

McCurdy School History



The Homestead Act of 1862 made millions of acres of unoccupied land in the Southwest available to settlers. By the turn of the century, the only land that remained available to settlers was within Arizona and New Mexico. One individual that accepted the challenge and settled in New Mexico was a Congregational minister named Rev. Wannamaker. This individual started a village in 1906 named Amistad, in eastern New Mexico. He inspired numerous religious leaders to settle in the area by placing ads for immigrants in religious periodicals. The religious settlers that responded included Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Brethren. A few years later, a young United Brethren minister from Kansas named Rev. Clarence Schlotterbeck arrived in the area to visit his parents. He was invited to visit the community of Amistad and he opened a mission field in the area.

Rev. Schlotterbeck was soon appointed by the Home Mission Board in Dayton, Ohio as "United Brethren Mission Superintendent for the Southwest." He was to organize churches in areas without churches or pastors. And with the authority to establish denominational churches throughout the area. The efforts of Rev. Schlotterbeck resulted in the establishment of what became known as the North Texas Conference.

The second meeting of the North Texas Conference was attended by Mellie Perkins. According to meeting minutes, Mellie Perkins was the Dumas, Texas representative. In the spring of 1910, Rev. Schlotterbeck went on a difficult journey on horseback across the Sangre De Cristo mountains and into the Rio Grande Valley. He believed that on his journey he could encounter United Brethren people lost from their churches and living in the valley. As Rev. Schlotterbeck traveled through the upper Rio Grande valley, he discovered that it was Spanish-speaking territory and that numerous "Anglos" and Spanish people lived in the area without religious services.

Approximately three months later, he returned to Amistad and reported his trip with encouragement to evangelize the area. His message resulted in a donation of \$1000 dollars from Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hauser to establish work in the Velarde, New Mexico area. His message also resulted in an offer from Mellie Perkins to go to work in the northern Rio Grande Valley area. Mellie Perkins arrived in Velarde on October 12, 1912 on what was now mission property. The area was described as having a "dilapidated" appearance.

After a lot of repair work and landscaping, the Velarde Mission School opened on October 21 with 4 pupils and ended in May with 43. At the end of the school's first year, it was clear that Miss Perkins and the Velarde Mission School would be in need of additional personnel. During the 1913-1914 school year, Miss Bessie Haffner of Illinois joined Miss Perkins at the Velarde

Mission School. Records indicate that Miss Haffner remained with the school until 1916. In 1915 Miss Perkins moved from Velarde to the Santa Cruz area to open the Santa Cruz Mission School on October 11, 1915. The new school started with a total of 8 students.

Before arriving in Velarde in 1912, Miss Perkins has attended Campbell College in Holton, Kansas to prepare for her work in Velarde, New Mexico. A portion of her time was spent studying the Spanish language under the instruction of a young woman named Edith McCurdy. She and Miss Perkins became friends and the following year "she wrote an encouraging letter and sent money for the mission work." In the summer of 1912, Miss McCurdy traveled home to Pennsylvania to visit her family where she became ill and died suddenly. Her grieving father donated \$1000 to Santa Cruz Mission in her memory. The first mission building in Santa Cruz was dedicated in November of 1915 and was named the Edith M. McCurdy Mission.

On September of 1917, the Alcalde Mission School was opened in Alcalde between Velarde and Santa Cruz. Due to her mother's illness as well as her own, in 1918 Miss Perkins resigned from the mission field and left New Mexico. She died on June 15, 1924 in Puente, California.

In 1927 Glen McCracken became the high school principal and later the superintendent of McCurdy School. In 1930 Mr. McCracken reported a total of 108 students at McCurdy School. As the first gymnasium was nearing completion at McCurdy, a fire burned the building to the ground in 1931. When the building was rebuilt, it was dedicated and named McCracken Gymnasium. Boarding students were a part of the McCurdy School student body and during the 1940's the boarding living quarters became very crowded. Miss Irene Bachman shared her concerns and the need for new a new dormitory to the church body and became successful in 1950 when a new dormitory was constructed. The new dormitory was named Bachman Hall in 1965. By 1965 Mr. McCracken had retired and Dale Robinson was named the new McCurdy School Superintendent.

As a result of high operations costs and other economic factors, the Velarde Mission School was closed in 1966. With the help of group ministry, the Velarde church maintains and active congregation. In 1969 Mr. Robinson assisted in the creation of a local School Board of Trustees to have local input into the school's decision-making process. In 1973 the number of students at McCurdy was a record of 597 students. This total included students at the Santa Cruz and Alcalde schools. Due to high operations costs and other economic factors, the Alcalde Mission School was closed on May 23, 1980. After the closure of the Alcalde Mission, McCurdy School presently enrolls approximately 420 students. McCurdy School has continued to provide a high quality Christian-based education throughout the 1980's, 1990's and presently in the new millennium.

(Information on the McCurdy School history is taken from the book entitled Light in the Valley)