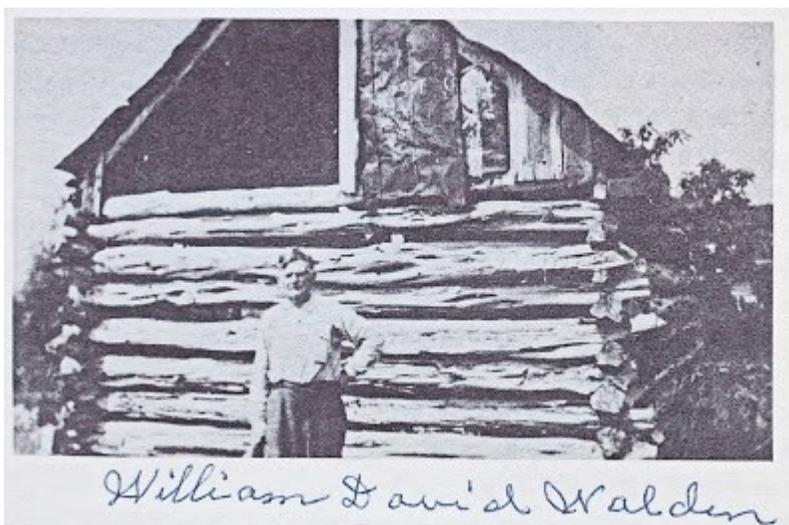
From this description we see there were four separate buildings in which school was held. Barkley notes, sometime during this period – perhaps during the land title disputes – the school came to be located on land donated by the Champion family; the descendants of the Champions still own large tracts of land along 2222. Barkley says "[the school] was later consolidated with Summitt (sic) and later was in the Austin Independent School District, when the school site reverted by sale to Mrs. C.C. Champion, as provided in the original deed."

Travis County maps show the school near the intersection of today's 2222 (which

used to be called Bull Creek Road[3]), and Loop 360. On the Travis County Roads Map of 1898-1902 the school is shown as Bull Creek School; on the 1932 Topographic and Road Map of Travis County (the year the final building was constructed) the school appears as Pleasant Valley School.

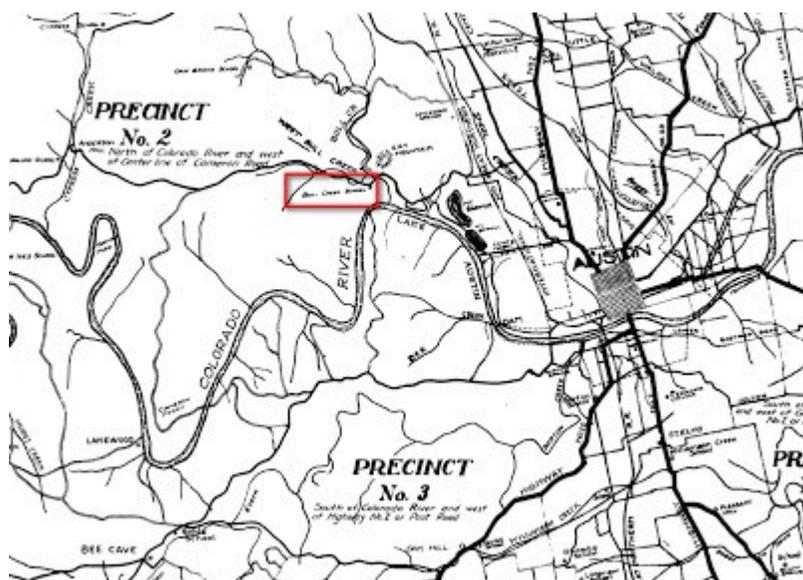
This also appears to be the location of the very first log cabin version of the school built in 1867. In 1966 the *The Austin American* ran an article about Clementine Walden Jackson, 75 at the time, titled "She recalls bull creek, oak grove of long ago!". In the article is a photo of her father, W.D. Walden, son of Hughell Walden who settled along Bull Creek in the 1850s building Walden mill[4]. Her father is standing in front of the old log cabin school he attended in the 19th century with a caption that says "It [the log cabin] was where the Pleasant Valley School is located today [1966], beside Bull Creek Road (FM 2222)". William David Walden was born 1859, died 1939. In the photo he is obviously not a young man. Of the four school buildings discussed by *Defender 1936*, there is only one that meets the criteria of having been there when he was school age, and was still around later in his life for the photo to be taken some time before his death. That is the first private school in a log house. All other buildings either were built after he past school age, or burned before he the photo could have been taken later in his life. That tells us the log cabin in front of which W.D. Walden is standing was located on 2222 where the final Pleasant Valley School would later be built in 1932.

Photos, Part I

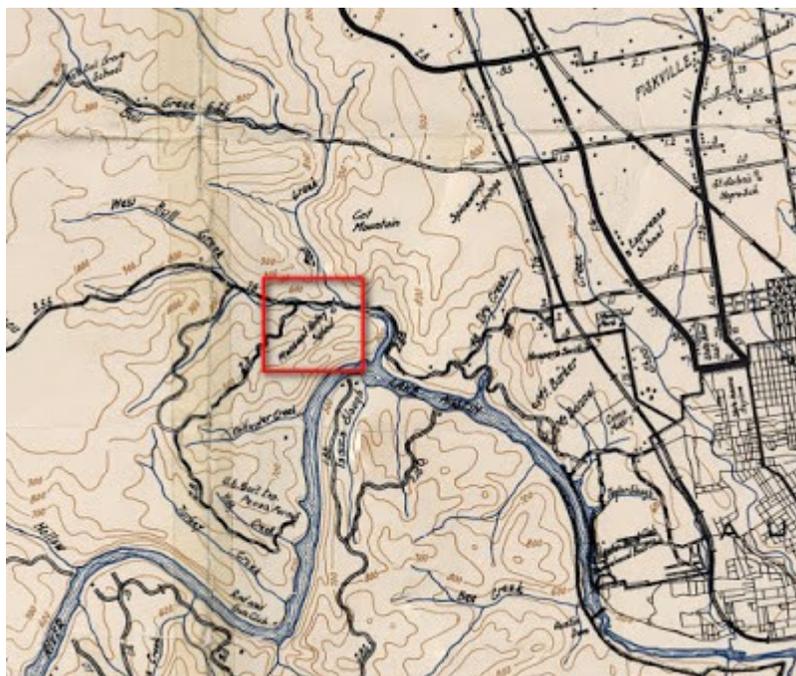


W.D. Walden (1859 - 1939) in front of log cabin school he attended in 19th century. From Clementine Walden Jackson's *The Walden home in the valley* (of Bull Creek), 1966; copy available at Austin History Center. The 1867 log cabin school is the only building that meets the criteria of having been there when he was school age (he

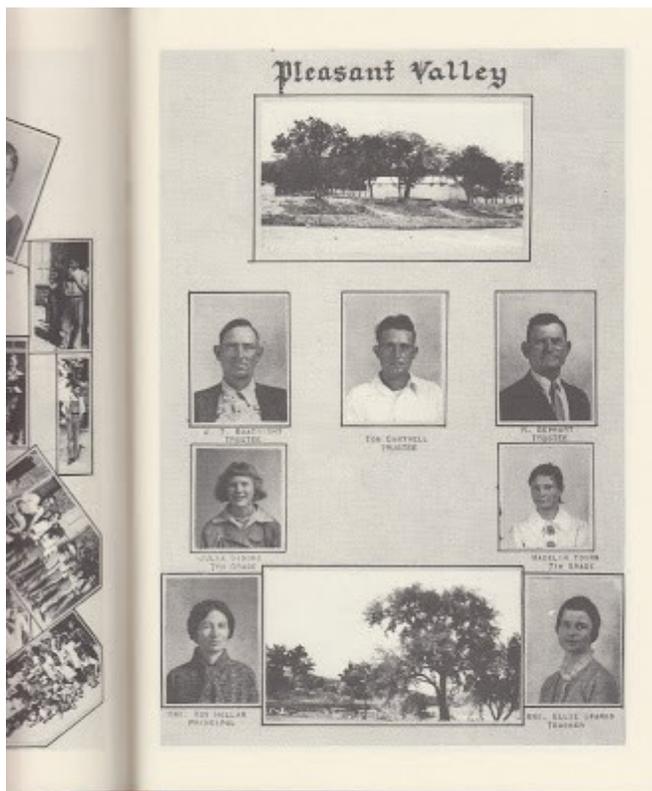
would have been 8 years old in 1867), and was still around later in his life for this photo to be taken some time before his death. This was the first Bull Creek School / Pleasant Valley School.



1898-1902 Travis County Roads, Precincts 1-4. School is shown as Bull Creek School



1932 Travis County Topo and Road Map. School now shown as Pleasant Valley School. The final school building was constructed in 1932.



Page from *The Defender 1936*. Photo at top shows last Pleasant Valley School building. Photo courtesy Lanny Ottosen.

Part II, Today

To recap, *The Defender 1936*, a book about Travis County rural schools published in 1936 for Texas' centennial, provides a history. Over the years the school occupied four buildings, first called Bull Creek School and later renamed Pleasant Valley School. The first established in 1867 was a one room log cabin, a time it says when Indians were still prevalent to the area. Two subsequent buildings burned, and the final Pleasant Valley School was built in 1932.

The location was today's intersection of FM 2222 (then called Bull Creek Road[5]) and Loop 360, on land donated for the school by the Champion family whose descendants still own land along FM 2222. As you well know, that intersection is today one big mix master of a road system. So, what ever happened to that old log cabin, and to the final building built in 1932?

We know the old log cabin was around long enough for a photo of W.D. Walden (1859 - 1939), who attended school in the cabin, to be taken before his death.[6] But I've found no evidence of the cabin today, even after discussions with descendants of the Champion family. But we may have some great old photos of that first school.

Again, while discussions with the Champion family can't confirm (most that might have known are deceased), there's reason to believe the "C.C. Champion log cabin",

photos of which are at the Austin History Center, was that first one room log cabin school, built in 1867. That cabin was located on Bull Creek Road (today's FM 2222), as was the school; is tied to C.C. Champion who donated land for the school[7]; and resembles the log cabin school in front of which W.D. Walden's photo was taken (what little of it is visible in the photo).

The first log cabin school is probably gone, but I believe preserved in photographs of what is known as the C.C. Champion log cabin. But what about the last school, built in 1932? Aerials photos show the old school building on FM 2222 until the construction of Loop 360 at which the location was bulldozed. I had assumed the old school was bulldozed during construction; discussions with TxDOT didn't give hope otherwise. Then one day I had e-mail from a fellow history buff of Bull Creek, David Whitworth, saying he may have located the old school. Indeed, he had! When Loop 360 was built, the Champion family, who owned the building, moved it about .2 miles east to sit on the bank of Bull Creek, near Fire Station 31 and County Line BBQ. The old school was now a residence.

In October 2017 myself and Bob Ward of the Travis County Historical Commission got a tour of the old school courtesy of its resident of 29 years, and a descendant of the Champion family, who still own the building. The old school looks much as it did in photos of the 1930s; a few updates were needed (e.g. indoor toilets!) to make it livable. But the old 1932 school building still exists. For now.

Plans are underway to develop the land where the school has resided since it was moved; the fate of the old school building, the last of four that were the Bull Creek School / Pleasant Valley School stretching back to 1867, is in question. Unless the school can find a new home and be moved, it is to be demolished, and photos of it may be all we'll have left to preserve its history.

Photos, Part II

All photos of the C.C. Champion log cabin were purchased from the Austin History Center. Photos of the 1932 Pleasant Valley School provided by descendants of the Champion family.

C.C. Champion Log Cabin; Probably the first 1867 Bull Creek School



This undated photo of the cabin is the best one to compare to the school in front of which W.D. Walden's photo was taken. His photo would have been taken at the rear of the cabin facing the camera here. Compare rear end of cabin, roof line and timbers with W.D. Walden photo.



This photo is dated on the back 1908. That year W.D. Walden would have been 49 years of age, and the building if it is the old Bull Creek School one room log cabin, 41 years old.



Hand tinted photo shows alternate view showing road passing by cabin. Back of photo reads "Old log cabin that was on Bull Creek Road at junction north [of?] Bull Creek March 1915". That year W.D. Walden would have been 56, and the building if it is the old Bull Creek School cabin, 48 years old.

The 1932 Pleasant Valley School building as it was



Front entrance to school. Two doors provide entrance to the two room school. No windows on the front; windows are on back side of building. Structure at left of building said to be a cistern, perhaps fed by spring or artesian well? The Champion family for a while advertised the sale of "The Champion Natural Mineral Water" from "Well No. 2, Near Bull Creek".



A view of kids playing in field, school in background up slope.



Reverse view from photo above, this photo taken from the school looking down slope. Gates show entrance to school, a road running up hill to the school. Road passing by the gate would be Bull Creek Road, i.e. today's FM 2222



Interior view. The 1932 building was a two room school, rooms separated by a moveable partition visible here.



Another interior view. Judging from students visible in both photos this shot was taken at same time as photo above. Piano visible by windows. The windows in the school were on the back, up hill side of the school.



Bare foot student and member of school staff pose in front of school.

The 1932 Pleasant Valley School building as it is today

The following photos were taken October 14th, 2017 when Travis County Historical Commission members Bob Ward and Richard Denney were given a tour of the old school as it is today. Because of the location it was difficult to get a picture from a distance to capture the whole of the school in a single shot. The building now serves as a residence so updates to the building have been made inside: e.g. a permanent wall now separates the two rooms, one room serving as an office / work area, the second a living area. Inside toilets, kitchen, etc. added. In short modern amenities have been made to make it livable.



Cornerstone from the 1932 school; courtesy of Champion family descendants



One notable change to the school is that windows have been added to the front of the school. Position of doors and eaves over each remain the same. Vents just under roof remain as in the old building.



A wider angle shot of the front of the building which still has two entrances.



Left side of the building where the cistern was located. Notice notch in roof line, said to have accommodated the cistern.



As with the old school, windows remain at the rear of the house.



Another view of the back of the house and what appear to be the original windows.

Footnotes

[1] Not to be confused with Pleasant Valley in south Austin. The valley of Bull Creek was once referred to as as the community of Pleasant Valley. *The Defender 1936: Travis County Rural Schools*, published 1936. A copy is available at the Austin History Center.

[2] see Native Americans on Bull Creek <http://txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/09/new-interpretive-signs-at-bull-creek.html>

[3] Today's FM 2222 has over time been called Bull Creek Road, and also Burnet Road (yes it once was a route to Burnet, TX). Lakewood Drive and sections of Spicewood Springs were once called Bull Creek Road. See <http://txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/06/what-does-bull-creek-road-have-to-do.html>

[4] see Walden mill on Bull Creek <http://txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/09/new-interpretive-signs-at-bull-creek.html>. Also, DON ADAMS, S. W. (1966, Aug 14). She

recalls bull creek, oak grove of long ago! *The Austin American*. Retrieved from <https://www.austinlibrary.com:8443/login?url=https://www.austinlibrary.com:2353/docview/1637684826?accountid=7451>. Also, William David Walden, (1859-1939), Texas Death Index, 1903-2000, retrieved from Ancestry.com

[5] Again, see <http://txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/06/what-does-bull-creek-road-have-to-do.html>

[6] Clementine Walden Jackson's *The Walden home in the valley (of Bull Creek)*, 1966. Also "She recalls bull creek, oak grove of long ago!", *The Austin American*, 1966, Aug 14. Retrieved from <https://www.austinlibrary.com:8443/login?url=https://www.austinlibrary.com:2353/docview/1637684826?accountid=7451>

[7] Barkley, Mary Starr (1963). *History of Travis County and Austin, 1839-1899*, pp. 153-154, 1839-1899. Waco, TX: Texian Press.



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