



## **#37: A Story of the Aldine School Board**

This story is not about Humble ISD but is rather about our Humble-area neighbors to the east: Aldine ISD. I grew up in Aldine and attended the Aldine ISD schools. I was always impressed with the way Aldine ran their schools and noticed how good they were with their finances. As a student, I was told stories of how Aldine once went bankrupt and swore never to go bankrupt again. But I never knew the actual story. Here it is:

Aldine ISD went through some fast, uncomfortable growing pains in the 1950s: (1) home valuations went up significantly, (2) parents protested that their taxes were too high, and (3) student enrollment went from 2,000 students in 1945 up to 7,000 students in 1955, resulting in the need for more schools and more teachers (and more funds). A group of parents, called the Aldine Taxpayers Association, wanted the district to spend less money, and to lower their taxes. In 1956, they decided to do something about it.

During school board elections in 1956 and 1957, five members of the Aldine Taxpayers Association were elected to the school board. This created a majority of the board (5 members) aligned to the taxpayer's association, and a minority (2 members) who were not. The majority immediately went to work to assume control of the district. They fired Superintendent Johnny Elsik and replaced him with Dr. Paul Hensarling. Although, they ultimately turned against Hensarling too. They tried to circumvent Hensarling by hiring an Assistant Superintendent, and then gave the assistant all of the superintendent's authority. When that didn't work, they fired Dr. Hensarling.

The real problem came in October 1958. With a majority of the school board representing the Aldine Taxpayers Association, the school board adopted a tax rate of \$1.35, even though it would take a tax rate of at least \$1.59 to fund the school district for a year. In the meantime, the five majority members claimed the two minority members were no longer qualified to legally be on the school board and filed suit against them. At the next school board election, two members of the majority were voted out and replaced with two school board members who were not members of the Aldine Taxpayers Association. But, due to the lawsuits, there were still questions as to if there were currently 5 or 7 legally elected school board members. The three remaining taxpayer association board members claimed they represented the majority of the five legally elected school board members and kept giving orders.

In April 1959, the district did not have enough money to pay its teachers. The teachers walked out, which shut down all 11 of the Aldine schools. The Texas Legislature stepped in to provide the district with a loan, but the board members filed suit against each other as to who had authority to accept or deny the loan. Both the State Education Commissioner and Texas Governor Price Daniel pleaded for the school board to settle their differences, but to no avail.

At the next school board meeting on April 30, 1959, the meeting broke out into a riot. Parents, upset about the school closings, rushed the stage and attacked the three school board members that were aligned with the Aldine Taxpayers Association. Robert L. Whitmarsh was dragged from the stage and beaten with a chair, while Henry F. Ammons was picked up and thrown from the stage into the angry crowd. Carl H. Tautenhahn managed to run and lock himself in a bathroom. Sixty deputy sheriffs were dispatched to break up the riot.

Due to all of the legal wrangling, the Aldine schools did not reopen until May 20<sup>th</sup>. In June, the three problematic school board members were found guilty of official incompetence by adopting a tax rate that was unable to support the school district and were replaced. All of the lawsuits and challenges were not finished until August 1959. By that time, with the help of new superintendent W. W. Thorne, the district was finally able to get their operations back to normal.

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*This article originally appeared in the Humble, Texas newspaper: The Tribune, 8 March 2021.*

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