

A history lesson

LANDMARKS

By DALE FRY

HIGHLAND LAKES NEWSPAPERS

History reveals that Gillespie County's Crabapple Schoolhouse, located a few miles south of Enchanted Rock on FM 965, was built 133 years ago following a foot race between two men.

In 1877, two men—Crockett Riley and Mathias Schmidt—were equally adamant about donating land for a school in Crabapple. Schmidt earned naming rights after besting Riley in the race.

Construction was a community affair. A few men provided limestone, a few more hauled lumber from Austin in their wagons pulled by their animals, and others served as stonemasons.

Some of the original desks remain. Each is eight feet long and seats three students. The slanted desktops include a groove at the top for writing tools, an inkwell and a shelf for supplies.

The school opened Jan. 5, 1878, and Schmidt finally saw his dream of a school for Crabapple come true — four days before he died.

"I attended through the eighth grade, from 1946 to 1954," said Janice Beckmann, a former student. "We had 17 to 24 students a year—a big school then. Sometimes I'd be the only one in my class."

Beckmann fondly recalls the end of each

year—a warm family time of community-wide celebration.

"They would always present a big 'school closing,'" she says. "The men would barbecue, and the women always brought the trimmings. We had lots of music, singing, and baseball games with neighboring schools—and sometimes parents would produce a three-act play that evening; then they'd have a big dance."

After Fredericksburg's schools consolidated in 1957, Crabapple's citizens formed the Crabapple Community Club and opened the building as a community center. Today, Beckmann serves as treasurer.

The school will be open from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Sept. 4. Former students and community members will provide history and other information about the colorful old structure, which is located on the Gillespie County Country Schools Trail and is designated as a National Historical Register site. The public is invited.



STAFF PHOTO BY DALE FRY

This structure served as a school in Gillespie County for almost 80 years.