

Texas Historical Commission (JM), 1/10/78  
27" x 42" Official Texas Historical Marker with post  
Gregg County (Order #5136) Location: 315 East North St., Kilgore  
SITE OF\*\*\*  
ALEXANDER INSTITUTE\*

5136

BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS, EDUCATION  
WAS PROVIDED BY SMALL PRIVATE ACADEMIES SUCH AS THE  
ALEXANDER INSTITUTE, A SUCCESSOR TO THE NEW DANVILLE  
MASONIC FEMALE ACADEMY, FOUNDED IN NEARBY DANVILLE  
IN 1854, THE INSTITUTE WAS NAMED FOR PIONEER EDUCATOR  
ISAAC ALEXANDER (1832-1919), A NATIVE OF VIRGINIA, DR. ALEXANDER  
WAS PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY WHEN IT MOVED TO  
KILGORE IN 1873, SOON AFTER THE CITY WAS FOUNDED.

IN 1875 OPERATION OF THE SCHOOL WAS TRANSFERRED TO  
THE EAST TEXAS CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH SOUTH, OFFERING COURSES FROM PRIMARY THROUGH  
COLLEGE LEVEL, THE INSTITUTE WAS HIGHLY REGARDED AS A  
FINISHING SCHOOL FOR GIRLS AND A PREPARATORY SCHOOL  
FOR BOYS. STUDENTS FROM ALL PARTS OF EAST TEXAS  
RECEIVED INSTRUCTION HERE. THE BOYS BOARDED IN PRIVATE  
HOMES AND THE GIRLS WITH MRS. ALEXANDER, DAUGHTER OF  
A WELL-KNOWN METHODIST MINISTER, THE REV. JAMES HALL.

DR. ALEXANDER SERVED AS PRESIDENT UNTIL 1894, WHEN  
THE SCHOOL MOVED TO JACKSONVILLE IN RUSK COUNTY AND  
BECAME LON MORRIS COLLEGE, ONE OF THE OLDEST JUNIOR  
COLLEGES IN TEXAS. THE KILGORE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OCCUPIED  
THE OLD ALEXANDER INSTITUTE CLASSROOM BUILDING AT  
THIS SITE UNTIL 1913. THE STRUCTURE WAS THEN DISMANTLED

AND THE LUMBER USED TO BUILD A PRIVATE RESIDENCE.\*\*

\*3/4 inch lettering  
\*\*1/2 inch lettering  
\*\*\*1/4 inch lettering

(1978)\*\*\*  
APPROVED  
Truett Latimer

Incise in base: SPONSORED BY MRS. WECE B. JOHNSON,  
A TRUSTEE OF LON MORRIS COLLEGE

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## ALEXANDER INSTITUTE: FORERUNNER OF MODERN SCHOOLS

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In the early days of Texas history and before the establishment of the public school system, means of education had to be provided by the settlers of each community. The usual method of providing education for the younger generation was by the establishment of private schools. "An Act was passed by the Fifth Legislature of Texas, approved January 25, 1854, 4 Gammels Laws of Texas, pages 27-29, incorporating the "New Danville Masonic Female Academy," the Section of the Act reading:

"Section I. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas that Oliver H. Pegues, Thomas W. Templeton, John A. Smith, J. N. Pettis, Solon S. Barnett, Benjamin R. Wilson, F. M. Stovall, W. W. Caulder, Elbert Dickson, Henry Tucker, J. C. Haynes and Joseph S. Stuart and their successors in office ~~be~~ and they are hereby constituted a body corporate and politic by the name of the President and Trustees of New Danville Masonic Female Academy, in which name it may sue and be sued, plead and be impleaded, buy and sell property, both real, personal and mixed, hold and enjoy the same; the said institution may have a common seal for the transaction of its business."

The institute continued as a school until after the War Between the States in 1865, and until the establishment of the townsite of Kilgore in 1872.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Isaac Alexander, who had been a teacher in the famed Looney School at Gilmer, became associated with the New Danville Masonic Female Academy. In 1873, he was persuaded to move the academy to Kilgore after <sup>the town</sup> its founding in 1872, and thereafter the school was commonly known as the Alexander Institute, open alike to male and female students. Danville, prior to 1872, was quite a place of importance for church and school assembly.

"Kilgore was fortunate in securing for this section an educator without a peer, Dr. Isaac Alexander, founder of Alexander Institute, a private school

1. Richard B. Levy, History of the Creation of Gregg County, Texas, Pg. 9

unsurpassed in scholastic efficiency and one destined to play a large role in the history of Kilgore. A good man and pioneer educator, Dr. Isaac Alexander was born July 24, 1832 at Lebanon, Virginia. He was educated at Emory and Henry College, converted, and joined the Methodist Church at the age of sixteen years. He came to Texas in 1854 and joined the Texas Methodist Conference in 1855."<sup>2</sup>

"In 1875, the school was transferred to the East Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Opened with primary, grammar, and junior college departments, the school developed into a finishing school for girls and a preparatory school for boys. The only Methodist school in the bounds of the Conference, the Institute, by 1885, had property valued at \$8,000, employed four teachers, and enrolled 150 pupils."<sup>3</sup>

"Lumber, livestock, poultry and cotton predominated Kilgore's economy at the time Professor Alexander opened the private institute, therefore, the nominal rates of tuition charged by Alexander made it possible for youngsters of Kilgore pioneers, as well as those of surrounding communities, to get an education. Tuition charges ranged from \$2.00 to \$4.00 per month. Boarding students were attracted from points in East Texas quite distant from Kilgore. The "young ladies" were required to board with and be under the personal supervision of Mrs. Alexander, daughter of a well-known Methodist minister of the time, <sup>the</sup> Reverend James Hall. The "young gentlemen" students boarded in private homes for a customary charge of \$12.00 per month."<sup>4</sup> "Many romances between local and boarding students came to bud and culminated while at the Institute, thus blended the families and affected the history of East Texas. For example, Lou Della Thompson, who learned her ABC's at Alexander Institute and whose father, Captain John M. Thompson helped with the building of the school, met and later married a young

2. A narrative of Places, Names and Narratives of Kilgore and Vicinity as related by Mrs. Stella G. Bagwell and others. Pg. 9
3. Dorman H. Winfrey, A History of Rusk County, Texas pg. 55
4. APictorial History of Gregg County, published by Longview Jr. Chamber of Commerce

gentleman boarding-student, W. R. Crim, of a neighboring community, Crim's Chapel. Captain Thompson purchased a ship's bell, while on a trip to New Orleans, La., that hung in the bell tower at Alexander Institute. On clear mornings, this bell could be heard tolling the opening of school hour for a distance of three miles. The bell was later moved to the grounds of the present Kilgore High School."<sup>5</sup>

"Dr. Alexander served as president of the institution until about 1894 when it was moved to Jacksonville in northeastern Rusk County near Kilgore and later was given the name Lon Morris College."<sup>6</sup> "At the time the Alexander Institute was moved to Jacksonville, Miss Stella Goforth of Overton, later Mrs. John E. Bagwell of Kilgore, was one of the teachers in the old two-story building. The building was converted into a public school, housing Kilgore Public Schools until 1913. The chapel part of the building, owned by the Methodists, was moved a block west and became the Methodist Church, while a two-story, galleried dormitory, located three blocks west, was sold as a private residence.

It is interesting to note some of the physical descriptions of the building as well as the disciplines and social behaviors of Alexander Institute, typical of its era, as told by former students, Mrs. Lou Della Crim and John Henry Laird. "The lower floor of the school consisted of two large rooms. A partition separated these two rooms up to a raised platform that was in the center between the two rooms. The boys sat on one side of this partition and the girls sat on the other. The teacher standing on the platform could teach both boys and girls who sat on long recitation benches on each side of the partition. Knot-holes and cracks in the partition were worn slick by the constant passage of notes between the boys and girls when teacher's back was turned. The boys and girls were not to speak or communicate with each other in any way except once a year on May Day when all rules were suspended and the entire school went to a spot on Rabbit Creek, now known as Oil Center, for a May Day basket picnic. Pupils were conveyed to the

*This word should be partition  
DP, 10  
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5. Stella G. Bagwell, *op. cit.*, Pg. 9

6. Homer S. Thrall, A Brief History of Methodism in Texas, pg. 276

picnic grounds in spring wagons. On Sunday afternoons and after school hours the boys and girls would take walks along the paths in the wooded territory adjacent to the school. They would meet each other quite by accident and stop and talk. In this way, the many romances began and flourished. Mr. Laird indicated that he had spent many hours passing the notes that arranged for these "accidental meetings". Spiritual guidance and admonition were given the students at chapel each morning and at a special lecture given by Dr. Alexander each Monday morning from the platform dividing the rooms.

It was here at Alexander Institute that "knowledge and right rules of conduct built Christian character" for the youth of Kilgore and the surrounding area. The school was moved to Jacksonville where it still exists as Lon Morris College. Although Dr. Alexander, exhausted of finances at the time of the move, had requested that the school be named for whoever endowed it, his daughter, Jennie, wife of James A. Thompson and daughter-in-law of the aforementioned Captain John M. Thompson, was grieved until her death that her father's name was not used by the college he had founded and given his love and devotion."<sup>7</sup>

On January 6, 1894, the Trustees of the Alexander Institute, J.A.V. Barton, W. A. Sampey, A. J. Frick, T. P. Smith, John Adams, L. M. Fowler, J. T. Smith, J. S. Mathis, W. R. Miller, R. W. Wynn, and W. C. Bolton executed a deed to the Methodist Episcopal Church of Kilgore, Texas described as Block 151, a part of the Mary Van Winkle Survey, as recorded in Vol. 2 pg. 13 of the deed records of Gregg County, Texas. This property was used as a community school for Kilgore students. On November 23, 1904 W. C. Bolton, now 80 years of age, one of the aforementioned trustees of the Alexander Institute, and representing the Methodist Conference, executed a deed to J. S. King et al, trustees of the community school of Kilgore, Texas to property described as Block 151 as recorded in Vol. 2 pg. 13

7. Stella G. Bagwell, op. cit., pg. 9

deed records of Gregg County, Texas.

According to the Gregg County Commissioner's Court records, an election of the people of Kilgore on August 27, 1906, as canvassed by Gregg County Judge Edwin Lacy, established the Kilgore Independent School District, an area of 25 miles, having 125 pupils, and with a tax rate set at .20¢. On April 19, 1913, the Board of Trustees of the Kilgore Independent School District; J. F. Culp, President, L. P. Griffin, P. E. Barton, R. W. Wynn, John S. King, and Steve Dunn, a negro, executed a deed to J. W. Brantley and wife, Linda R., described as Block 151, a part of the Mary Van Winkle Survey. Three days later, April 22, 1913, Mr. Brantley executed a deed to Block 151 to W. T. Thompson for a consideration of \$1,150.00. Since Mr. Thompson's death in 1927, the property has been transferred to his wife, Fannie E. Thompson, at the time of her death in 1932 to their daughter, Mrs. Anabel Compton, and at her death in 1955 to her daughter, Mrs. Evelyn Compton. The house, standing today at 315 E. North St. and occupied by Mrs. Compton, was constructed primarily from materials salvaged from the original building housing the Alexander Institute. The building was dismantled in 1913 at the time the property was sold and a new school building was erected on Longview Street.

"In taking a look at the heritage of Kilgore, a city founded by God-fearing pioneer East Texans, it is established that these citizens determined to build a community supported by the soil, yet prospered by transportation. These pioneers, including Dr. Isaac Alexander, not content with just an agrarian community, provided this area with an educational facility, the Alexander Institute, that drew young students from all the surrounding communities."<sup>8</sup>.

Truly, the Alexander Institute, the site of which is located at 315 E. North St. and described as Block 151, Lots 4 and 5 and E 1/2 of Lot 3, City of Kilgore, Texas, is significant in the history of the East Texas area as well as the history

8. Helen M. Griffin, Why I Am Proud of My Home Town, Kilgore News Herald, July 3, 1977  
Pg 1B

of education in the State of Texas. The institution served as the foundation for present-day educational facilities in Kilgore; was the forerunner of Lon Morris College at Jacksonville, Texas, a college that has celebrated its centennial and is recognized as the oldest Junior College in Texas.

← oldest junior college in Texas is not a junior coll. recognized

It is "one of the oldest" but the ups and downs of colleges are such that tomorrow one of the older colleges now giving four years of work could turn junior and knock this one out of the distinction.

D. Parmelee, 10-21  
1977

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