

On the Range

by AmeriCorps Workers
Jacob VanStike and Zach Dreher

The School House, known as the Hillmon School District No. 6, was moved from the Devizes neighborhood in northwest Norton County to the Prairie Dog State Park grounds in 1968 with the purpose of being a museum open to the public. It was restored by volunteer labor inside and out with furnishings being made inside the building; including three different types of desks, and arm chair, teacher's desks, book cases, pot-belly stoves, black boards, an 1890 Webster's Dictionary, some other old books, and about everything else needed to start a school in the 1920s. The school got its name from Dick Hillmon, a homesteader and pioneer who donated the land for the building only if they named it, "The Hillmon School." Originally, the first school house was in a log building and Emma Hillmon, wife of Dick Hillmon, was the first teacher. Mr. Hillmon came to Norton County and took land two miles west of Devizes in the late spring of 1886. Dick and Emma Hillmon divorced because of conflicts, which led to division of property.

The little 20x28 foot school house now stands restored to its former usefulness at Prairie Dog State Park, four miles West of Norton, where youngsters can marvel at how different it was then, then now. Life in those days was quite different from today. There were no automobiles, no radios, no TVs, and the writing utensils were goose quill pens. The only sources of news were the newspapers and the only entertainment would have been community meetings at the country schools.

Later in 1887 the site of the school house was moved across the road and up the hill where a new school was built at the cost of about \$450, which is now the present building. Many

teachers have taught at the Hillmon School House. In about sixty years, approximately twenty-five teachers have taught there. Mr. Martin taught the first term in the new school house, and was followed by many others. Some would teach a year or longer, others would have a term of five to seven months, depending on the money available.

Not every child went to school during this time period; some of the older children would come to school later in the afternoon after working in the morning. The age of the children ranged from kindergarten to twelfth grade with as many as thirty kids in a classroom.

This school is full of memories that fill the classroom. Memories of Christmas programs, chasing jackrabbits on horses, catching crow's eggs from a tall tree, picnics, acting mischievous in front of the teacher to make her think we were up to something. At the end of every school year at the School House, the mothers would bring baskets full of food and they would celebrate the day with a feast. Then the big old school bell would ring one last time, calling them in to take their seats; for some it would be the last. Howard Hays wrote an article in the Norton Daily Telegram, September 3rd, 1968 about the re-opening of the school house saying, "Gone are the one-room schools that once dotted these western plains. Their bells that once called little children to their desks are silenced forever, but these memories of the individuals that attended this school still linger what was once a dream, now has come true."

The information used to create this article was found in an article published in a prior edition of the Norton Telegram on the 3rd of September in 1969 written by Howard Hays.



Welcome . . . to Prairie Dog State Park

A prime place to experience the shortgrass prairies of western Kansas, Prairie Dog State Park occupies 1,150 acres on the shores of Keith Sebelius Reservoir in Norton County. The park is home to a thriving prairie dog colony and is the site of the last remaining adobe house in

Kansas. The renovated adobe house was built on the site in the early 1890's. A 1.4-mile nature trail complete with interpretive signage is a great way to explore the park and observe wildlife. Historical interpretation is a hallmark of this park. Two vintage 19th century buildings

are preserved here, including a one room school and renovated adobe house. Sebelius Reservoir is well known for its excellent fishing opportunities. In recent years, anglers have found productive fishing for black bass, walleye, wiper, crappie, catfish and saugeye.



— HILLMON SCHOOL DIST. NO. 7 —

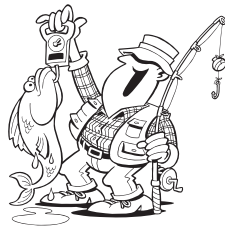
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