

For Whom Miss Belle's Tolls

"Welcome to my school. I'm always happy to have a visitor. The children, as you see, are just arriving. Step inside into my classroom. When the children come in, they sit on these wooden benches and get ready for their lessons. In the summer months, the children help me move the benches to the storage barn so I can set up my parlor until they return in the fall. I live in the back of the house during the school term.

The children are taking out their slates and chalk as they get ready to learn. It's a little chilly, so I've started the stove. I think I'll just add another piece of wood.

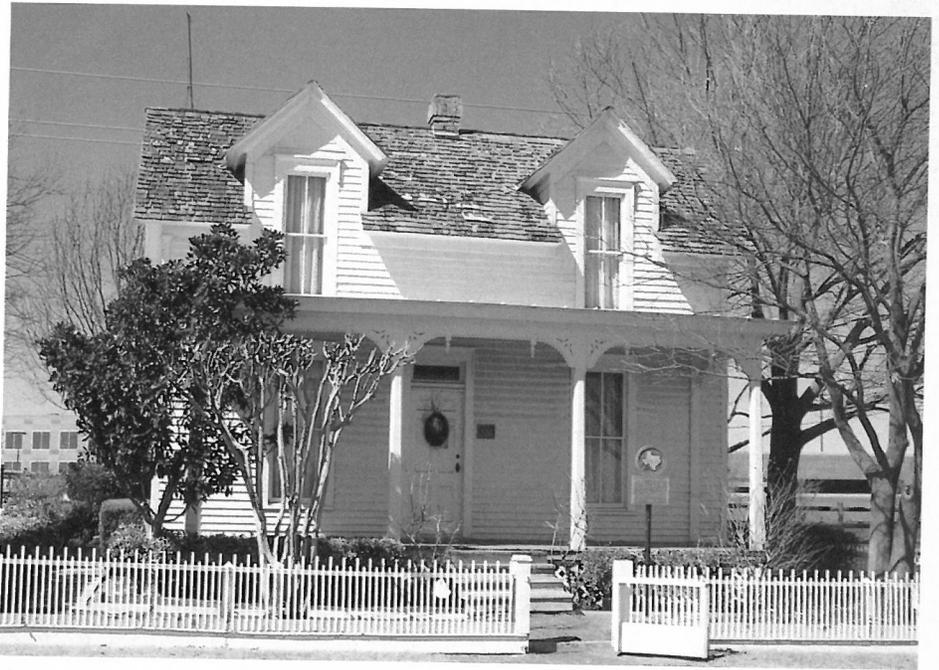
I have about ten children each year of various ages. Usually they are at Kindergarten through fourth grade levels. I teach them basic studies, ABCs and mathematics and such, but I also teach social graces. I think that is important.

I charge \$4.00 a week for tuition. I know this is a bit high, but the children are getting a very strong education. I've been a teacher in the Richardson Public School system, so I'm very experienced.

While the children are getting settled in, let me show you around. This room, next to the schoolroom, is used as a bedroom. My brother's children often stay with me, and if one of my students isn't feeling well, there is a place to lie down.

Through the bedroom is my dining room. When I got my telephone in 1910, I had it installed in here. The switchboard was located in Sam Harben's Drugstore.

Here's my kitchen. Yes, you do smell apple pie. It's in the pie safe just behind you. I baked it early this morning. These pie safes are wonderful inventions. The screening in the doors lets the pies cool and keeps the flies out at the same time.



Through that door and up the stairs is my bedroom and a spare room where I do my sewing. I always lock this door at the bottom on the stairs when I go to bed at night. And, I keep a pistol with me for protection. Can't be too careful."

Walking around Miss Belle's Place you can almost see her in her starched cuffs and collar. A picture of Virginia Belle, known to her students as "Miss Belle," shows her as a "no frills" 32-year-old spinster, when her parents bought the house for her in 1902. The purchase price was \$350. At that time, the house was located in downtown Richardson at 206 Sherman Street. Miss Belle taught until 1938 when her first kindergarten student, Eldon Campbell, completed the program.

The two-story frame house was built around 1887. It was a four-room Victorian style home. A two-room addition to the first floor was later added. You will notice that there are

no closets in the house because at the time houses were taxed according to the number of rooms and closets were considered rooms.

After Miss Belle died, the house had various owners. It was used as a house and as a commercial property until Jean Lowe donated the house to the City of Richardson. In 1979 the City moved the house to the Owens Farm property and the Junior League of Richardson began working on extensive restoration of the property.

Miss Belle's Place, designated as a Texas Historical Landmark, is truly a Richardson treasure.

For more information or to schedule tours, contact the Junior League of Richardson at www.JLRTX.com.

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