Long-Ago

Schools of the Chicot Area

“READING, WRITING AND RITHMETIC”
PART NINE

By MABEL THOMPSON

The Kelley-Ortego School came into being for the same reasons that most of the other earlier schools were built. Most of the people living in this area of the community, were about six miles from the school then in existence located near the Bayou Chicot High School, which was too far for the students to go. We must remember this was horse and buggy days, and roads were dirt and many times almost so bad no one could use them.

Mr. Robert Kelley, the father of Kate, Aaron, Everett and Nellie (now Mrs. Soileau) wanted to see his children get an education so began a campaign among his neighbors to build a school house in their community to be close enough for all children of the families living here to attend. After he had talked for some time another neighbor decided to join in and help Mr. Kelley. This man was Mr. Lucius Landreneau who had children that he wanted in school. When all parents became interested, material was purchased and all got together and built a one room school house in Mr. Landreneau’s pasture, and the school took the name “Kelley-Ortego.”

VIRGINIA KELLEY
WAS FIRST TEACHER

Miss Virginia Kelley (Mr. Kelley’s niece) was the first teacher. She now lives in Cheneyville and is Mrs. Virginia Powell. Jack Thompson of Opelousas was School Superintendent at the time and even if there were some public schools very little was done for the rural areas. All of this at the time we were in St. Landry Parish, as our Evangeline Parish did not come into being until 1911.

Some of the students who attended during the first year or so of the new school were Kate, Aaron, and Everett Kelley, Olive, Lydia, John, Estelle, Lena and Isaac Ortego, Thomas, Milton, and Christopher Thompson, Edoxie Landreneau, Ida Euge and Newe Brunel, Berthomson, Adam and Edna Smith, Eva, John Able, and Rene’ Vidrine, Willie, Lee and Azalee Andrus, Eve, Avia, Joe, Andrew and Horace Vidrine, Lodie, Lydia and John Landreneau.

OTHER TEACHERS

Miss Virginia Kelley only taught here one year. Then most that I talked to believed it was Winde Tatman was the next teacher for six or seven years. Dolly

MRS. J.H. COURTNEY, who was the last teacher at the Kelley-Ortego or Andrus School. Mrs. Courtney later married Everett Kelley.

Hudspeth taught one or two years, then Mrs. Della Newell taught one year somewhere around 1915. Laura Lyne came at mid term and only finished out the year. Nell Garland and Daisy Rico and Joan Neville Griffith (Mrs. Henry Griffith) taught for a while and the next teacher was Mrs. Daisy McGhee (Mrs. Merida McGhee) and after she became ill Mrs. J.H. Courtney started here in 1921, and continued on here until about 1935 or 1936 when she came to the three room Bayou Chicot School to join Mr. R.E. Allen, Mrs. Ethel Allen and myself who were already there and had been for some years. When the High School came into being in 1937, Mrs. Courtney was the Fourth Grade teacher. We three stayed on with Mr. Allen as principal, Mrs. Allen as Seventh Grade Teacher and I taught Fifth Grade along with other teachers who came and took different positions.

NAME OF SCHOOL CHANGED

Some time in the twenties Willie Andrus gave the land for the school house and the building was moved out onto the road running from Kelley’s to Lutz Hill. I am not sure why the building was moved unless Mr. Landreneau had moved away and someone else now owned the land or if all thought it would be in a better location out on the road. The school was now called Andrus School.

FOUR SUPERINTENDENTS

When the teachers taught here they taught under four superintendents, Jack Thompson from Opelousas, E.E. Ortego, Y.L. Fontenot, and F.V. Launey from Ville Platte, superintendent of Evangeline Parish.

Other students that went here during the time the school was in session were: Albert and Esther Andrus, Alfred and Rose Ortego, Nellie Kelley, Leroy and Herrenee Vidrine, Bert Milton, and Azagabella Holden, Everett Goodman, Eugene Dorman, Clarence Byrd, Fred, Doris, Kathryn and Paul Courtney, Arthur, and George Crane, Roy, Mae, Allen and Francis Andrus, Nita and Henry Guillory, Clyde Cooper, Oklie, Ollie, Winnie, and Alice Guillory, Howard, Pierre, and Geraldine Soileau, Robert, Lois, Effle, and Marvis Soileau, Mozia, Ike, Paul, Emery, John, Vina, and Botile Soileau, Adam, Evey, Aza and Irene Brunet, Ray, Rodney, Allen Roy, Charlie, Hardy and Marguerite Andrus, Isom and Joel Vidrine, Allie and Rayburn Vidrine, Marion, Foster, and Archille Vidrine, Corrine, Dudley Vidrine, Joseph and Daniel Cotton, Leamma Vidrine, Mattie Franques, Henry and Fabian Andrus, Odette and Halle Andrus, Kilen and Joyce Andrus, Henry and Nathan Guillory.

The teachers had to teach seven grades. If you do not believe this is some job just try it for a day. Courtney told me that on a few occasions she took all the children down to Chicot Bayou just behind the building and had a fishing party at lunch time.

“HOT LUNCH”

Mr. F.V. Launey said Mrs. Courtney had the first “hot lunch” kitchen in the Parish. On cold days she heated the children’s lunches on the wood heater. In the old schools pupils learned more about nature probably than they do today as their most schools were built in the woods, the pupils learned to recognize the different trees, wild flowers, and ferns they saw growing around them every day.
CHENEY OLD FIELD SCHOOL - Left to right, first row, Garnet Murphy, Carrie Young, Billie Mitchell, Sunshine Young, Aldridge Causey, Unknown, Beulah Murphy, Harbert Whittington, Betty Causey, Albert Causey, second row, Charlie Murphy, Ola Whittington, Unknown, Blanch Causey, Wallace Whatley, Murray Causey, Unknown, Hardie Causey, Grace Murphy, third row, Unknown, Walter Murphy, Lorena Whatley, Miss Pearl Nolen, teacher 1910-1911, and Miss Irene Walker.

CHENEY OLD FIELD SCHOOL - Left to right, first row, Sarah Whatley, Gordon Whatley, Aldridge Causey, Albert Causey, Blanche Causey, Unknown, Jessie Whittington, Beulah Murphy, Billie Walker, second row, Joe Ferguson, Grace Murphy, Martin Ferguson, Unknown, Unknown, Jay Fontenot, Edna Fontenot, Marshall Ferguson, Miss Grace Lawson, teacher, Walter Murphy, Harbert Whittington, third row, Charlie Murphy, Hardie Causey, Murray Causey, Wallace Whatley, Jeffer Fontenot, Frances Gasperecz, and Garnet Murphy.