

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Anna Pennybacker, Teacher, Author, Activist, 1861-1938

Pioneering teacher Anna Pennybacker made Texas's history come alive by sprinkling it with tantalizing stories. She wrote the first Texas history textbook, used by four decades of Texas students.

Daughter of a Baptist minister, Anna arrived in Texas with her family at age 17. She won a competitive scholarship to attend the new Normal Institute in Huntsville, and in 1880, after a year of instruction, she graduated with a teacher's certificate. She taught first in Bryan grammar school, where her stories won smiles and acclaim from the children. While her fiancé studied abroad, Anna taught in Missouri. He returned in 1884 as superintendent of Tyler schools and appointed Anna to be history teacher and principal at Central High, a post that she filled for nine years. In 1888 she published *A New History of Texas for Schools* complete with illustrations, footnotes, and teaching guides. The book found its way into classrooms throughout the state. The Texas legislature responded by adopting it as the official text for public schools.<sup>1</sup>



In 1893 Anna followed her husband to his new position in Palestine, Texas. He died six years later, and she moved with her three young children to Austin. From here she became increasingly involved in the women's club movement. She headed the state Federation of Women's Clubs 1901-1903 and rose to president of the national Federation 1912-1916. As a club member, she spoke artfully to raise scholarship money for women at The University of Texas at Austin and to persuade the legislature to build a women's dormitory there. She embraced causes such as child welfare, immigrant status, women's suffrage, and the Chautauqua Women's Club. A pacifist and friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, she supported the Great War reluctantly. Afterwards she set her goals on international peace and disarmament by working as a special correspondent to the League of Nations. She urged the United States to join the World Court and to sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact, renouncing war as an instrument of national policy.<sup>2</sup>

At age 76, still devoted to education, Anna gave the commencement address for Houston's combined high school graduation, the first woman ever to do so.

### Quotations

*[My book] attempts to picture the principal events in our history in a style easy and natural, yet vivid. It was written from the standpoint of a teacher, who believes that success in teaching history demands not only a live instructor, but also a live text-book.*—From preface to first edition, *A New History of Texas for Schools*, by Anna Pennybacker<sup>3</sup>

*I gasp even yet when I remember the astonishment I felt, and the thrill over the daring of it. A story in school! . . . I stepped into the outer edge of freedom of thought. For here was history!*—A student of Mrs. Pennybacker<sup>4</sup>

*I feel with all the strength of my woman's being that war is a relic of barbarism.*—Anna Pennybacker, 1918<sup>5</sup>

### Photo

#1440-I. ITC San Antonio Light Collection.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Major source for biographical information in this article is Johnnye Pierce Kennedy, "Anna Pennybacker, Historian of Texas," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 11:2 (Fall 1972), pp. 73-80. Other sources are Stacey A. Cordery, "Pennybacker, Anna J. Hardwicke," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/PP/fpe30.html> (April 14, 2005); Ruthe Winegarten, *Texas Women: A Pictorial History from Indians to Astronauts* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986), p. 100; and "A Guide to the Mrs. Percy V. Pennybacker Papers," Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/00043/00043-P.html> (April 14, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Pennybacker's political activities are discussed in Winegarten, *Texas Women: A Pictorial History*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Anna J. Hardwicke Pennybacker, *A New History of Texas for Schools* (Tyler: Published for the author, 1888), pp. v-vi, cited in Kennedy, "Anna Pennybacker," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 11:2, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Student quoted in Helen Knox, *Mrs. Percy V. Pennybacker: An Appreciation* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1916), p. 56, cited in Kennedy, "Anna Pennybacker," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 11:2, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Winegarten, *Texas Women: A Pictorial History*, p. 100.