

History Of The
HAZELWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Board Of Education
HAZELWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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To Don Russell —
he started something big.

Foreword

THIS HISTORY OF THE HAZELWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT started out as a presentation to retiring school superintendent Clifford R. Kirby, prepared by a number of teachers and PTA workers for his retirement dinner in 1967.

The Hazelwood board of education felt that the patrons of the district would be more capable of understanding and anticipating future crises if they had accurate information available on the heritage of their school system.

A close examination of the presentation revealed a number of inaccuracies. This is due to the fact that those putting it together were working under pressure of deadline and they did not have at their disposal the knowledge of sources or research techniques used by the professional historian.

Our membership in the Mercantile Library, State Historical Society of Missouri, Missouri Historical Society, and the Central Public Library of the City of St. Louis — plus personal files containing material used in preparing specialized area histories over the past several years — have yielded many of the answers we needed.

A special acknowledgement is to be made to the officers and directors of Land Title Insurance Company, Clayton, who allowed us the use of their vast repository of records to identify data on the school lands of the 19th century. Henry Strecker of that firm spent enough time on the

high ladders of the record rooms to develop a more or less permanent nose bleed. Those rooms — two floors of them — are partitioned with shelving and files running to within a few inches of the 20-foot ceiling. To locate data on the old Brown school, for instance, Strecker consulted at least a dozen of those books, taking about 45 minutes, before he found the notation of date showing the transfer of land to the neighborhood farmers who comprised the three-man board of education.

The title company is the one used by Don O. Russell, the Hazelwood board's legal counsel, in compilation of data needed to secure clear title to school sites purchased by the district.

The others to whom credit is due are far too numerous to mention. Interviews with those who taught or attended the old one-room rural schools a half-century ago were simply delightful. Some of the individual school histories were written by the author as long as 10 years ago, and of course some of those interviewed at that time no longer are with us. All are acknowledged in the narrative.

If history is to be described as a course of monumental events, then there is little history connected with the Hazelwood School District. We are thinking in particular of the departure of the Lewis and Clark expedition from the mouth of Wood River [a point which now happens to be in the Hazelwood School District, due to the wandering of the Mississippi River.] Or the great St. Louis fire and cholera epidemic of 1849. The opening of Eads Bridge; the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904.

Those events were news — unusual occurrences which do not really mirror life in these United States as it existed more than a century ago. The history of the Hazelwood School District is an elusive one. It is a study in dynamics — the precipitous change from a somnolent group of 13 widely separated little school buildings to a vibrant, urban goliath bent upon the nearly impossible task of preserving the identity of each of tens of thousands of students, while providing an economical and efficient education with too little revenue, and at the same time teaching each of those children to compete effectively in a society geared to render the moon rockets obsolete before they take off.

—April 10, 1969

*School days, school days,
Dear old golden rule days,
Readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic,
Taught to the tune of a hick'ry stick.
You were my queen in calico,
I was your bashful barefoot beau,
And you wrote on my slate, "I love you so,"
When we were a couple of kids.*

— Gus Edwards, 1907

History Of The
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Introduction

THE HAZELWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT IS ONE BIG hunk of ground. On the west the boundary reaches from the old Rock Road bridge over the Missouri, then up around the great bend of the river on the north, over past the confluence to the new Chain of Rocks bridge across the Mississippi on the east, and then straight west, generally following the route of Interstate Highway 270, a few blocks to the south.

Excepted is a sizeable gouge out of the center of the district from the south, and this includes Florissant's so-called "Old Town" section, generally marked on the west and north by the course of the historic Coldwater Creek. The eastern boundary of this gouge begins about a mile west of the Y of the Halls Ferrys — New and Old — and follows a section line up to an intersection with the creek.

All told we're talking about 78 square miles of district, and that is just 17 square miles larger than the City of St. Louis.

In the earliest days of St. Louis County this was simply the periphery of one of the most fertile valleys on earth. Although precise documentation has yet to be discovered, the old town of Florissant — known then as St. Ferdinand — is believed to have been founded in 1786, just 22 years after the founding of St. Louis. Prior to that time the area was a prime hunting and gathering ground for nomadic Indian tribes. We shall quote these paragraphs from our *History of Florissant*:

“As the earthmovers roared down through the valley in the post-World War II years, shearing the tops from the ridges and filling the draws, the telltale signs of early habitation were exposed to sunlight. Firepits, postmolds and refuse pits indicated that, if the area was not actually the home of vast numbers of Indians, at least it was a large hunting camp at which the inhabitants spent several weeks out of the year.

“One such evidence was uncovered on a tract east of town, on a farm located approximately ½-mile south of Highway 140 [now U.S. 67] and about ¼-mile east of New Halls Ferry Road. As the graders for the Las Lomas subdivision peeled layers off a ridge near Coldwater Creek, a row of black circles appeared some five feet below the original grade. They were about 15 feet apart and 15 to 18 inches in diameter, with the inner circumference lined with blackened limestone slabs.

“These were the firepits of a primitive culture. There is a rule of thumb on soil buildup — an inch a century. This would indicate that the pits were used some 6,000 years ago, or about 4,000 BC, possibly considerably before. Bits of animal bone were found in the pits, and some projectile points similar to those identified with the Paleo Indian culture — probably left in the game during the roast.

“Smaller circles, much closer together, formed large ovals in several areas of the building site. These were postmolds — the deteriorated remains of poles imbedded in the earth to form the walls of prehistoric homes or hunting lodges.

“Portions of a figurine also were discovered, along with fragments of human bone. Great quantities of fish bones, decomposed but not petrified, were found, indicating that the Missouri was up to her old tricks long before the white man first cussed her out.

“A site at Musick’s Ferry, at the end of Halls Ferry Road, indicated that the bluff was occupied by a number of cultures. Artifacts were found from the late Archaic period, the late Hopewell period, late Woodland and early Mississippian cultures.”

Only a few years ago a couple of young boys pulled a huge bone from the bed of Coldwater Creek, which authorities at the Museum of Science and Natural History indicated was an elephant bone of some sort — probably mammoth or mastodon.

One of the Frenchmen who helped found St. Louis was named Francois Dunegant *dit* (nicknamed, or known as) Beausosier. He led a colony of St. Louis pioneers to the banks of Coldwater, and thus started the old town of Florissant, or St. Ferdinand. As was the habit of the pioneer French, the old town was laid out in the grid system of the Spaniards. There were 16 even squares, 320 feet to a side. Across the creek (and into lands now occupied by the school district) were the

commonfields. These were strips of ground about 180 feet wide and reaching from the creek to the Missouri bottomlands. These were apportioned to the citizens in accordance with their need and ability to work the ground. The Hazelwood School District now owns no less than 11 buildings on these former commonfields.

The area was initially settled by the French, with only a handful of Spanish. It was dangerous to live in an outlying farm dwelling without a community of fellow citizens at hand. Few of the Indians in this area would take a human life, but they would take just about everything else that wasn't nailed down.

Settlement, therefore, was very slow. On the Dupré atlas of 1829, a quarter century after the land was transferred from Spain to France to the United States, the great holdings were still lodged in the names of Auguste and Pierre Chouteau. There were several dozen other names showing of course, but not very many considering the vast size of the district.

Such was not the case in the little village of St. Louis. By the time the Dupré was published, the city had outgrown its knickers. The first schoolmaster, a man named Trudeau, had started a number of schools and given up on all of them. He finally engaged in the fur trade of the Upper Missouri River.

The people evidently had expressed dissatisfaction with the cost of the schools in the early 1800s, because the board of aldermen voted to suspend school one year. St. Louis University — then little more than a junior high school — already was under way. At the seminary on the "Bishop's Farm," founded by the Jesuits, a school for Indian boys opened and closed. [This later became St. Stanislaus Seminary. It is located on Howdershell Road, east of Charbonier Road.] Philippine Duchesne and her community of Sacred Heart nuns at old St. Ferdinand opened and closed a school for Indian girls.

The farmers in the North County detested the idea of being illiterate, but they would rather deny the blessings of an education to their children than lose their labor on the farm.

The land was good to its inhabitants. It served as a breadbasket for the Indians and now it was serving as the breadbasket for all of St. Louis. The flooding of the bottomlands was more than compensated for by the lushness of the rest of the valley. More and more of the ground was placed under cultivation, and the holders of the vast tracts gradually sold off enough portions to make the remainder workable. Thus, the population slowly increased. First a few dozen families, then a few hundred.

As farming techniques developed, and as the quality of the farm implements and horticultural science improved, the occupants of the

land found themselves no longer poor farmers. Few were affluent but they worked hard and saved their money. Gradually, one by one, they became aware that their children were going to have to be equipped with more than a fine set of sinews if they were to compete in the 19th century. These people had no tradition of formal education — free or otherwise — behind them. Few had seen the inside of a classroom at all. Yet, even in their primitive state of pedagogic thinking, they knew that free schools for all children were necessary, and they willingly committed themselves to provide those schools.

One by one, they sold or gave away small parcels of ground, then levied modest taxes against their holdings to pay for a teacher.

There was ample provision for the creation of public schools in the State of Missouri. The first constitution, written in 1820, called for one or more schools in each congressional township (six miles square) where the poor should be taught totally free of charge. Each township was divided into 36 sections of one square mile each, and the 16th section of each township was to remain in the public domain, with revenues produced by it to go into school funds.

A far-reaching act in 1835 established some method of state control of public education, pegged the length of the school term at no less than six months, established the two-thirds majority necessary for passage of tax levies, up to a maximum of $3\frac{1}{2}$ cents per \$100 assessed valuation, and established local boards of education to hire teachers and make other arrangements for the conduct of public schools.

In 1839 legislation was passed establishing the office of state superintendent, and in 1853 the legislature provided for a county commissioner to visit, examine the instructors, and award certificates of qualification to them, and to call elections. The schools still were not completely free — those who sent their children had to pay small amounts of tuition. The uniform course of study was legislated two years later, and finally, in 1866, the legislature recognized that free public schools were the duty of all the citizens, and tuition to the elementary grades was halted.

By 1876, when the City of St. Louis elected to divorce itself from the burdensome and vast reaches of St. Louis County, the county area had 82 school districts, including 25 high schools. By 1934 there were 127,529 school districts in the United States. Sixteen years later there were 84,468.

But it was in the middle of the 19th century that the farmers of the North County became concerned enough about the lack of education in their sparsely populated area to do something about it.



Henry Strecker, an official of Land Title Insurance Company, Clayton, searches for Brown school data in cavernous record vaults. It took a 45-minute hunt, crosschecking through dozens of yellowed documents, to uncover clues to the date of transfer of the land to the school district.

CHAPTER 1

THE BROWN SCHOOL

THE AVERAGE ST. LOUISAN HAS A MENTAL image of North St. Louis County: one rolling hill after another, with both hills and valleys encrusted with one little house after another.

This may be the case with some areas of the Hazelwood School District, but it is a fact that only half the ground now is developed. A lot of it still lies much as it was a century ago — narrow roads curving through the bald knobs. Clusters of neat farm buildings are surrounded by oceans of black soil, and sometimes by oceans of Missouri River floodwaters.

Up in the northernmost reaches of the school district, where the Missouri bends from a northeast course to the southeast and juncture with the Mississippi, there is a white brick building serving as a private home. For 100 years it housed children from that sparsely settled neighborhood. It is surrounded by the undulating hills of the North County — with the once vast areas between the farm complexes now relieved by an occasional house or two.

Here is the Brown school. Product of a homespun American society of frontiersmen, anxious to prepare their children for their future, begrudging their loss to the classroom during the spring plowing season, proud when an occasional eighth grader returned from Clayton exams aglow over his new diploma.

Now the white brick building is quiet, serving its remaining days as the residence for the Salem Baptist Church custodian.

John N. Seely owned that ground first. Records in the Land Title



This shot of old Brown (James) school was made in late 1800s, shows frame vestibule capped with belfry. Photo courtesy Mrs. Aurelia Wehmer.

Company vaults in Clayton reveal a sizeable acreage was conferred to Seely on February 18, 1800, by the Spanish government. A certificate recognizing this was issued by the United States on September 22, 1810. On January 26, 1834, Seely deeded much of his ground to the hero of this chapter, William (Uncle Billy) James.

In the 1840s the settlers were anything but crowded, but the little log school near the Cold Water cemetery — the only one for miles around — was bursting at the seams. The children on the Shackelford, New Halls Ferry and Old Jamestown roads had a long way to walk to school in the biting winters of the mid-century.

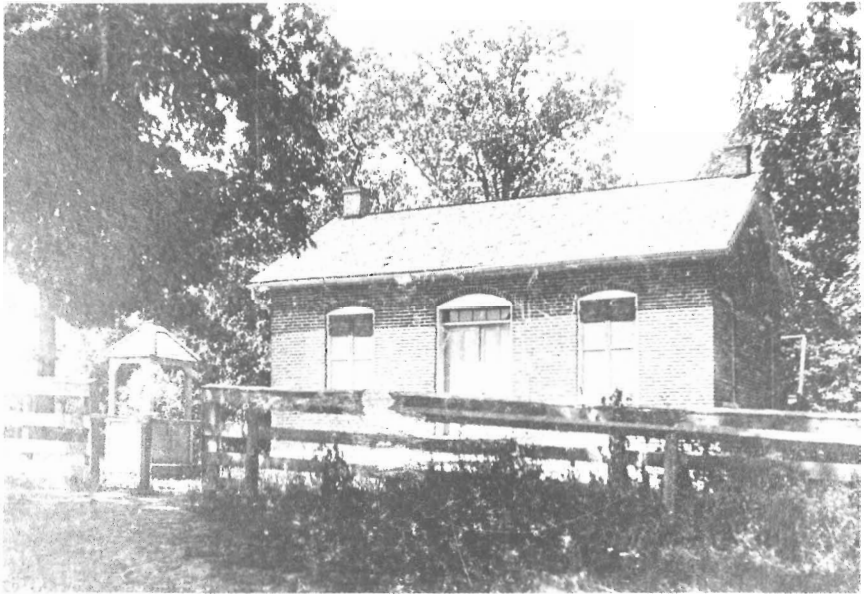
Uncle Billy James did something about it. On December 9, 1859, he deeded $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre of ground to the three directors on the board of education — Peter Temple, Benjamin Douglas and Lewis Patterson. The tract was on the north side of Old Jamestown road east of Douglas and almost on the corner of the Carrico road. It adjoined land owned by the Browns — David, Clement and William.

On this ground a tiny, one-room school was built of brick, probably hand-fired in the neighborhood. There is some speculation that slaves might have built the building, and this is entirely possible. Slaves took well to the mason's art.

The late Mrs. Henri Chomeau, widow of an early St. Louis County



No one can be identified in this picture of Brown school enrollment taken in 1890s — not even the guy peeking around the vestibule. Photo from Aurelia Wehmer.



The old Brown school as it appeared about the turn of the century. Windows are shuttered, vestibule removed and ornate well house has been erected. Photo courtesy Mrs. Aurelia Wehmer.

engineer, said that the school originally was called "James School," after "Uncle Billy," but by the time she taught there, in 1887, it was called the "Douglas School," in honor of her uncle, Benjamin Douglas.

This may have been the case, but Mrs. Aurelia Thompson (Rill) Wehmer went to school there in 1893 and it was the "James School" then. By the time her boys went there, however, it had changed finally to the "Brown School."

Mrs. Wehmer states that an early teacher, Lizzy Brown, had the opinion that her family really owned that ground due to a surveyor's error; that it wasn't Uncle Billy's land to give in the first place. On the strength of this argument she persuaded the board of trustees to change the name of the school.

Mrs. Wehmer was born in 1887, a daughter of a farmer and threshing machine operator named James Thompson. Born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1843, Thompson married a daughter of Walter Carrico, who inherited a large acreage in 1877. Thompson died in 1916.

In 1893 Rill Thompson started at the James School. Her teacher was Miss Maybell Parks, who later married young Clem Brown.

Rill's older sister Evie (Evaline) was a teacher working at the old Hyatt school on Shackelford near Humes, and Rill spent some years at Hyatt with her. Miss Eletha Gibson taught at James for awhile, and then Evie Thompson came to James to take her place.

Miss Varena Douglas was the first teacher known by Mrs. Wehmer to have taught at James. She married Chomeau and her sister, Mary



Photo taken in March, 1969, shows addition built to the west wall by present owners, Salem Baptist Church. West chimney is gone, east chimney is relocated, gable is now above entry. Cistern cap at left is all that remains of well.



Wood library addition of 1920s is at left. Church-built addition is in foreground.

Douglas, succeeded her as the teacher at James. After Varena's death, she also succeeded her sister as Chomeau's wife. Then Miss Ibby Patterson, who now lies in the old Cold Water cemetery, followed the Douglas girls as teacher, and she was succeeded by Lizzie Brown, who married George Carrico.

Rill compiled the list of teachers with care. She wrote down her sister Sarah, who followed Evie when Evie married Julius Warren. Sarah married Horace Wagner and in came Miss Elizabeth Kiskaddon. Then a Mrs. Puncheon, Miss Agnes Carrico, and Miss Ruth Nolte, who married a man named Couch. Ruth Spangler followed her and was succeeded by Blanche Nolte, who married Oliver B. Patterson. Miss Nolte was the first teacher of Rill's children. Miss Bessie Musgrove, Mrs. Mabel Butts, and a Miss McAlister followed. Miss McAlister married an Aubuchon and was succeeded by Mrs. Lorene Hitt, now Mrs. Oscar Lusher. Mrs. Lusher was the first Hazelwood superintendent, and has been retired only a few years from the Hazelwood system. She and her husband live in Florissant.

Miss Lenore Hitt followed her sister at Brown, and now heads the Social Studies department at Hazelwood Senior High School. Miss Gruerson succeeded her, and the last teacher at the old school was Mrs. Julia E. Trousdale, now teaching first grade at Charbonier school.

Rill finished up at the James School in 1901. Not wanting to take the arduous examination from the County Superintendent, she went to live with her brother in St. Louis, attending the Clay school on 20th Street. After she received her diploma she attended Central and Yate-man high schools, then came home to marry and raise a family.

She now lives near her children on Old Jamestown road, not far from the old school.

"I remember the James school well," she said. "You know it didn't

have that brick addition on the west until the church bought the building from the school district some years back.

"We had a well in front with two wooden buckets on a chain. My, how those boys would delight in dousing me with water when I walked by.

"There was a chimney at each end and a pot belly stove on one end only. I'd burn up on one side and freeze on the other. I can remember the boys throwing wood in that stove like it was yesterday.

"Our farm was just up the Carrico road $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile.

"There were blackboards at each end of the room and double seats — two children for each desk. We had no cloakroom — hooks on the wall did the job. The windowsills held our sack lunches.

"The church (Salem Baptist) used the school for night meetings a lot. They would hang kerosene lamps on brackets by the windows.

"There were double doors on front, with a row of window lights over them. The little wood library addition was added long after I got out of school — sometime before the middle 20s."

Mrs. Wehmer has fond memories of her cousin, Clarence Carrico. "My, he was slick. He could chew a plug of tobacco an hour and the teacher knew darned well he was doing it but do you think she could catch him at it? No sir she couldn't. Clarence went on to be a famous



Mrs. Aurelia Thompson (Rill) Wehmer, with her grandson, Greg, son of James H. Wehmer, former school board president.



Cold Water Cemetery, where most of Brown and Cold Water school pioneers are buried.

osteopathic doctor.

“The school picnics were wonderful. We would bring the whole family and have big picnic dinners on the school grounds. There would be a sack race, potato race, three-legged race — all the things I guess most children today don’t know anything about.”

[Mrs. Wehmer died late in 1976.]

In 1903, the county superintendent, J. Will Andrae, issued his third annual report and had this to say in preface: “I am sorry to say that

there are a few teachers in the county who seem to have lapsed into a semi-somnambulistic state and who must arouse themselves or be relegated to the great heap of forgotten antiquities."

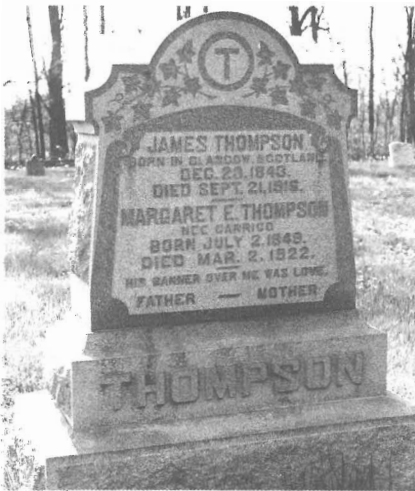
Andrae announced the average salary for female teachers was \$53.65 (men got \$70.25) a month. There were 6,715 children in average daily attendance in the county (10,375 enrolled), 226 teachers, 118 buildings, an average tax levy of 34½ cents, and 292 trees planted on Arbor Day.

James Thompson, Rill's father, was listed as president of the school board (He served on the board for 40 years.) H. W. Carrico was clerk, and John W. Warren and August Lemkaman were directors. Two years later Herman Bergfeldt was president, Carrico remained as clerk, Thompson and George Rau were directors.

In 1911, W. T. Bender was County Superintendent. He reported that "school boards paid more attention to the grade of teachers employed and took more interest in the sanitary conditions of the school buildings and outhouses, hitherto sadly neglected."

Frank Niehaus was board president, Carrico still was the clerk, and John C. Heins was director. The teacher was paid \$855 for the year, and had 18 pupils in average daily attendance. The total cost of conducting school was \$1,729 — or \$96.06 per pupil.

In 1923 the board was dominated by Carricos — Walter was president, H. W. was still clerk, Grover B. was a director, and so was William Plume. The salary of the teacher was up to \$900.



James Thompson, Rill Wehmer's father, served on Brown school board for 40 years.



Carrico family served on Brown school board for nearly 100 years. Here is grave of patriarch, Walter Carrico.

The salary rose still more, to \$1,035 in 1932, but was slashed to \$765 the next year as the depression deepened.

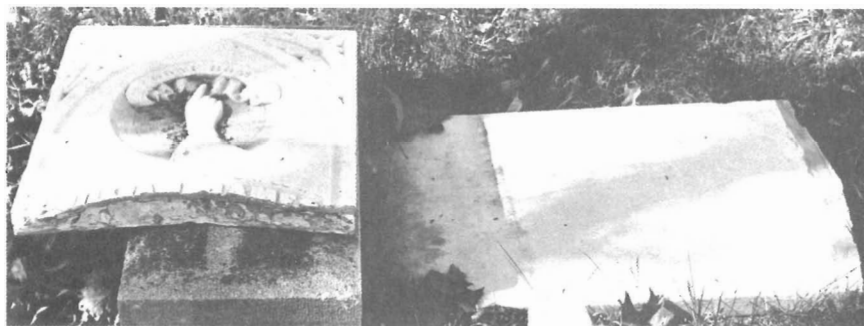
By 1941 the salary was \$1,000, ADA was only 10 pupils, and the levy was 65 cents. Carrico was still clerk and Rill's husband, Louis A. Wehmer, was a director.

ADA in 1945-46 was 20 pupils. In the 1949-50 school year there were 16 pupils in average daily attendance, the teacher earned \$1,620. The levy was \$1.30 and the total cost of school was \$4,254.87, including 10 high school tuition pupils.

Back in 1933 the great Rufus G. Russell was county superintendent. (Hazelwood's Russell school on Howdershell road is named after Dr. Russell.) He met with a districting board no less than 16 times in an attempt to combine the county's 90 districts into 16. The Brown school would have joined Cold Water, Elm Grove, Hyatt and Rosary with Hancock, Evergreen, Kinloch, Ferguson and St. Ferdinand (Florissant) schools. The plan failed at the polls.

On December 10, 1949, the little Elm Grove district on Highway 140 [now U.S. 67] reorganized as a six-director district, and became known as the School District of Hazelwood. On March 25, 1950, that body added the Brown school to its list of annexations. On the board at that time were James H. Wehmer (Rill's third son), Elmer Minkemann and Louis Alberts. Wehmer later served as Hazelwood board president for several years.

The deed was done. Shortly thereafter the old brick building, just a few months short of a century old, saw its last pupils. It soon was functioning as the Salem Baptist Church parsonage.



Broken headstone marks grave of William (Uncle Billy) James, who gave land for the school. He died in 1875 at age 71.

CHAPTER 2

THE COLD WATER SCHOOL

IT HAD BEEN 40 YEARS SINCE THE BIG WEEPING willow blew over. It would be good to again get some shade from the southern sun for the aging brick building.

Mrs. Helen Grueninger Schoenhoff, now 72, felt the shovel go into the soft turf. Within minutes a four-foot willow was in place.

"My brother George planted the original willow back around the turn of the century. I was just a baby then," she said.

"We always made a production out of tree planting at the schools; always dedicated the tree to something. George dedicated his to the sinking of the *Maine* in 1898," she said.

The tree was on the south corner of the old Cold Water school, 15875 New Halls Ferry road. Many trees had come and gone in the 110 years the building had been there. Of the hundreds of laughing children who played outside in the school yard during the first 50 years, probably only a few are still alive.

Yet, the building seems as sturdy now as it ever was. In the last years of its active life it was underpinned with a new poured concrete basement.

A few years ago it was saved from destruction by a group of concerned citizens who had formed an organization called "Heritage Foundation" for that purpose.

Heritage Foundation put on a new roof. Last winter they installed a new central heating plant. This spring they planted shrubbery and some foundation plants. They are constantly on the lookout for old furnishings, so they can return the building to its appearance around the turn of the century.



This is how old Cold Water looked after it had been abandoned for teaching purposes by the young Hazelwood School District. Photo was made by the late Earle T. Williams, husband of the last Cold Water teacher, Mrs. Grace Williams.

Old as it is, this is not the first Cold Water school. The first building, made of logs, is referred to in an old deed to the original Cold Water Church. Both structures once stood near the Cold Water Cemetery,

near Old Halls Ferry and Vaile roads.

The Cold Water Church was moved and now stands on the south corner of New Halls Ferry and Patterson roads. The old log Cold Water School burned about mid-century.

An 1829 atlas shows the present site — just in front of the big new Hazelwood High School — was in the center of a 557-acre tract owned by D. and S. Hodges. On the west was ground owned by Antoine Soulard, the first surveyor of St. Louis. Just to the northeast was the end of the vast Commonfields of St. Ferdinand, the commons serving the old town of Florissant.

Mrs. Schoenhoff, who now lives on Clayton road, attended Cold Water in 1897. Edward C. Hume, the present caretaker of the old Cold Water Cemetery, attended for eight years, from 1904 to 1912.

One of the foremost authorities on the lore of the old building is Mrs. Alice Dale (Mrs. Henry W.) Wehmer, a long-time teacher of the Hazelwood School District, who on July 1, 1961, became the first teacher to retire from the system.

Mrs. Wehmer attended Cold Water from 1897 until 1905, when she became the first Cold Water alumnus to actually get a diploma. Her



Old Cold Water looked like this in 1969. Scar around front doorway was left when anteroom was removed. Belfrey is empty now — the little bell is enshrined in a place of honor in front of the new Administration Building, just to the north. (See dust jacket.)



The late Alice Dale Wehmer was 79 when she posed for this picture in 1969. She still cherishes her grade school diploma, the first to be issued to a Cold Water graduate.

mother, Anna Belle Smiley Dale, attended the old Brown school in the early 1870s. Mrs. Dale died in 1966 at age 99.

The family lived on New Halls Ferry near the river, then moved almost opposite the Cold Water school. Alice was the oldest of the eight Dale children.

"The one person who had the most influence on my life was my teacher at Cold Water — a pretty wisp of an 18-year-old girl named Rose Brier," she said.

"She was a quiet girl — very tidy. She customarily wore a shirtwaist and skirt — and always a white apron — always. Her home was in Ferguson but she boarded at the Herman Kamp farm. Her father, a German immigrant who taught at Normandy, also was the county superintendent," Mrs. Wehmer said.

"Then in the eighth grade her sister Cecilia came to teach and she



Mrs. Helen Grueninger Schoenhoff, 72, finishes planting a willow tree in 1969. It replaced one planted in 1898 or 1899 by her brother, George Grueninger, to commemorate sinking of Maine. At left is Edward C. Hume, who attended from 1904 to 1912. At right is John Wehmer, president of Heritage Foundation. Scar on rear of building was left when anteroom built about 1900 was removed. Door led to well and chain pump.



Mrs. Wehmer's mother, right, was Anna Belle Smiley Dale, who died in 1966 at age 99. At left is her teacher at old Brown school in 1875, Mrs. Vena Douglas Chomeau, wife of Henri Chomeau and early St. Louis County engineer. She also was the mother of Post-Dispatch columnist Adele Starbird. Both Mrs. Dale and Mrs. Chomeau are buried in old Cold Water Cemetery.

just didn't have it. She left after a few months and Samuel Kruse came in," she said.

(Dr. S. A. Kruse retired in 1956 as head of the education department of Southeast Missouri State College, Cape Girardeau.)

Just prior to the end of the school year Mrs. Wehmer's aunt took her to Clayton, the county seat, for the graduation examination. They walked to Florissant, took the street car to Suburban Park in Wellston, then transferred to a Clayton car. The exams, administered by J. Will Andrae, the county superintendent, covered nine subjects and took all day to complete.

The 79-year-old teacher's memory was clear and accurate as she recalled her school days:

"The picnics then were just wonderful. The board would bring a big brass band from St. Louis — maybe 10 or 15 men. There were numberless kegs of draft beer and believe me we didn't have much trouble getting the fathers to come to the picnic. There were lemonade stands for the kids, paid for by the board members. They sold souvenirs too.

"The wooden steps and platform by the front door was our stage. Forty or 50 of us would sing, march and drill to spoken numbers for our parents. Folks would come from Black Jack to Bridgeton, from St. Louis to the river. It was always the biggest picnic in the county."

One and a half acres of land for the brick building was bought for \$150 from Thomas and Mary Turnstall on August 5, 1859. Purchasers were Edward Hall (namesake of Halls Ferry Road), Duvelle Patterson, and Alisia Patterson, members of the Board of Education.

Its present configuration is close to the original. A belfry was installed in 1898 or 1899. A gable-shaped scar around the front door is evidence of a wood anteroom, built about 1906 and recently removed. A



Hume and Mrs. Schoenhoff are shown inside Old Cold Water.



Miss Cecilia Brier taught this class in the fall of 1904. Mrs. Wehmer is circled at right in top row. Circled at left in second row is her brother, John Dale, who now lives in Overland. Girl circled below Miss Brier is Jennie Ann Dale Baseler, who now lives in Bel Nor. Note front addition has not yet been built.

similar scar along the rear wall is evidence of another anteroom built about the same time. A door on the south corner led to a chain pump and to a coal shed to the rear of the property.

Mrs. Wehmer describes the building as she remembers it in the 1890s:

“The one room building was small, about 24 feet by 30 feet, but large enough to accommodate 50 or 55 students seated in double desks placed in four rows with aisles between and one on each side. As time went by, seating arrangements were changed as class attendance diminished. In the early days, a pot-bellied stove stood near the center of the front part of the building, surrounded by a metal jacket which acted as a circulator and protected those who sat nearest the stove. At closing time in winter, ink bottles were frequently placed near the stove to keep them from freezing during the night when the fire died down. A large coal box was placed at the right side of the stove. This was filled each evening and held enough coal to replenish the fire during the coming day. Coal, always in generous supply, was kept in a shed at the rear of the school building.

“The teacher’s desk was on a raised platform or rostrum in the back



Miss Ida Hencken taught this 1906 class, posing in front of brand new entrance anteroom. John Dale is just below her.

part of the room. There were few discipline problems — spit balls, pig-tails dipped in ink wells, and most serious, snowballing as pupils dashed along the hard beaten paths to the two important little houses on the opposite corners of the school yard. Some very old timers say that boys and girls were not restricted from attending school because of age — some boys coming with full-grown mustaches, and children at a very early age. They were mostly farm children, and attendance swelled when they were not needed on the farm. This worked a hardship on the teachers but they were patient, gentle and understanding and they were most all loved and respected.

“Water was brought in from a cistern that was just outside the side door, and the metal or granite bucket was placed on a bench near the door together with a wash basin for washing dirty hands, and all drank from the universal dipper.

“Six kerosene lamps, one at each of the side windows, served to light up the building. These were used on rare occasions — probably a board meeting once or twice a year, maybe to set the teacher’s salary for the coming year (\$10 to \$40 per month), or the annual Christmas party. The Christmas party was one of the highlights of the school year. Children were given bags of candy, nuts, apples, and oranges. A program was rendered and a Christmas tree was lighted by candles.”



Alice Dale, center, is flanked at left by Alvina Kamp, who married a Mr. Albert, and Marie Kamp, who married William Piemann. Alice now is Mrs. Henry Wehmer, 3634 St. Marys Lane. Fragment, reproduced here actual size, is all that remains of 1897 photo.

She mentioned the curriculum:

"The earliest texts were McGuffey readers, Websters Blue Back spellers, and Ray's arithmetic. Later these were replaced by such texts as agriculture, physiology, Franklin's readers, English grammar, U.S. history, civil government (later known as political science), geography, New Spelling Copy books, and some years the German language was taught. An eighth grade graduate was required to pass an examination in each of the above subjects, except German, which was optional. Much of the work was oral, often by rote, or repetition, and by the time one reached the eighth grade he knew most of the answers. This accounts for the excellent foundation and ability to retain fundamental facts."

After graduation Mrs. Wehmer attended the old Ferguson High School on Wesley avenue.

"Dad paid the \$50 tuition. I would walk past the store and post office at Cross Keys and on into Florissant every morning. Then I took the street car to Ferguson. During the dead of winter I would board there."

Toward the end of her senior year, the teacher at the one-room Hyatt

school on Shackelford north of Humes fell and fractured her hip, and Miss Dale began a long teaching career.

Some of the early teachers were James Fugate, Fred Meyer and a Mr. Murphy, all of whom taught at Black Jack prior to Cold Water. In 1870 a Mr. Stamps was the teacher. Teachers since Dr. Kruse have been Ida Henken, Leatha Gibson, Robert Steller, Eleanor Hall, Florence McNearney (1915), Margaret Tegler (1916-1917), Emily McDonald (1918-1926), Lena Lampe (1927-31), Sarah Briscoe Carrico (1932-43), Dorothy Anderson (1944) and Grace Loesing Williams (1945 until the building was closed.) Mrs. Carrico now teaches in the Normandy school system.

The annual report issued in 1904 by County Superintendent Andrae lists Charles Gering as president of the board, Albert Swanson as clerk, and Fred Fischer and Patterson Hume as directors. Three years later Hume had been replaced by Julius Jacobsmeyer.

In 1907 a diploma was issued to Julius Hardt, the only graduate that year. Jacobsmeyer became board president and John C. Hughes and August Hackmeister were elected directors.

The assessed valuation in 1923 was \$463,290, climbing to \$573,540 in 1929. Board members included such men as Henry J. Niehaus, Herman Niehaus, Louis Gerling, Fred Dieckmann and Walter E. Rosenkoetter.

The Cold Water school was annexed to the three-month-old School District of Hazelwood No. R-1 on February 18, 1950. Members of the board of education at that time were Fred Dieckmann, president; Arthur and Oscar Hackmeister, directors; and Alfred Jacobsmeyer, clerk.

The following year Mrs. Williams taught 22 children in the first four grades. The last eighth grade graduation was in 1950, with Ellen Rather, Florence Sewing, Shirley Helms, Charles Hellman and Lawrence Meyer graduating.

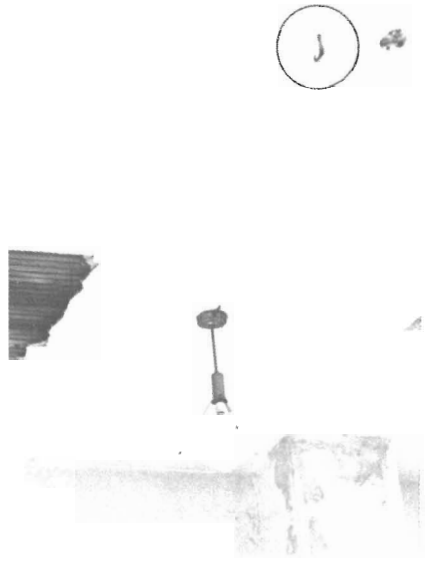
In the spring of 1954 it was all over and the school was locked up for keeps. Mrs. Williams moved to the third grade in the new Elm Grove



Dr. Samuel A. Kruse, Mrs. Wehmer's last Cold Water teacher, shown a few years before his retirement in 1956 as chairman of the education department of Southeast Missouri State College, Cape Girardeau.



Gravestone of Edward Hall, member of Cold Water school board in 1859, when land for old school was acquired. Halls Ferry road was named for him. He is buried in old Cold Water Cemetery.



Hook near southwest end of ceiling in Old Cold Water (circled) supported coal oil lamp.

school that fall. Now she teaches at the Walker school.

Work on restoration of the building is continuing as rapidly as funds will allow. John Wehmer, son of Mrs. Wehmer and chairman of the Fine Arts department of Lindenwood College, currently is president of the Foundation.

What will happen when the building restoration is completed? Decisions have yet to be made. Possibly it could generate enough revenue to open for tourists in the summers. Possibly elementary and secondary teachers in the Hazelwood district would like to enliven their history classes by bringing their children in for "A Day at Old Cold Water."

One thing is certain; due to the efforts of the Heritage Foundation, old Cold Water will live again.

CHAPTER 3

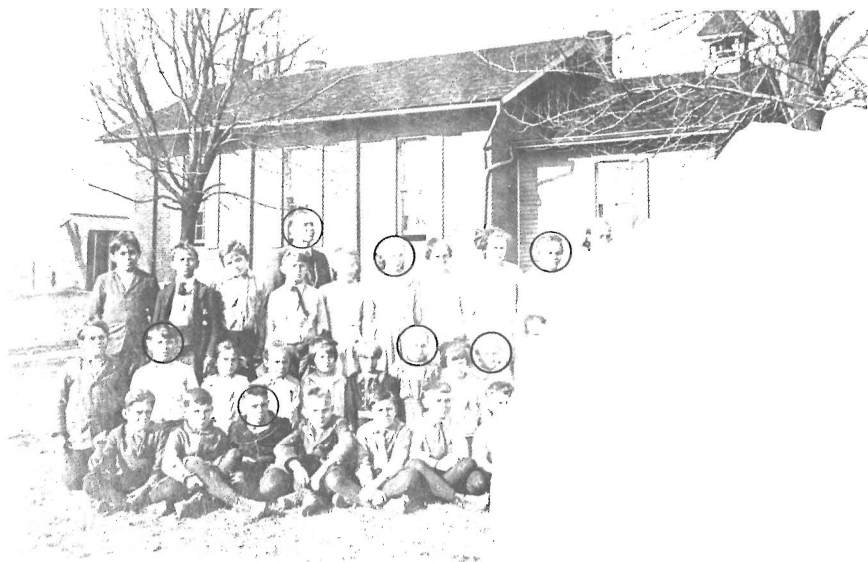
THE VOSENKEMPER SCHOOL

IT WASN'T MUCH OF AN AUCTION, AS THOSE things go. All that remained of the original Vossenkemper school was a huge pile of scrap lumber, some roofing materials, a 16-foot-square frame annex building (intact), some heavy beams, a roof truss and a big pile of bricks. Plus a little iron bell.

Old Gus had been on the Vossenkemper board of education for a good many years so he knew the rules. You just couldn't walk off with school property. So when it was called at auction, Gus put in his bid. "Two bits!"

And then he looked sternly around him. There were no other bidders. Gus was a big man. He grinned and took his bell home with him. That was in 1927. The bell stayed in his garage for many years. In 1967 his son and namesake welded the bell, built a bell tower and mounted it by his home at 477 North Highway 140 [now U.S. 67], a short distance west of the old Vossenkemper school. There it is today, its discordant sound more of a clank than a bong.

The second Vossenkemper school still stands at 6200 North Highway 140, a big two-roomer on the southwest corner of the highway and Robbins Mill road. This week the highway department is taking out a few more of the great trees that have shaded the site for a century, and



In this fragment of a photo of Vossenkemper enrollment in about 1920 or 1922, the original school, complete with its brick outhouse, may be seen. The iron bell now in August Niehaus' yard is in its bell tower, and Christian Nolte seems in perfect command of the children. The circled faces, left to right, belong to Niehaus, Oscar Wolff (of Old Jamestown road), Nolte, Selma Buschard Eggert, Mary Niehaus Behlmann, Dorothy Krueger Trampe (who lives on Lusher road), and Amanda Lichtenberg Buschard.

it's a good guess that the building itself will go within a few years.

[It was a good guess indeed. The building was sold to the developers of the adjacent Jamestown Mall and razed in 1975.]

It ceased to function as a school in 1955, four years after consolidation with the Hazelwood School District. Since that time it has served as the maintenance building. In the last several years the burgeoning district placed demands upon the building that were impossible to accommodate, and next week the board of education will open bids on a replacement building just south of the senior high, at 15875 New Halls Ferry road.

Even the new building will be unable to hold all the groundskeeping equipment owned by the district. Some will have to remain at Vossenkemper, plus some bulk storage — at least for a few more years. So the building still has some time, but it's running out.

The early history of the Vossenkemper school still is much a mystery. The old timers heard that the one-room brick school, torn down in 1927, stood exactly 60 years, and that there was an earlier log or frame build-



This picture, taken in September of 1924, shows the front of the frame anteroom, with doors draped with the American flag. Niehaus is circled.

ing on the site.

Henry Strecker, from Land Title Insurance Company, searched the voluminous records in Clayton for a clue to the existence of an earlier Vossenkemper school.

Records on the land show a deed executed July 28, 1852, and recorded the following April 1 from Jacob Veale and Lydia Veale, his wife. This involved a quarter-acre of land "or more, if absolutely necessary," for school purposes. This had to be a gift, as it was restricted. The deed passed the land to Solomon Russell, William Reef (or Keef), and Hugh L. Henshaw, trustees of the Cold Water school district. The restriction stated that the land must house a school within two years of the gift or the land would revert to the donors. It also specified that if a school was erected but wasn't used as such for a period of more than two years, the title would revert back to the Veales.

The Cold Water district was just to the northwest, and probably the Vossenkemper township had no school organization to receive the gift. Therefore, the trustees of the adjacent district had to function in that capacity.

Appended to the old yellow document is a note which says, "Mr. Chomeau says that this is the only school in the neighborhood and we



This is the second Vossenkemper school to stand on this tract at 6200 North Highway 140 [now U.S. 67]. The road was known earlier as Robbins Mill road. In front is Ray Rosenkoetter, who was a board member at the time of consolidation of the old two-roomer with the Hazelwood School District, on May 22, 1951. Structure was erected in 1927.

pass this deed as conveyed." (Chomeau was an early employee of the title company and a long time native of the North County area.)

A document dated December 30, 1867 (exactly 60 years before the erection of the present building) shows that Henry Vossenkemper and his wife conveyed this same tract, measuring "2.88 chains by 3.50 chains" to the trustees of the district. (A chain is 66 feet.) This hardly could have been done unless the ground had reverted back to the Veales, and they transferred it when they sold the rest of their ground to Vossenkemper. The ground was not a gift this time, as had been believed. The deed was unrestricted and carried a price tag of \$175 — the fair rate for an acre in that year.

On August 20, 1874, the ground was deeded from the Cold Water trustees to Vossenkemper, then a member of the Vossenkemper board, and two other board members, John Leber and Andrew Ruffner, and their successors.

There are no other early records of the school readily available. Ray Rosenkoetter, who is in charge of the ground crews of the Hazelwood district's maintenance department, served on the Vossenkemper board



The Vossenkemper site now is a vacant lot. It was bought by the developers of the adjacent Jamestown Mall.

from 1942 until May 22, 1951, when Vossenkemper voted itself into the School District of Hazelwood No. R-1.

"I'll never forget when they put up this building. We let school out a month early that spring and the farmers came in with their teams to pull down the old brick building," he said.

"Later on they sold all the stuff at auction. I bought the little vestibule — a 16-foot-square frame building — and moved it over on Gus Remmert's farm just to the west of here, where I worked as one of the hands. It's still there.

"Then all that summer they worked on this building. Finally got it open in October. We had these two rooms upstairs and two big play-rooms downstairs. After the work was done the board decided they didn't want the furnace in the play rooms, so we brought in a team and excavated for a furnace room to the west."

In 1931 the board bought an additional acre of ground from the estate of Walter Merck.

"I started school at Columbia Bottoms, then I went to Twillman in 1910 under old E. M. Denny. Later I went to Black Jack. Moved up this way in 1920 when I went to work for Mr. Remmert," Rosenkoetter said.

"Back in those days the board wasn't exactly frivolous with its money. They got rid of the janitor because they thought he used too much coal. They hired me at 50¢ a day to come in and carry out the ashes and fire up the furnace in the morning, and bank the fire every night. I guess that's when I became interested in school business.

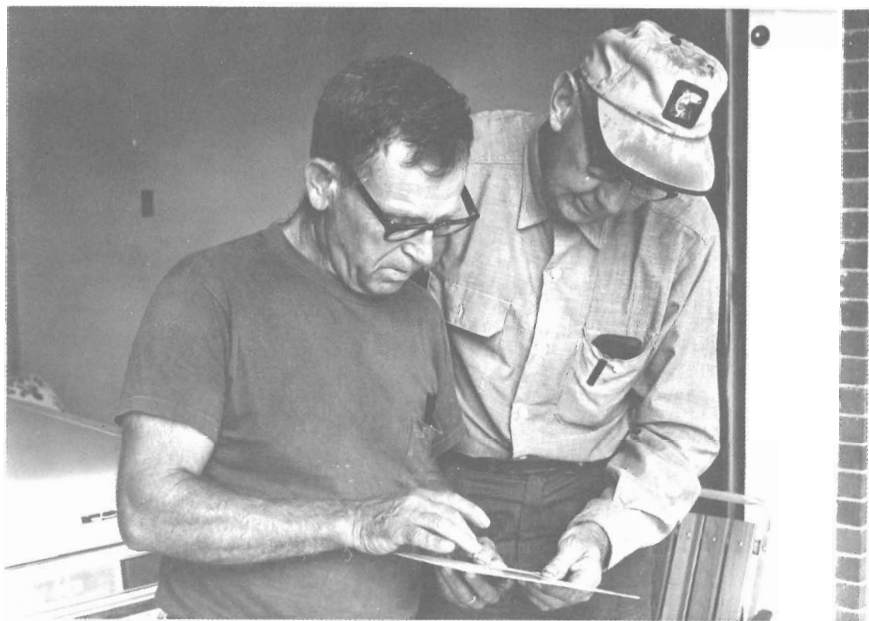
"After I went on the board, we found ourselves with a little surplus money. Two of us wanted to give the two teachers a \$25 bonus at Christmas time. They were only getting \$90 a month then. You know



Elmer Witte, left, long time clerk of Vossenkemper board of education, and August Niehaus, former board member, ring old iron bell which was over original school, built in 1867.

we actually had to overrule the third member!

"Tight as they were, those early board members had the loyalty of their teachers. Christian Nolte, a really great schoolmaster, taught for 27 years in the old building. He died in 1935. Before him there was



Niehaus, left, and Witte look over their old school picture.

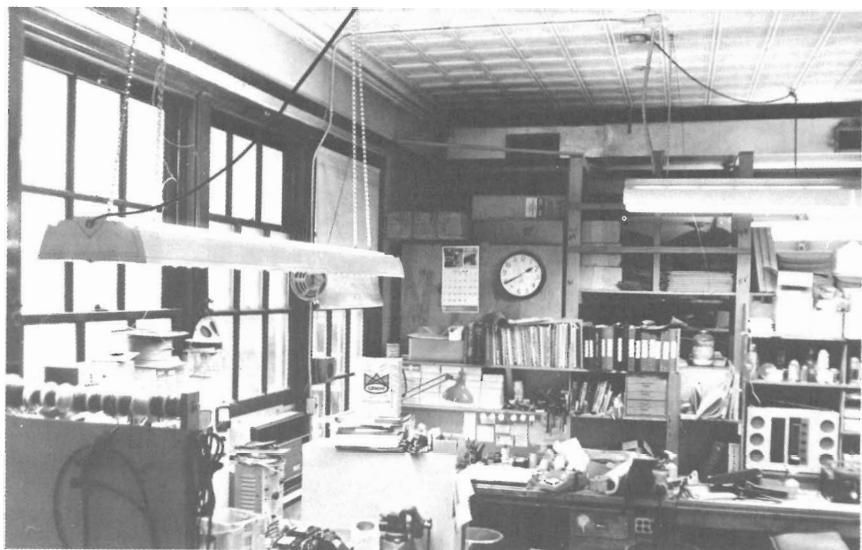
Elizabeth Mills, who stayed for 25 years.”

The last two teachers were Mrs. Catherine Hearst, who taught grades 5-8 for many years, and who currently is a guidance counselor at Kirby Junior High; and Mrs. Lydia Wulff, who now teaches third grade at the Wyland school in the Ritenour district.

“I can remember the plays we used to put on — the pie socials, the dances with the hot dogs and soda, and the picnics. All the picnic money went for Christmas for the kids, and we had some pretty big Christmas parties, I must admit. But as usual, the board members did all the work.

“When we got our new furnace in 1944 the contractor wouldn’t take a school voucher. I had to write out my personal check and wait until the next board meeting for my money. And then when the board of health condemned our water supply we had to buy tank trucks of water, hauled in from West End Fuel Company on Natural Bridge, and they wouldn’t take a check of any kind. So I had to give them four dollars of my own money every time they made a trip.”

Records in the office of the county superintendent indicate that there were just three graduates from the school in 1904 — Frank and John Wohldmann and Olinda Krueger. Henry Jacobsmeyer was board president; J. Zimmermann the clerk, and August Merkt, director. Two years later Charles W. Meyer had replaced Zimmerman and



This is the way the north room of old Vossenkemper school looked during period district used it for storage and as a maintenance center. This area was used to repair audio-visual equipment, electronic gear, etc. Some may remember the windows and the tin ceiling, but little else.

Henry J. Dieckmann had replaced Jacobsmeyer on the board.

By 1911, another Henry Vossenkemper was on the board, replacing Merkt, and Nolte was the teacher.

In 1923 Paul Hammerschmidt was board president, Henry Witte clerk, and August Niehaus the director. The district had a 20¢ tax rate and paid Nolte \$1,350 for 10 months work.

In 1933 a county school districting board met 16 times and emerged with a plan to merge the 90 little three-director districts in the county down to 16. Vossenkemper would have joined Pea Ridge, Columbia Bottom, Prigge (Larimore), Twillman and Black Jack — now all in the Hazelwood district — with the Moline, West Walnut Manor and River-view Gardens schools. Wanting no part of this, the board members campaigned against it and the measures failed all over the county.

The last Vossenkemper graduation was held June 8, 1954. The 10 graduates were Raymond Bumb, Shirley Eggert, John Gibson, Linda Hazens, Victor Heislen, Robert Johnson, Harry Kutter, Joyce Lichtenberg, James Watkins and Gary Weller. Rosenkoetter was president of the board the year of the annexation. Clarence Bumb and August Niehaus Jr. were directors. Elmer Witte was the clerk.

Harry Kutter was president of the large, active PTA, and Mrs. Wilma Lange Rosenkoetter (no relation) was secretary.

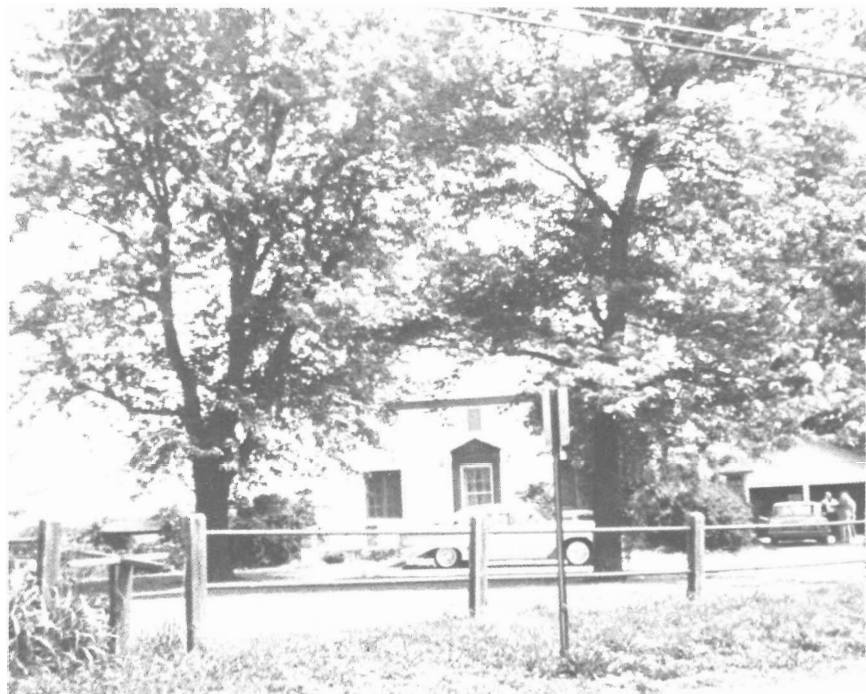
CHAPTER 4

THE PEA RIDGE SCHOOL

MARK TIME, MARCH!" A DOZEN KIDS RANGING in age from five-year-olds to gangling teenagers and dressed in the simple raiment of country people, started pounding the bare ground with crisp cadence. Young Kate Rocek, herself only two years out of her teens, waited until all the footsteps sounded as one. Then the young school mistress — they called her the "school marm" then — gave another military command, and the children silently marched into the little brick school. They stopped moving at their seats, but the cadence continued. Then, "Ready-y-y, Halt One Two!" Anybody who stomped out a "three" went back outside and did the whole thing over again.

That was the way each day started at the old Pea Ridge school in 1906. The little building was in the center of one of 13 little three-director school districts which combined in the early 1950s to form what is known today as the Hazelwood School District. In the Spanish Lake area off the north end of Bellefontaine road, the building stood for 90 years on the inside bend of Spanish Pond road. (What appears to be a continuation of Spanish Pond there actually is Strodtman road.)

Now there is a brick house on the site. On the mailbox in front is the name Charles Warner, and the number 12985. It is still all "country" for miles in all directions, but the road now is blacktopped, and it is only a matter of time before the great earthmovers peel off the soil and



This picture of the old Pea Ridge school was taken by the late Earle T. Williams in the early 1960s. It had been sold to a private party, who had converted the old school to a residence.

plant houses in the cornfields. In front of the house are several huge trees — the last links of the present to the rapidly dimming past. Three generations of children played hide and seek under those trees, but now all is quiet.

Henry Strecker, researcher for Land Title Company, was able to establish that, as those old Hazelwood predecessor schools went, Pea Ridge was a relative newcomer. A Gabriel Lord owned the ground first, as part of a 338-acre land grant. Vascal Cerre is shown as the owner later, in the old Dupré atlas of 1829. The land changed hands several times, and by 1868 was owned by John and Wilhelmina Crow. A document is on file in the Land Title offices showing transfer of the acre on which the old school stood from the Crows to the "Township Board of Education" on October 19, 1868. It was recorded November 23 of the same year. The selling price was \$125 — not bad for just one acre in those days.

The exact date of construction of the school is unknown — it could be presumed that it would have been built right away, and the structural techniques evident from the old photos indicate as much. It was a stout



The only evidence of the old school in 1969 were the fence posts. The residence is new.

little building with heavy wooden shutters and a rubblestone foundation. Like most schools it had blackboards (real slate, too) on the side walls, the teacher's desk at one end, and the room's front door at the other. Even the single outhouse was brick — it also sported a gable roof. A cistern in front had a chain pump. All the kids drank from a single tin cup.

Emilie Paul went to that school She started in the fall of 1903, when a man named Charles Deuser was schoolmaster. Two or three years later young Kate Rocek moved from the Prigge school to teach at Pea Ridge. She had been at Prigge, predecessor to the present Larimore school, just one year. That was her first job.

"Kate left her mark here, and nobody has been able to equal it, before or since," said Emilie, now the wife of Emil Tiggemann, former president of the old Pea Ridge board of education.

"I'm 72 years old and I've met a lot of fine people in my time but never anyone like Kate. She had a profound influence on a good many lives."

Emilie and Emil live on a 143-acre spread along the east side of Bellefontaine road. The land is bordered on the south by the Burlington Railroad and on the west by their own little road, Hill Top Lane. The Tiggeman's son, Burtis, lives in the big house at the end of the lane, and now works the ground. They moved there in 1922, shortly after they were married.

"My father, Herman Paul, farmed over in Columbia Bottoms," said Emilie, "just over the Pea Ridge line. The first year Kate Rocek taught up north, she lived with the Luecke family. Then she moved in with us. Her family originally was from Tacoma, Washington, but I



Old Pea Ridge school is in background of this school photo, taken in 1930. Burtis Tiggemann, son of Emil and Emilie, is second from left in front row. Second from right in front is Norval Hood Jr., who later served on school board with Emil Tiggemann. Teacher is Miss Gladys Simpson.

remember her father owned a bakery in St. Louis County.”

Miss Rocek continued to teach until the year Emilie graduated, in 1910. She then married a man named Steichmann and they moved to Indianapolis, where she worked in the city schools as a physical education instructor.

“Kate wanted one thing before she left, and that was to see me get a diploma,” said Mrs. Tiggeman. I had been over to neighboring communities a few times, and we went to Baden once a year. But the day Kate took me to the big town of Clayton for my examination — well, I’ll never forget it.”

In those days all the eighth grade graduates in St. Louis County who wanted diplomas had to be tested by the county superintendent, W. H. Bender, at Clayton High School.

“There were all those big high school kids in the same room with us country kids. They put all our questions on the big blackboard and we took most of the day to answer them. I came on home and shortly thereafter Kate left for Indianapolis.

“We used to get the old *Watchman-Advocate* in those days, and that is how I learned about my graduation. My kid brother got the mail one Saturday morning and came yelling into the house: ‘Miel, Miel — you graduated!’ And there was my name on page one, along with all



Emil and Emilie Tiggemenn pose at their Hill Top Lane farm with the diploma she received after graduating from the eighth grade, Pea Ridge school, in 1910. Old school was a mile through the fields from their farm. Signature of Mrs. Tiggemann's teacher, Kate Rocek, is in lower right corner of diploma.

the other kids who passed. That's how I found out.

"Then I got a postcard from Superintendent Bender, saying my diploma was in Clayton, and I could come and get it or send the postage.

"Well, Kate got a card too, and it was she who sent the postage. She wanted the diploma, because she wanted to sign it. A few weeks later it came to me in a mailing tube from Kate in Indianapolis. I still have it — tube and all."

Kate Rocek Steichmann is 85 now and a widow. She recently returned to the West Coast after visiting relatives in the North County.

"We always have good times when Kate comes back. We talk about the songs we used to sing every morning as school started, and in the

evening before we went home.

"We even had a special song we sang: 'Always Speak the Truth.' That was reserved for days when one of us was caught telling a fib.

"Even though Kate was very strict, with her military discipline and all, I can remember but one time when she had to give out corporal punishment.

"We had one little girl in a bad mood one day. I guess Kate just got fed up with seeing her sulking at her desk, because she walked over, bent the kid double and gave her a half dozen good whacks on the hind-side. That was the end of the pouting."

Emil Tiggemann went to Pea Ridge too, but just a year. "We moved around a lot since my folks died when I was a kid. I went to Salem Lutheran, Prigge and Columbia Bottom school too.

Tiggemann attended Pea Ridge in 1914, under a Mr. Steller.

Early records in the office of the St. Louis County superintendent show that there wasn't a single graduate from Pea Ridge in 1904. In 1903-04 the school board consisted of William Benne, president; Charles Kuske, clerk; and Henry Mueller and Henry Wiese, directors. Three years later, W. F. Lindemann had replaced Wiese. The teacher hired for 1904-05 was Dueser, but Kate Rocek was already on the county records in 1906-07 as the Pea Ridge teacher. In the spring of 1907 two of Kate's pupils graduated — Elmer Kuske and Richard Wehmeyer, who now lives in Clayton. Wehmeyer visited with Kate in July, 1969, during her return here. "I owe everything I am today to her," Wehmeyer said. "She was the only person who was able to make education interesting and challenging to me."

In 1911, Robert Steller came to Pea Ridge, and one of his pupils, Julius A. Kuske, passed the exam in Clayton. At that time the board consisted of Herman Paul (Emilie Tiggemann's father), president; William Wiese, clerk; William Lindemann and Henry Laabs, directors.

"Back in those days," Tiggemann said, "people would stay on the board for years and years. You couldn't get rid of the job as long as people thought you were doing right.

"Well, some of them thought a couple of board members ought to be replaced, and I was asked to run. I won and was elected president of the board in 1928. My brother Bill was a director, along with Bill Wiese. Oscar Wiese became clerk.

"What we found out was the district didn't have any money, so we had to go to the bank and sign for enough to finish out the year. Then we asked for higher taxes — something like a total of \$5¢ a hundred — and got it. No fights. We had a job to do and the people wanted us to do it, so they backed us all the way."

Emil stayed on the board to the end, which happened with the annex-

ation to the Hazelwood School District on June 22, 1951. With him at the time of annexation were Norval Hood Jr., president; Norval Hood Sr., clerk; and August Breuer, another director. At that time there were just 12 pupils in the little school. There was the usual school picnic, the usual ice cream and soda, the usual program the night before. But the picnic wasn't like other picnics at all, because even the children knew that it was all over for little Pea Ridge.

And the end came quickly. On November 15 that same year, 1951, the Hazelwood board of education sold the old Pea Ridge school to Muriel Realty Corporation, which evidently remodeled it into a residence. The building was demolished a few years later.



Kate Rocek as she appeared in 1914, just four years after she concluded her teaching career at old Pea Ridge school.

CHAPTER 5

THE COLUMBIA BOTTOM SCHOOL

GO AS FAR NORTHEAST AS YOU CAN IN ST. LOUIS County without getting your feet wet and you'll be in Columbia Bottoms. Or more properly, on the Columbia bottom. If you don't know where that is, look at the St. Louis metropolitan area map in the current Rand McNally atlas and you'll see a bulb-shaped protrusion stretching to the east, with the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers at its easternmost point.

Look on that same map and you'll see a pattern of blue lines representing roads right out to the rivers. This is as large a piece of fiction as you'll find these days. The best parts of those roads are a few muddy ruts. The rest of the way they are wide hedgerows, with scarcely a trace of any path at all. If it weren't for the black, sponge-like alluvium, they would lay open the underbelly of any Ford that dared transverse them.

But if you want to find the sites of the old Columbia Bottom schools, you have to take those roads, and if a Ford is all you have then you take a Ford. You may get back and you may not. We did.

Henry and Gertrude Beckman know that land well. Much of it belonged to them at one time. They own the last house on the Larimore road, just before it dead ends into Columbia Bottom road. It's a hard house to miss — it's round. Sits up on a knob like a tuna can, commanding a view for miles around. The Beckman clan has its own little com-



Best available photograph of “new” Columbia Botton school, built in 1918, shows Mildred Beckman playing on see-saw with unidentified boy. Building to left is small garage school board built for the teacher’s car. Photo was taken in mid-1930s.

pound there. On another hill up from the big round house is the home of Robert Beckman, a son. Next door is James Beckman, another son. A third boy, William, lives at 2938 Redman road.

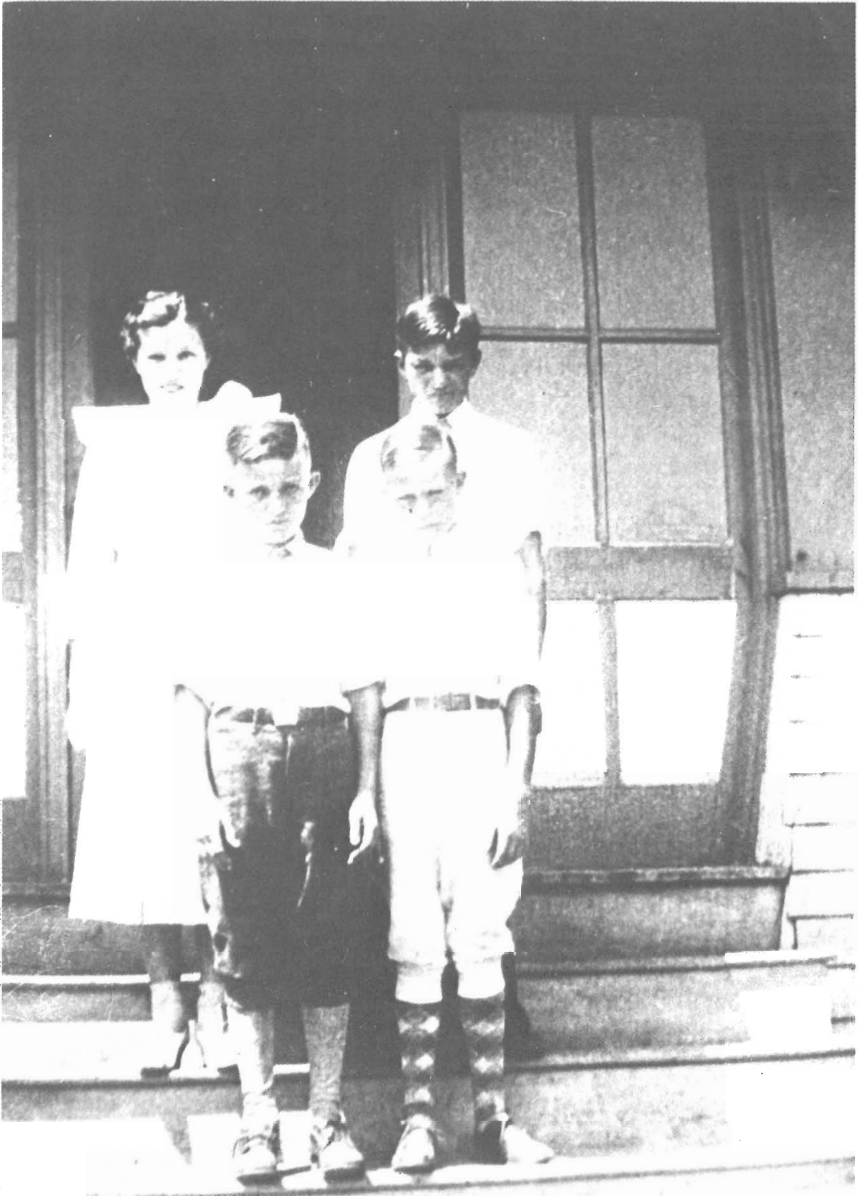
The three of them join their father in farming the 23 acres of the home place. They also work 80 acres down on the bottom — the 80 that Henry and Gertrude bought when they came here from What Cheer, Iowa, as a young married couple in 1922. They don’t own that 80 any more — the City of St. Louis took it (along with all the other



This picture, taken in 1930 or 1931 by the teacher, shows children on the concrete steps of the old school. Back row, from left: Elwood Vogelsang, James Beckman, Catherine Leis, Billy Pohlman and Mildred Beckman. Front row: Howard Rosenkoetter, Bill Beckman, Herman Saeger, Robert Beckman and Earl Poggemoeller.

Columbia Bottom lands) in the 1940s in hopes they could make it a second major airport some day. It was in one corner of the Beckman's bottom 80 that the last Columbia Bottom school stood.

The Beckman family also owns the fabulously fertile Cora Island in



The Beckman children shown on the schoolhouse steps. From left: Mildred, Jim, Bob and Bill. Photo was made in 1932.

the Missouri River, just across from Columbia Bottom. This 1,350-acre hunk of black gold is worked with crawler tractors (plus air conditioned wheel equipment). The home place is well stocked with tan and white

gold — polled Hereford cattle.

It didn't take Henry Beckman long to shoot down his roots. Records in the office of the St. Louis County Superintendent of Schools show Beckman going on the school board as clerk in 1923, replacing Christ Horstmann. At that time B. H. Husemann was president, and William Saeger and Adolph Jilg were directors. The district had an assessed valuation of \$106,780. There was one teacher who received \$1,000 for nine months of work. There was no tax at all.

Beckman had an explanation for that. "When Missouri became a state, there was the stipulation that out of every township, which consisted of 32 sections of ground, section 16 belongs to the school, and revenues from that ground must go to the schools.

"In this particular township, the school section went under the Missouri River permanently about the middle of the century, and the state gave us another section in lieu of the first. That section now is on the northeast corner of Dunn road and U.S. 67 [now U.S.367], where Kirby Junior High School now stands. [In 1976 the district opened its new East High School on the same site.]

"The district let half the ground out to a tenant farmer, but it sold the other 80 acres. The County Court at that time had the authority to invest school surpluses, and did so with a Valley Park developer who went broke. So the district ended up owning a 20-acre piece of ground on the Meramec. Revenue from this, the 80-acre farm on Dunn road, plus other funds let out at interest, gave a handsome revenue to little Columbia Bottom school. Usually we could get by without a tax levy, but occasionally we had to have one, because sometimes the tenants fell behind in their payments to the district. But usually we had a surplus without any tax at all."

Gertrude Beckman could testify to that. "I was clerk of the board myself up to the time of annexation to the Hazelwood School District," she said. "Every April we would look at the books and see that big surplus, and I can tell you we had one fine picnic at the end of the year."

The Beckmans sent their three boys to Columbia Bottom school, and also their oldest child, Mrs. Richard E. (Mildred) Cour, of 9250 Sundown drive.

Columbia Bottom wasn't even operating by the time their youngest, Betty, was of school age. She started at Pea Ridge, moved to Larimore at the time of consolidation, and then attended Beaumont in St. Louis for two years. Her last two years were spent at the new Hazelwood High School, and Betty was one of the first 43 to graduate, in 1956. She now lives at home, and is employed by Mercantile Trust Co.

"I'm proud to say every one of the children graduated," said Mrs.



Teacher Rose Ritter took the entire Columbia Bottom enrollment on a field trip to the St. Louis Zoo in 1934 or 1935.

Beckman. "The first four got their diplomas from Dr. Rufus G. Russell, the county superintendent for many years. Once a year Dr. Russell would come by and give the examinations to the children." (The late Dr. Russell is the father of Don O. Russell, attorney for the Hazelwood board of education.)



Henry and Gertrude Beckman are barely visible through foliage which has gobbled up second Columbia Bottom school, closed in the 1940s. They stand on the foundation — about all that is left.



Huge trees grow inside the foundation today. Finish concrete has eroded away from risers of the steps.

Henry Strecker, researcher for St. Louis Land Title Company, searched the century-old records and found that on November 18, 1871, Frederick and Anna Riemann deeded a wedge-shaped acre of ground to the township board of education. The deed was recorded December 9 of the same year. This was the site of the first school, which probably was built within a year. It was a frame building.

The river evidently worked toward that school ever since it was built, with chunks of the bank falling away annually. On January 10, 1916, the board gave Mrs. Carolina Seeger, widow of Henry Seeger, \$200 for one acre of land considerably to the east. Minutes of an early board meeting indicate that a clear title to the ground was impossible to obtain, so it was quit-claimed back to Mrs. Seeger. On June 7 of that year the board paid \$150 for an acre of ground from Julius and Alvina Curt. They were the owners of that bottom 80 acres which was purchased four years later by the Beckmans.

The roads have changed considerably since that time. What was then known as Upper Columbia Bottom road seems to have disappeared completely.

To reach the first school, travel north on Columbia Bottom (the extension of Riverview Blvd. past the I-270 bridge approach) to its end. At this point, Strodtnman road takes off to the west and there is a barricade across Madison Ferry road into the bottoms.

About half a mile in on Madison Ferry is a dirt lane to the north.



Beckman looks out across the plowed ground — once the site of the old town of Columbia (or St. Vrain) — toward the home site where he and Mrs. Beckman raised their five children.

This is known as Destrehan road (or one of the Destrehan roads.) About a third of a mile to the north the road ends in a “T” with another rutty dirt lane. Go left several yards, then a very hard right turn. Go about three-quarters of a mile down that lane, which gets progressively more difficult to pass. Go by a small grove of trees on the left.

In the center of a second grove on the left is the site of the first Columbia Bottom school. There is absolutely nothing left on the surface of the site.

“That silt builds up on this part of the bottom at the rate of an inch or better a year,” said Beckman.

What happened to the old building? “I think it just fell apart. It was getting pretty old anyway. I remember vaguely seeing it in an advanced state of deterioration,” Beckman recalled. “It disappeared completely in the 1940s.”

Considerably more is known about the meetings of those early boards of education, however, because Henry Beckman saved one of the old record books, and this month donated it to the Hazelwood School District.

The following is a precise quote of the entire minutes of the 1888 annual meeting:

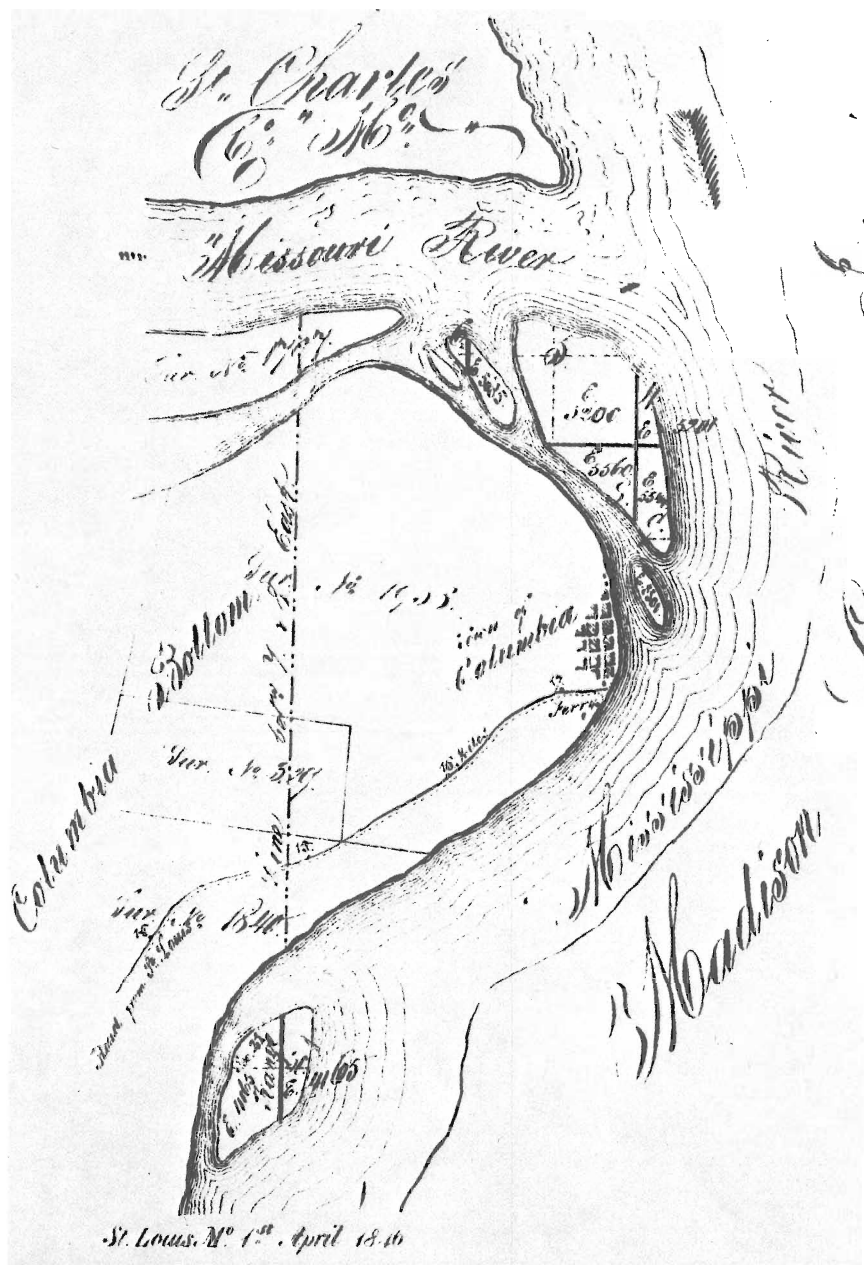
“The qualified voters of this Dist. No. 1 Township 47 Range No. 8 met, after being duly notified, at the schoolhouse, April 3, 1888, and the following business was transacted.

“First the house was called to order by Mr. Charles Rennecamp, after which Mr. Lewis was elected chairman and Mr. Geo. Linhardt secretary. Next being the election of a director. The persons nominated and voted upon being Mr. Phillip Fraaze, Mr. Sonamann, and Mr. Sager. Mr. Phillip Fraaze receiving a majority of all the votes cast was declared elected.

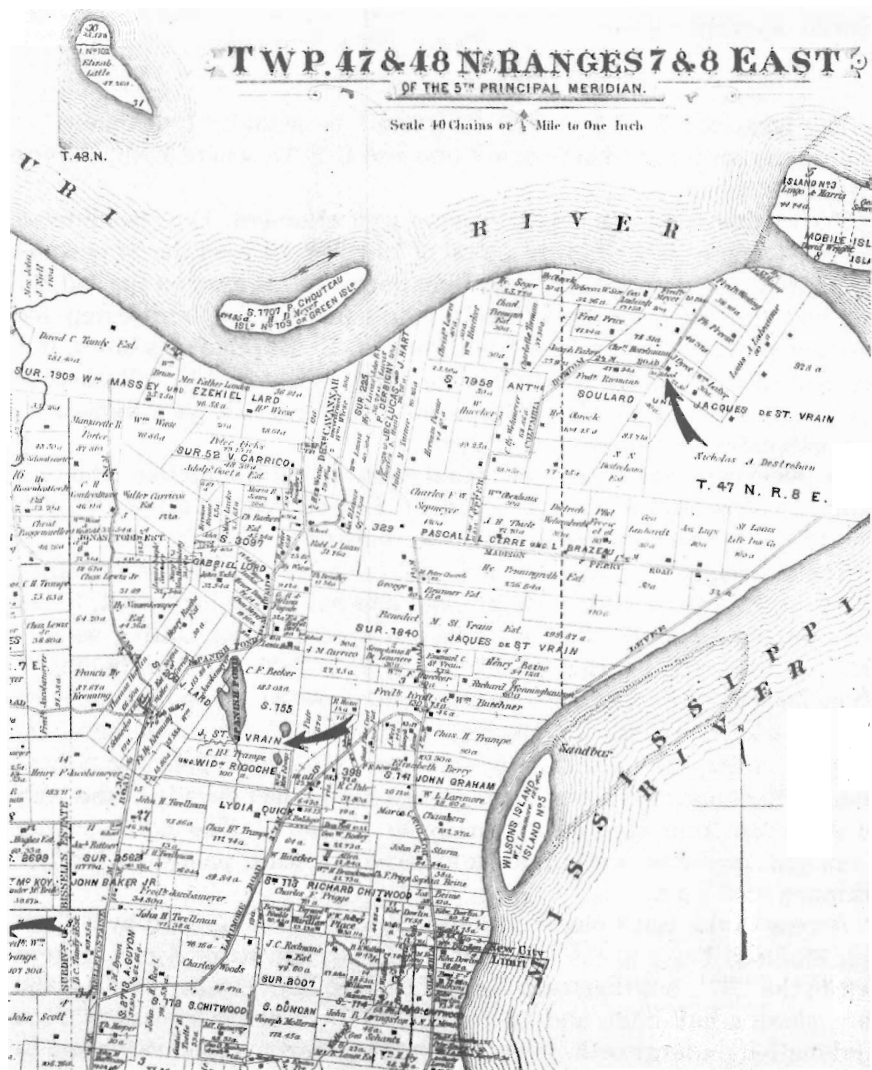
“After which the meeting took into consideration the verbal prayer or petition of Mr. William Richman in which he asked the Dist. to



Even in dry weather the Bottom is damp. This is a typical stretch of Destrehan road. This spot is in front of the site of the first Columbia Bottom school.



The little town of Columbia shows up clearly in this page from the Hutawa Atlas of 1846. River now flows considerably east of shoreline indicated on this map. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society.



All trace of Columbia (or St. Vrain) had gone by 1878, when this map by Julius Pitzman was published. However, site of old school is clearly indicated. (Roads, however, have been relocated.) St. Vrain home is marked by arrow in lower center, and site of present Kirby Junior High at lower left.

lessen the rents on a farm belonging to the Dist. and of which he said William Richmann was the renter. It was determined by this meeting by a majority of votes, that this Dist. was in favor of allowing him some equitable [sic] reduction such as the County Court in its judgement

should determine upon.

"After this the meeting adjourned.

George Linhardt sec."

The farm occupied by "Mr. Richman" — actually Reichmann — was on the corner of what is now Dunn and U.S.67, where Kirby Junior High now stands.

The annual meetings evidently were well attended. Four candidates for the board in 1892 received a total of 28 votes. In 1894 the 24 patrons voted in a 10-month school, then went back to nine months the following year. In 1892 the board voted to retain Charles Rennecamp for another year as teacher. Two years later, S. H. Harman was hired, but in 1899 they evidently ran into some static. They had to call another meeting just six days after their annual meeting. Harman wanted \$5 a month extra for janitor work. He got it.

In 1888 there were exactly 12 families living on the bottom who had children between the ages of 6 and 17. (There was a total of 30 children.) Twenty-one taxpaying families were listed in 1898 and 1899.

The old register of orders (checkbook) mirrors the late-19th century life well. \$4 was paid for cutting wood, another \$4 for hauling it. \$1.25 for cleaning the well, \$9.50 for a lightning rod, \$5 for cutting weeds, \$65 for a tin roof for the school house, \$11.85 for "col an halling." They bought joints for the stove pipe, expended \$11 for a junket to the "Mermack," evidently to look over the district's lands down there. On July 17, 1899, they paid Chas. H. Klose \$100 for "Painting School haus." Revenues from school properties in that last decade of the 19th century ran from \$760.50 a year up to \$1,230.89. The north county Deutsche, never accused of being loose with a buck, paid their teacher as much as \$85 a month.

Access to the last Columbia Bottom school also is gained by following Madison Ferry to the first lane, or Destrehan road. Again, take a left to the "T", but then turn right. This also is Destrehan. Follow the lane about a half-mile, and on the left will be a dense growth of trees and matted undergrowth. Penetrate some 20 feet and you will come to some poured concrete steps leading up to the top of a concrete foundation. The foundation has nothing on top but stubs of reinforcing rods. Inside is a heavy accumulation of trash. To the rear is another set of steps. In the foundation are trees with six-inch trunks. And that is all that is left of the Columbia Bottom school.

"We didn't have any electricity in the school — ever," Beckman said. "So we generally had our board meetings in the daytime. And usually when it was raining and we couldn't get into the fields.

"Right inside those front steps was a hallway, with cloakrooms on either side. There was just one big room. Just about like all the other

one-room country schools. It was a frame building, too."

Beckman said that his board built a garage for the teacher's car in the 1920s.

"While our children were in school we had several teachers," Mrs. Beckman said. "There was Jenny Meyer, and Rose Ritter, and I think Irene Huseman still lives in Jennings. Before our kids went to school Martha Langendoerfer taught there for years."

Genevieve East and Katherine Willoughby taught there in 1904-05. Miss Langendoerfer was on the job by 1906.

Beckman wanted to continue on down the rapidly deteriorating roadway. The car was now swinging out into the plowed ground to avoid being mired in the ruts. The water in those ruts was standing about one foot deep at the time, although it hadn't rained in four days.

Another quarter-mile to the east the car stopped. "Now here," said Beckman, "is old St. Vrain."

By this time there was no lane at all — merely a wide patch of unplowed grass with a row of trees on the left. We must have been less than 500 yards from the confluence of the two great rivers.

"I know exactly where St. Vrain was because I saw it on a map once in the county courthouse. It was four blocks wide and two blocks long, and this lane went through it the narrow way. I've plowed this ground twice a year for nearly 50 years, and each time I do it I uncover broken pieces of china, glassware, and other remnants from that old town. You can tell right where it began and where it ended from that. It was supposed to have been founded in the 1830s."

A check with the Missouri Historical Society revealed that Beckman was remarkably accurate. In the old Dupre atlas of 1837, no trace of such a development was shown. But in the yellowed old atlas published by Julius Hutaawa ("2nd st. cor. of Pine") in 1846, there is shown a town in the same spot, four blocks in the north-south direction and two blocks wide, right on the river. However, it is a known fact that the river now flows considerably to the east of the 1846 shoreline. It appears that Beckman was accurate in all details except one — the town, for the record at least — was named "Columbia," not St. Vrain, and in all probability that is where Columbia Bottom got its name.

It is worth mentioning that a further search of the Missouri Historical Society records revealed that most of this ground was owned by Jacques Dehault Delassus de St. Vrain, the brother of Carlos Dehault Delassus, the last Spanish governor of St. Louis. His home was the entire east shore of Spanish Lake. His son, Ceran, joined Charles and William Bent to form Bent, St. Vrain & Co., one of the leading outfitting companies for the Santa Fe trade. They were the builders of Bent's Fort, located just west of Las Animas on the Arkansas River in



This photo, taken August 22, 1969, shows the entire Columbia Bottom area, including the confluence of the Missouri (left) and the Mississippi rivers. Bridges in foreground are Chain of Rocks and I-270. Left arrow indicates intersection of Madison Ferry and Columbia Bottom roads. Center arrow indicates approximate site of school abandoned in 1918, and right arrow the school abandoned in the 1940s.

Colorado, and which has recently been completely rebuilt. The St. Vrain River is one of the most beautiful in the west, tumbling along the eastern boundary of Rocky Mountain National Park. Another son, Felix, became an Indian agent and was killed by the Saukies during the Black Hawk War. Still another boy, Marcellin, commanded Fort St. Vrain in central Colorado, after Ceran St. Vrain. It was an illustrious family, with ties close to the Columbia Bottom area.

By the time of publication of the New Atlas of the City and County of St. Louis, by Julius Pitzman, in 1878, all trace of Columbia (or St. Vrain) had disappeared.

Henry Beckman had still more light to throw on the Columbia Bottom story. "We had quite a fire on the Dunn road property back during the late 20s," he said. "We had a barn right about where the east edge of Kirby Junior High is now and she went up in flames. Seems like the renter had a still working there and things got a little overheated. He had a pretty big moonshine operation going for awhile."

While Columbia Bottom never really hurt for money, enrollment gradually fell off from a maximum of about 25 pupils. By 1938, there were only nine pupils in average daily attendance, far fewer than in any of the other districts that now form the Hazelwood School District. The City of St. Louis owned all the ground in the 1940s, and gradually the old farmers moved out. By the time the question of consolidation was



The same area as it appeared July 14, 1969. This was not an unusual flood year.

put before the directors, the little school had closed and the only school-age child in the district was being sent to a neighboring building. The Columbia Bottom school was empty and unattended. The elements acted swiftly with, as Beckman says, a little help from vandals now and then.

(Beckman says there is a story that the building was sold, and then collapsed while being placed on a new foundation. "That's all untrue. It just fell down of its own accord and the people trucked off the lumber for kindling.")

That would be the end of the story except for one incident that placed the little, one-pupil district in the role of the hero for the rest of the Hazelwood School District.

Back in the 1940s, the board saw no reason to keep the remaining 80 acres, since there was no school in operation. So they sold it, for \$9,000. On October 27, 1951, the Columbia Bottom district merged with Hazelwood by a vote of 15 to 1. With that the picture changed drastically. The big new district was short of both land and cash. One of the principal reasons for all this consolidation was to build a high school, and the new board of education wanted that 80 acres at Dunn and U.S. 67 [now I-270 and U.S. 367, one of the most valuable corners in St. Louis County.]

Don Russell, attorney for the district, searched for evidence that the land actually was in lieu of 16th section school grants, found it, and was able to obtain a quit claim deed for the full 80 acres for the sum of

\$1,000, on the basis of the fact that the board had no right to sell the ground in the first place. Within three years the district had its high school, now Kirby Junior High.



A foot or so beneath the spot where Henry Beckman stands is the foundation — or what's left of it — of the original Columbia Bottom school.

CHAPTER 6

THE LARIMORE SCHOOL

THERE IS A MYSTERY CONCERNING THE PRIGGE school that probably never will be solved. There are three known Prigge schools. There is some indication that there was a fourth. Where was the land for the fourth school? Where is the building? When was it built and where? And why?

Prigge is the predecessor name for the Larimore district, which elected to join the growing Hazelwood School District in a special election on July 29, 1951.

The trouble all started in the office of the county superintendent in Clayton. There they have the old map of the north county, bearing a copyright date of 1927. On this map are indicated the 13 old three-director districts that consolidated to form the present Hazelwood district. In the section of the map labeled "Prigge," there is a little black dot at 12125 Larimore road, which indicated the presence of the Prigge school. Across the street is another black dot with a cross on it. This is the old St. Aloysius Catholic school. So far so good. But down on the north side of Prigge road is a hand-drawn rectangle, just before the point where the road jogs to the south to connect and end into Columbia Bottom road. All the other sites on the map have the hand-



Oldest Prigge school, probably built in 1840s, now is a granary on farm of Lester Schollmeier, 12350 Riverview drive.

drawn rectangle around a black dot. This one shows the two public schools separated by perhaps a mile of farm land.

Henry Strecker, an executive with Land Title Insurance Company in Clayton and an expert at tracking facts down through abstracts and deeds, found nothing along the Prigge road. He checked all properties back to the point where they were lands belonging to the crown in Spanish Louisiana. No indication of a deed to a school district at any time in the past.

Strecker had better luck up around Larimore and Trampe roads, however. The present Larimore school — occupied in 1941 but not finished until 20 years later, is on the north side of Trampe lane, just west of its intersection with Larimore road.

A couple of blocks to the west is 12125 Larimore road, and that is the site of the first black dot mentioned above. It is now the lovely home of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Koder Jr. They bought the building more than 25 years ago and set about making it a showplace of early Americana.

Strecker worked backward from this deed. His records showed that the Koder family had a great deal of trouble removing a cloud from the title (the Koders verified this — and how!) The old records revealed a map drawn from a survey made July 1, 1870 by Julius Pitzman. This shows the ground in the shape of a narrow parallelogram fronting on Larimore road. It was one acre in area. Pitzman wrote the following on the survey: “This is to certify that by order of Edward Curt on 1 July 1870 I have for the School District laid off 1 ac in sur 398. as represented on this plat.

Julius Pitzman.”



These are among dozens of sets of initials on south wall of earliest Prigge school, probably put there more than 100 years ago.

Then Strecker started to get into a little trouble himself when he went back even further. He found in U.S. Survey 398 another parallelogram just north of the first, but less than half the size, which was identified as school lands. On the bottom of the sheet was this unsigned note: "Note. The above plat copied from a plat in Babcock's abstract."

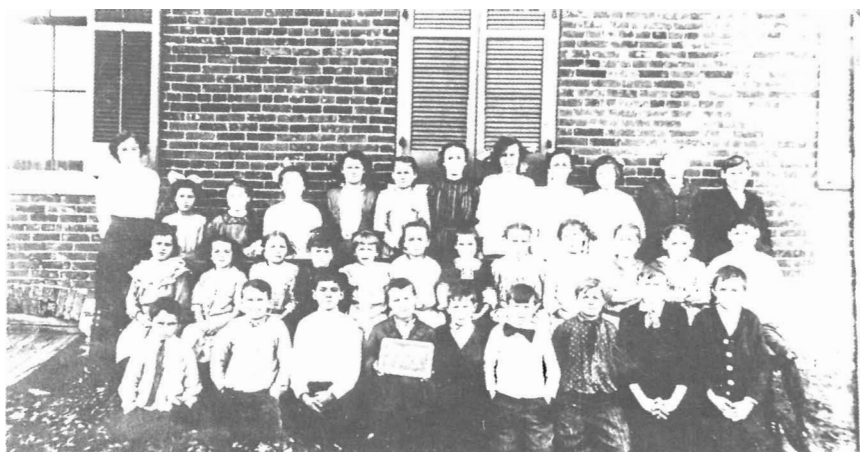
"I have never heard of Babcock's Abstract," Strecker said. "But there it is."

The records indicate this smaller piece was sold by Henry J. Steel to the school district for \$10 on April 7, 1840, and recorded on May 21, 1840. The deed had a reversion clause in it, stating that whenever the ground ceased to be used for school purposes it would revert to the prior owner or his heirs.

The larger piece of ground had no such clause attached to it. It was sold for \$100 on October 4, 1871 (recorded 26 days later), from a Richard Whyte, a widower, to the township board of education for Subdistrict 1.

What about the old Prigge building, now the Koder home? It has its secrets, but they are given up without too much difficulty. The Koders removed all the windows, relocated some and bricked up superfluous areas. But they also found the old ceiling much too high and installed a new one at a lower level. The old tin ceiling was left upstairs. The shape of the wood lintels, the rubblestone foundation, the simple fanlights above the two front doors, the stylized tin ceiling, all pointed to a construction date in the 1870s or early 1880s.

Then it could be concluded that this building probably was erected on this site. It is a fairly safe guess that this was the first building to occupy this site (but only a guess.) What then of the little tract out in back? The records indicate this reversion clause indeed was exercised. Was the Koder home the first Prigge school? If so, why was the little tract behind it deeded as early as 1840?

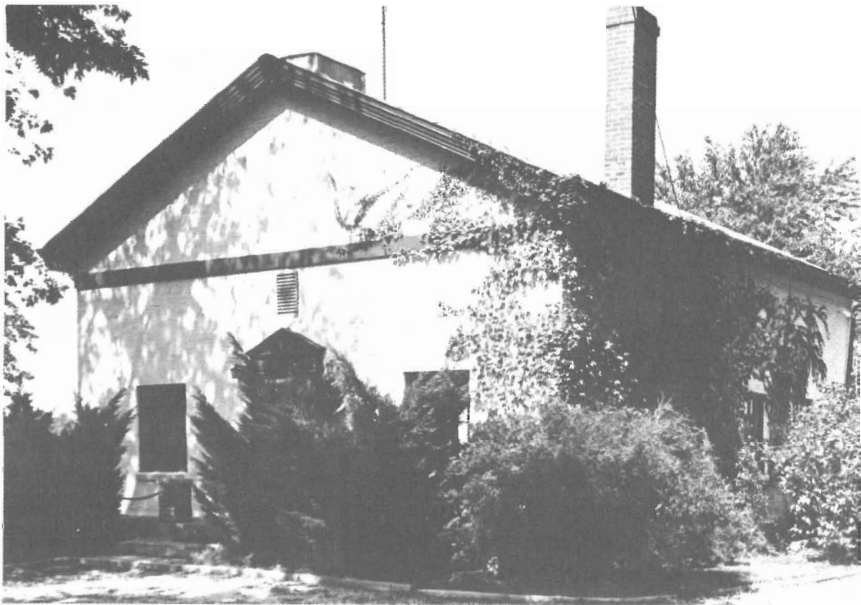


This picture, made December 10, 1913, shows south wall of old Larimore school. It was contributed by Mrs. Frank Hoelscher, 12079 Riverview Blvd., who is third from left in back row. Top row, left to right: Mrs. Ella Hetherington Trampe (the teacher), Ida Schantz, Angela Knobbe, Nellie Behan, Anna Albers, Josephine Irlander, Helen Schweier, Helen Eisele, Norma Gabriel, Alma Wehmeier, Louis Roth and Lester Wehmeier. Middle row: Irma Rahn, Catherine Schantz, Mayme Bruns, Elsie Hoelscher, Loraine Eisele, Gertrude Briete, Cecilia Knobbe, Margaret Ratterman, Edna Roth, Bernadine Irlander, Anna Ratterman and Paul Leeder. Front row: Jimmie Behan, Henry Albers, Socrates Shantz, Rudolph Albers, Waldo Trampe, Steve Mollerus, Eddie Bruns, Joe Eisele and Henry Ratterman.

The answer to all those questions rests on the farm of Lester Schollmeier, located on the east side of the Columbia Bottom road, just south of its intersection by Larimore road. There is a little grain storage shed along the road, with a smaller machine shed to the south, and a smaller storage building to the north. But obscured as it is on two sides, it is most obviously a former school building. The farmers in that end of the county who know of the building always had been told that that was the old Prigge school building. No one really knew.

Ray Schollmeier, who still farms the ground with his brother Lester, said he remembered tarpapering over the old shingles when he was 15 years old, back in the 1920s.

"I can remember my dad telling me then that he bought the building at auction, but he didn't say who from. He told me how they made a special dolly out of logs and wood wheels and hitched up several teams and brought it over here on the dirt roads," said Schollmeier. "I sure didn't think it was that old though. It seemed to be in a lot better shape



The old Larimore school as it appears today, now a private home.

than that.”

Schollmeier also distinctly remembers his father telling him they moved it from out in the field in back of the Prigge school where Koder lives now.

More circumstantial evidence was gained from a book now owned by Mrs. Helen Twillman, a second grade teacher at the Twillman school. The book started out as a repository for the military records of a V. V. Hall, a Union army officer in the Civil War. Later, Hall was appointed clerk of the township board of education for Township 47, Range 7 East, which consisted of five one-room schools — Larimore (Prigge), Twillman, Vossenkemper, Black Jack and Pea Ridge. (They were referred to by number in those days — one to five, respectively.)

Hall solved the mystery when he wrote, on April 25, 1868, that the board, in its annual meeting, had voted to see Mr. “White” about getting some more ground up on the road, on which they might build a new school. This negotiation appears to have been successful, and evidently the building at 12125 Larimore road was erected shortly thereafter.

The material copied from the Babcock abstract refers to an irregular line roughly paralleling the present Larimore road, but several yards into the fields to the northwest, was the original Larimore road, or the road known in the mid-19th century as the St. Vrain road. It led up to the property of Jacques St. Vrain at Spanish Lake.



Shortly after the old Larimore school was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Earl Koder Jr., the old high windows were bricked. This shed in front protected entrance. Door led to main door just behind it in brick wall, or to the left, downstairs to the basement. Another door in left side of front wall opened from inside classroom into left half of shed, which was used for storage.

"We had a lot of kids from Spanish Lake walking to the Prigge school," said Schollmeier, who attended there in the 1920s. "Clarence Luecke (who lives on Parker road now) walked the old wood footbridge that used to cross the lake. What happened to it? It just got so old it fell into the lake."

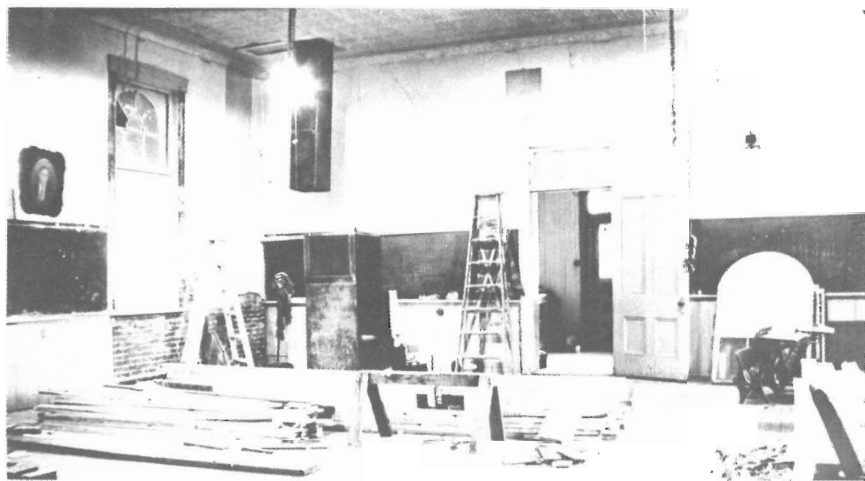
The old book produced by Mrs. Twillman provides much evidence of the life a century ago. In 1869-70 the school bought four cords of firewood at \$5.50 a cord, then paid another \$6 to cut it up. A slate blackboard cost \$10. During that year the enumeration of the district revealed there were 45 boys, 36 girls, and six "colored."

One of the sheets of the record book is an itemization of expenditures for the "colored" school. Possibly this explains the rectangle on Prigge road. It is possible that Charles F. Prigge, who owned the land at that time, simply erected a building for children of his slaves, never bothering to transfer any land. Whether it would have been legal for the taxpayers to support such a school on private lands now is a moot question.

Back in 1958 the author prepared a brief history of the old Prigge-Larimore school, in which a number of survivors of that era were quoted from personal interviews. Some of these observations are reprinted here:

Mrs. Jules O. Trampe, the former Ellen Hetherington, remembers the old Prigge school well, for she taught there from 1911 through 1921.

"I can recall that big single room, with upwards of 30 students, and a black iron pot bellied stove right in the middle of it," she said. "There



Shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Koder went to work, the interior looked like this. Blackboards are still on walls. The opened door used to lead to outside, before cloakroom was added to rear. Fan lights were above doors on front wall of building. Above door is square hole which once received pipe from pot belly stove.

was a big wood box beside that stove, and of course, we had the usual outside plumbing."

In those days, according to Mrs. Trampe, the teachers taught first, third, fifth, and seventh grades one year, and second, fourth, sixth and eighth grades the following year.

"It was Mr. Trampe's grandfather who gave that first old school, now the grain building, to the district," she stated. "Some of the kids we taught are still living around here. I remember well the Pogge-moellers, the Wolfkast boys, the Uzzells, and so many others."

"I started teaching in 1911," she said. "For \$68 a month. Before starting my second year I asked for a raise. The board got together and asked the people of the district to vote a 10-cent increase in the levy, from 15 cents per \$100 assessed valuation to 25 cents. They let the kids out at 2 p.m. and let the voters in. Anyone not in the room by 2 p.m. couldn't vote. The head of the three-man school board explained the situation, and the people voted in the affirmative with no labored discussion."

Mrs. Trampe stated that the children of the early 1900s didn't have any cafeteria program. "They brought their lunch in syrup buckets, and sometimes it was so cold that the sandwiches still hadn't thawed by lunch time. So they ate them frozen. Some of those kids walked for a mile or two through the snow to get to school, and were glad to do it.



Same room today, after completion in Early American decor.

"They knew," she said, "that to stay home would involve working in the fields, fixing fence or other hard manual labor. Also, the children have told me that it was worth the effort simply for the fun they had on the roads to and from school.

"I can remember so well," she recalled, "those cold winter days, when the kids would build snow forts in front of the school, and throw snowballs by the hundreds."

Mrs. Trampe said that there was little trouble with getting children to dress properly in those days. "The boys customarily wore knickers, with plain black socks. The little girls always wore plain, durable, warm and somewhat plain clothing. Once, in later years, a young lad came to school wearing blue jeans. He was sent home with the admonition to return properly attired. We had no trouble with blue jeans after that."

William Love, who was clerk of the school board for 12 years during the 1920s and 1930s, recalled the difficulty experienced by the board in erecting the first unit of Larimore school. Because of a reversion clause in the deed to the Prigge school property, they had to go to court to obtain clear title so that the old tract could be sold.

"At that," he said, "we had to keep the money in escrow 10 years, and it hadn't been paid even at the time of reorganization in 1951."

Along with Frank Toelle and Aubrey Hitter, the other board members, Love was instrumental in obtaining the 10-acre tract in 1930 upon which the present school now stands, and the WPA aid necessary to erect the original building. "This," he said, "consisted of two classrooms, an auditorium and the library." With WPA aid the stone building cost \$28,685. The dedication took place February 27, 1942,



The Koders bricked up the top part of the old, high windows, and installed a lower ceiling. This is the view in the attic today. The window lintels and tin ceiling serve to date the building in the 1870s or 1880s.

and was attended by nearly 250 people.

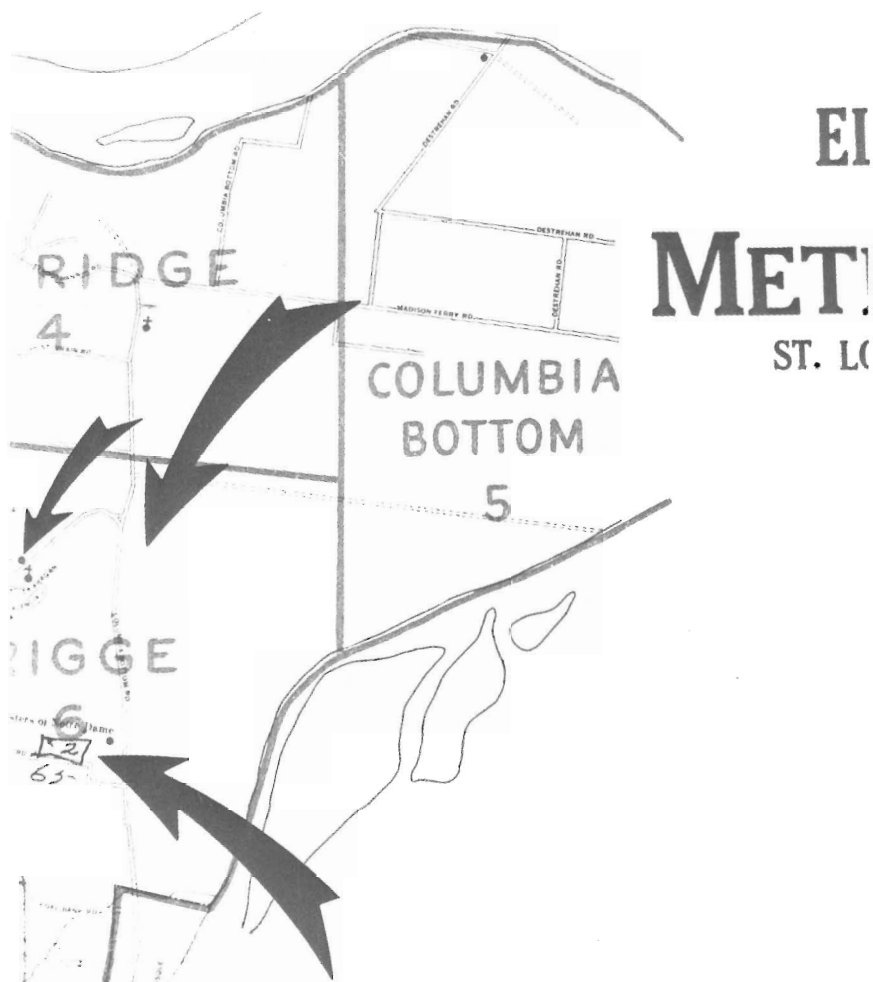
He said that all members of the board knew that the reorganization proposed in 1951 would certainly cost all of them their jobs. "Yet, all of us went out and campaigned actively for consolidation with the Hazelwood district, because we knew it would be the best thing for our children. Time has proved us right."

Larimore school was annexed into the Hazelwood School District on July 29, 1951. It was a small three-room school with Mrs. Florence Kasch as teacher-principal, teaching grades 1-2-3. Mrs. Wandling was teaching grades 4-5-6 and Mrs. Alice Dale Wehmer taught the 7th and 8th grades. There were 102 pupils.

In November, 1951, a group of interested parents met to plan the organization of a P.T.A. The first meeting of the Larimore School PTA was held on January 9, 1952.

The charter officers were Harry C. Grannemann Jr., president; Elsie Hedge, vice-president; Alleen Hale, secretary; and Ralph Young, treasurer. Grannemann has been on the Hazelwood board of education for the past 17 years.

Howard Maddux became supervisory principal of Larimore, Twillman, Black Jack and Vossenkemper schools in 1953. Later Black Jack



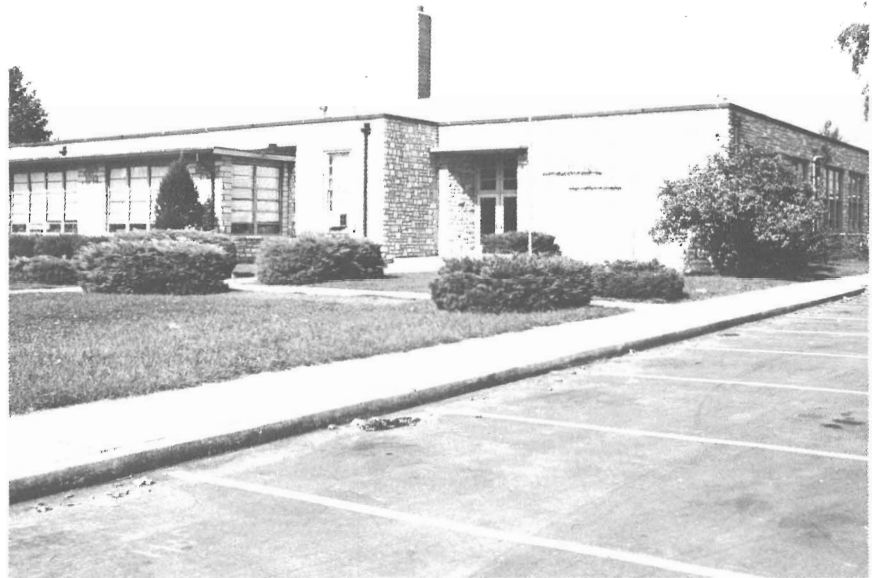
Mysterious notation of 1927 map indicates school at one time on north side of Prigge road, near Columbia Bottom road (bottom arrow). No trace can be found. Old Larimore school is indicated by center arrow. Arrow at top right shows location of farm where original wood school now serves as granary.

and Vossenkemper schools were closed and the children sent to Larimore and Twillman. At that time Lannis Chunn became principal of Twillman and Howard Maddux was appointed Larimore principal. Maddux now is Jury school principal.

Records from the office of the St. Louis county superintendent reveal little about the old school, because they aren't continuous until the 1920s. In 1903-04, Prigge led the pack of all area schools with six

1868 *T. Colored School.*
 Bought by Mr. H. Barnette 3 mules & 4 days from
 May 18 to June 21 1868 12 @ 30, per month
 on Mo 10 30
 on We R 10
 1 day 10 30
 In 22^d to order of J. Z. Mr. H. Barnette
 by 18 10 30
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Approved by Board
 June 12 68
 Gustavus V. Vigney
 Chairman
 J. H. Vigney Secy. T. Bd.

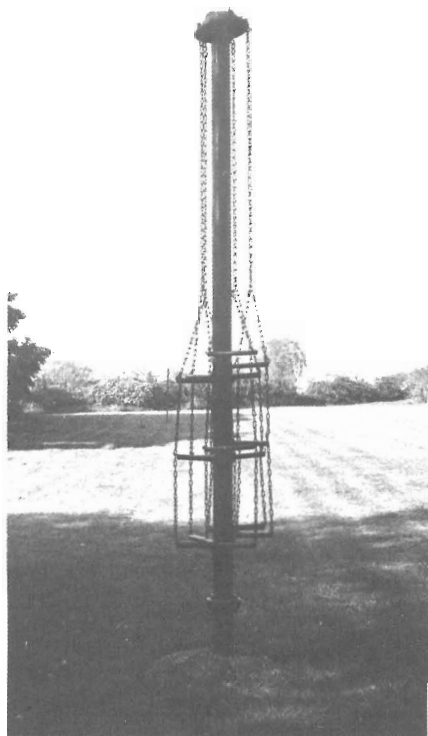


Stone Larimore school, built at Larimore and Trampe in 1941, is core unit for multiple-addition elementary school in use today. [The school was extensively remodeled in 1976.]

graduates: Johnnie and Lou Fry, Henry Prigge, Sidney and Phoebe Schantz, and Laura Trampe. Their teacher was Clara Detering.

William Wehmeier was board president, Charles Schantz was clerk, and H. B. Bruns was director. Three years later Bruns was president, H. E. Trampe was clerk and H. F. Prigge was director. The teacher was Catherine Hudson.

In 1911, Miss Heatherington received \$1,125 for teaching her 32 pupils.



Earl Koder found this pole in his back yard when he moved in, and restored the unique old swing for his own children.

CHAPTER 7

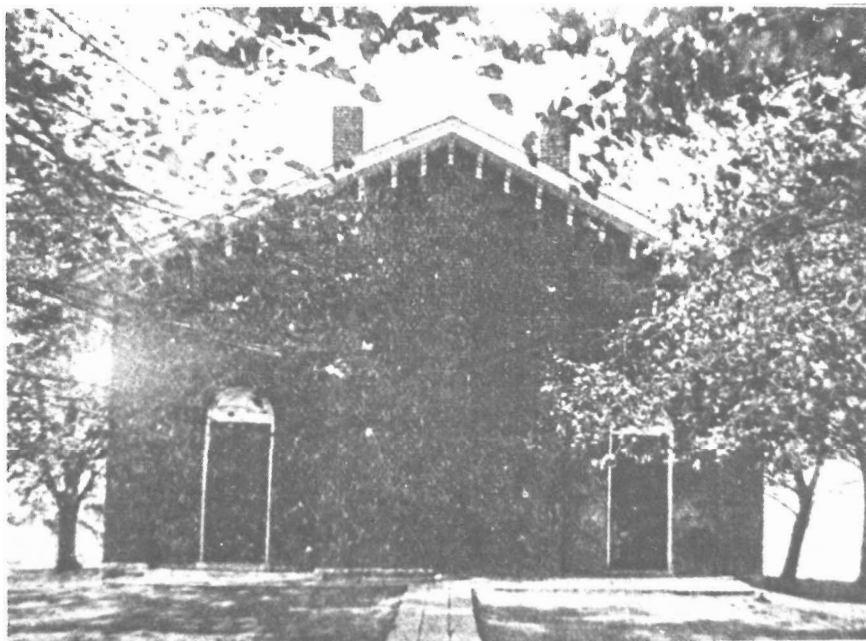
THE TWILLMAN SCHOOL

ONE BY ONE THEY WALKED INTO THE FIVE-YEAR-old building, looking around in wonderment as they remembered the school of 50 years ago, which stood on the same site. They were there in response to a call from J. Albert Jacobsmeyer, at that time a Clayton resident; and John Scott, a well-known bridge builder. All of them, however, knew nothing but farm life 50 years before. They were at the Twillman school, 11831 Bellefontaine road, to join in a massive reminiscence with those who also attended that school with them in the year 1882. The date was May 29, 1933.

At that time (1933) the Twillman school was a three-room building — two of them being classrooms taught by Miss Ruth Oliver and Mrs. Jessie Fellenstein, and the third a library of sorts. It replaced the old school they attended a half-century before in the year 1927, and some of the men there were responsible for the new school being built.

Also with them was their teacher, the aging Prof. Louis P. Frohardt, who was at the school from 1883 to 1886. Also in attendance was the St. Louis county superintendent of those days, a Prof. Brier, the father of Miss Rose Brier, one of the most loved of all the teachers of the old Cold Water school.

Prof. Frohardt took his place behind a desk, and the “pupils”



This is the only available picture of second Twillman school, predecessor of the present building. It is contained in dog-eared booklet entitled "Eighth Annual Report of Public Schools of St. Louis County," owned by Frank Toelle, 11722 Larimore road. It was given to him the year he passed eighth grade examinations, a gift from his school-master, E. M. Denny.

seated themselves in the cramped desks of the school children as best they could. "It was all very realistic," said one of them, "except of course our ages, and the modern day surroundings. One of the few reminders of those pioneer days is the beautiful grove in front of the building, which is made up of trees set out by other students and ourselves during Arbor Day programs."

They're gone now — every one of them, and the generation who looked on them as "old timers" is getting up in the years. These are the ones who can spin the tales and provide the data from which histories are written.

Much of the printed information on the Twillman school indicates it might have been founded prior to the Civil War. Henry Strecker, the Land Title Insurance Company expert who has been digging up information on the old Hazelwood schools from old abstracts, found that on August 9, 1852, John O'Fallon and his wife Caroline deeded a half-acre tract of ground to Elisha Hall, Charles Lewis and Frederick Price,



Mrs. Norma Twillmann Moellering, 1548 Claudine drive, stands on approximate site of first Twillman school, evidently demolished in 1860s. Site is along west side of Bellefontaine road, opposite end of Twillmann road. It is two or three blocks due south of present school. Mrs. Moellering supplied most of the old pictures and all identifications in this article.

trustees of the district that later became Twillman school district, for the sum of \$1 "and other considerations." The deed was notarized nine days later, but not recorded until January 20, 1866.

This ground was across Bellefontaine road from the dead end of Twillman road, on a tract about one-fourth mile due south of the present school. A log school was built there, and that is the extent of all knowledge of the first school. The balance of the farm evidently was sold some years later to Jacob and Kleofa Bittner, because on September 29, 1867, the board of education deeded the land "back" to the Bittners; then purchased two acres from them on what is now the southwest corner of the intersection of Bellefontaine and Redman roads, where the present Twillman school now stands.

Back in the Civil War days and later, the school was known as the Bellefontaine school. As the Missouri legislature gradually enacted measures calling for more centralized control of the multiplicity of little schools spotted all over the country, the name Bellefontaine became a problem, because in western St. Louis County there existed an older school and community with the same name.

Enter John Henry Twellmann, or Twillmann, as it became later. John Henry came to Missouri in 1842 as a boy of nine. His parents located on a farm a mile south of Spanish Lake, on which John Henry lived until



This faded old photo was taken on the south side of the old Twillman school sometime between 1910 and 1914. These are all the pupils of the famed old schoolmaster, E. M. Denny. Frank Toelle is second from right in back row (to left side of shutter.) Norma Twillmann Moellering is fourth from right in second row.

his death in August, 1882.

By the 1860s young John Henry was making a name for himself as an industrious farmer and community leader. He appears as clerk of the board of education serving five country schools at the time of construction of the first brick school, which probably happened in 1867 or 68, shortly after the land was deeded from the Bittners. (It could have been built a decade earlier, as reported in other histories, but it is doubtful if it would have been done unless the land was in the name of the board of education, and it definitely was not.)

Members of the Twillmann family today pass on stories of John Henry's willingness to advance funds to the struggling little country school, and it is for such things as this that schools are named.

Did somebody goof in the spelling of the name? "Yes," says Mrs. Norma Twillmann Moellering, of 1548 Claudine drive. "Don't pay any attention to those who spell Twillmann with one 'n' because then all the relatives will think I told you wrong. It has two 'n's in it." How the school ended up with only one "n" is anybody's guess. In 1911 it was listed in the county superintendent's report as having two "n's".

Not much is known about the operation of the school prior to the 1880s. The old record book owned by Ray and Helen Twillmann lists some expenditures made by the board in the late 1860s — these were the usual purchases and were typical of rural schools of the next several decades: hauling and splitting cords of wood, replacing a roof, new



This picture was made in 1912 or 1913. Bottom row, left to right: Tom Burrow, Bill Wiemann, Otto Trampe, Fred Meyer, Richard Trampe, Fred Tempke, Albert Wollgast, Henry Buschard, and Alfred Trampe. Second row: Elsie Twillmann, Lydia Tempke, Florence McLaughlin, Laura Kuske, Ild Buschard, Selma Tempke, Melva Jacobsmeyer, Lester Twillmann, Sophia Barlbort, Lillie Jacobsmeyer, Edna Jacobsmeyer and Norma Twillmann. Third row: John Burrows, Bill Hogan, Harry Barlbort, Ethel McLaughlin, Helen Telscher, Lucinda Trampe, Ida Meyer and May Telscher. Back row: Maude Burrows, Clemens Jacobsmeyer, Ed Nieshoff, Emil Trampe, Edwin Jacobsmeyer, Walter Twillman, Clemens Poggemoeller, and schoolmaster Denny.

desks, etc.

Like most boards of education in the county, the Twillman directors were not rolling in money. The teachers were paid only \$75 a month in the 1880s, barely a subsistence wage. Prof. Frohardt went on to greener pastures in 1886, and his successor, J. E. Kammeyer, lasted only one year. Arthur I. Gibson, who signed the diploma of John Henry's son, John Twillmann, stayed two years. Henry Taake taught up to 40 children in that one poorly-lighted room for four years. There is a gap in the records from 1894 to 1899, when the lean and lanky E. M. Denny took over as schoolmaster.

Young Frank Twillmann graduated from that school in 1907 under Prof. Denny. So did his cousins, Elmer and Clara Twillmann. Their father, Fred H. Twillmann, later president of the Baden Bank, attended there a generation before them. Frank later served for six years on the



Pupils of the Twillman school in 1883 got together in the "new" building later with their teacher, Prof. Louis P. Frohardt. Front row, from left: Bill Harper, Edward Jacobsmeyer, Theodore Jacobsmeyer, Prof. Frohardt, Louis Twillmann, August Jacobsmeyer, Herman Twillmann. Second row: William Hauser, Julius Jacobsmeyer, Albert Jacobsmeyer, Dr. Brier (the county superintendent when they were children), Louis Poggemoeller, and Bill Reichmann. Third row: Bill Uzzell, Mrs. Maggie Hauser Telcher, Amelia Twillmann Rosenkoetter, a Mrs. Borgmann (nee Reichmann), Mrs. Hermann Twillmann, and John Twillmann. Back row: Mrs. Mamie Hauser, Mrs. Julius Jacobsmeyer (nee Kanning), Mrs. Bertha Jacobsmeyer Niehaus, Mrs. Emma Trampe Meyer, Mrs. Fred Meyer (nee Jacobsmeyer), Mrs. William Burrows (nee Harper), and Mrs. Ed Jacobsmeyer.

of sterner stuff. "Harry Schnatzmeyer and I drew a picture of questionable taste. Mr. Taake took one look at it, sent us both out to the 'big tree' for some nice, supple linden switches. Both of us got good lickings. He told dad about it the next day and dad gave me another one."

The patriarch of the school district — successor to John Henry — was the late Louis H. Poggemoeller, who died in 1966 at the age of 97. Grandpa Poggemoeller started attending the school in 1883 after going to the Lutheran school for several years. Grandpa, a patient soul, finally quit at age 18. He went on the school board in 1915 and stayed on until 1930.

E. Oscar Rosenkoetter, another of the former board of education directors, recalled the day in 1902 when he took his eighth grade examinations at the St. Louis County courthouse in Clayton. He rode his horse to Baden, took the Broadway car to Olive street, then the



Ray J. Twillmann, whose wife Helen is a teacher at the school today, is second from right in front row of this picture, taken in 1927 or 1928, when oldest section of the present school was nearly new. Front entrance doors are now bricked up. Miss Ruth Oliver (now Walker) is at right in back row, with Ellen Trampe standing next to her. Mrs. Walker, after whom the Hazelwood district's Walker school is named, retired in 1963.

University car line to Clayton. He was the only one from the Twillman school, in a strange town, with a strange bunch of kids. He took the exams for two days, then returned home to await the three-week interval it took for the passing grades to be posted. He was one of 74 (out of 96) who made it.

That wasn't any big surprise in the Twillman district. Denny was a tough cookie and he wouldn't let a child go to Clayton for the exams unless he was certain the pupil would come back with a diploma. If they weren't equipped, they simply didn't go. Rumor has it that no one who tried out from the Twillman school during Denny's time failed the examination.

Frank Toelle, who with his wife, the former Alma Wehmeier (a Prigge schoolgirl) lives at 11722 Larimore road, recalls that the old school had two chimneys but only one stove.

"There was a boardwalk out to the street, and all along Bellefontaine road were flower beds which Prof. Denny partitioned off for each of us



The oldest part of the present Twillman school, 11831 Bellefontaine at Redman, was built in 1927. The front entrance was bricked up after consolidation with the Hazelwood School District in 1951. [The school was extensively remodeled in 1976.]

that wanted to try his hand at growing flowers. There also were two front doors. The boys would go in the left, girls on the north side. Shelves and coat hooks were just inside the doors. The foot-high platform was right there between the doors and the seats facing the front of the building. Shutters were closed nightly against the possibility of a strong wind."

Toelle later served on the Prigge board for 12 years, had the distinction of being able to hand diplomas to each of his three children.

"I was happy my children didn't have so far to walk as I did," he said. "Our farm was on Hall avenue, now Interstate 270, just across the street from the Kirby Junior High School. I had to walk that two miles every morning and back again every night.

Bill Schmegal, owner of the *Baden News Press*, has more than a speaking acquaintance with the old school. His father, William H. Schmegal, replaced Grandpa Poggemoeller on the board in 1930.

"You were a big boy when you could go to the well about a half block in back of the school, and bring a pail of water back to your classmates," Schmegal said. "We only had one dipper to drink from, but no one every seemed to get sick from it. There was a cannonball stove in the rear of the school, and on exceptionally cold days, we would bring two benches from the front of the room to the rear, and simply reverse the class.

"Most of us brought our lunch in half-gallon Karo syrup cans. The stove eventually gave way to a new floor furnace, which I had the pleasure of firing up every day for the last two years I was in school. I would get up an hour early each morning to do that little chore, which brought me \$30 a year spending money. I was glad when Harold Twillmann graduated, because that gave me a chance at the job."

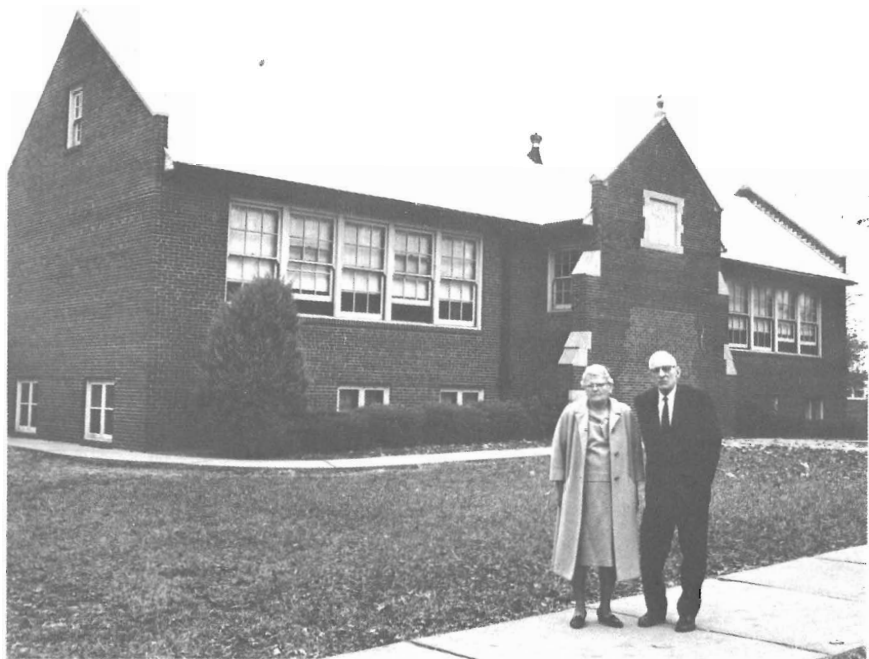


Mrs. Jessie Fellenstein, slated for retirement in 1970, came to Twillman in 1930 and has taught in Room 1 of the original portion of the present school ever since. Here she is, surrounded by her second graders, who are unanimous in their opinion that she is the greatest teacher in the world. Some of their parents who also were taught by Mrs. Fellenstein would be inclined to agree with them.

William E. Wiemann, 11140 Larimore road, president of Modern Electric Co, recalls Mr. Denny as being a "swell fellow, but very strict. He would always play ball with the kids. In fact, he was pitcher and I was the catcher. But he was a different man in the classroom. He would walk along with a pointer, and whenever he caught anyone talking in school he would whack them on the head. If you got caught a second time you stayed after school, and you got a taste of the linden switch. Then he would tell your daddy, and you would catch another one when you got back home. But he was a very patient man — willing to take a long time to teach you how to get along in the world."

Denny left the school in 1920, after 21 years of service. He was replaced by Miss Ruth Oliver, who retired from the district in 1963. She was one of those dedicated teachers who gave everything she had to the school, and somehow found a little left over for the community. On days when the weather was inclement she would stuff her little Model T Ford full of children who had a long way to walk and haul them home, sometimes delaying her own arrival to her room in the home of the Poggemoellers by as much as two hours.

She described the old brick building as follows: "It had a large round



Frank and Flossie Twillmann, 11504 Bellefontaine road, stand in front of core unit of school named for his grandfather, John Henry Twillmann. Frank served on old school board six years, later as custodian for 15 years. Flossie started hot lunch program in 1947, serving as head cook until her retirement several years ago.

stove, and in between the windows on both sides of the room were coal oil lamps backed by reflectors. A desk was on the platform. There were long benches where the children sat when they recited. It had an extraordinarily poor library. Outdoor toilets were on either side of the rear of the school, and some distance removed. And all around the perimeter of the room, above the blackboards, were the diplomas won by graduates of former years."

Mrs. Walker started the first PTA herself, paying all expenses out of her meager salary for the first program, a reading put on by the mother of former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford. That was in 1922. That PTA subsequently went on to provide all the funds for art training, which until then didn't exist. It funded the annual Christmas party, and to this day sponsors the picnics and other fund raising affairs.

The circumstances surrounding the building of the present school were described by Oscar Rosenkoetter, who with Louis Poggemoeller and Emil Jacobsmeyer, served on the board of education of what was then known as School District No. 7 (The numbering system was



How's this for service? Back in 1947 Flossie Twillman, to left of post, and her assistant, Mrs. William Kneller, set up the Twillman lunch room like this (above.) Photo below shows what it looked like six minutes later.



adopted during the February term of the St. Louis County Court in 1910.)

"There wasn't much demand to do anything about the enrollment situation, because of the conservative nature of so many of the residents, and yet we simply *had* to do something. We drew up a plan for a \$21,500 building and offered it to the voters."

We asked Ruth Walker if she remembered that election.

"Listen man," she said, "I borrowed Oscar Rosenkoetter's little two-seater Ford and I literally climbed fences with that car to make sure that the people out working went to the school to vote. I hopped the clods all over this school district, bringing men in right out of the field. The election carried with two votes to spare."

Bill Schmegal was in the last class to graduate from the old school.

"They put a temporary wood platform out under the trees and Dr. Rufus G. Russell came to give the diplomas, as usual. It seemed like all the residents of the area turned out to witness this great event. The ladies all brought basket lunches, of course. It was wonderful."

The following day Oscar Rosenkoetter started tearing down the old



Frank Toelle and his wife, the former Alma Wehmeier, in front of their home at 11722 Larimore road, built by them the year they were married, in 1925. Toelle served on the school board of the old Prigge school (now Larimore) for 13 years prior to its consolidation with the Hazelwood School District.

school. In three months the new building was ready for classes.

Mrs. Walker then shared the teaching assignment with Mrs. Ellen Trampe, a former Larimore teacher. After two years she was replaced by a Miss Von Bauer. She lasted only one year. Then, in the fall of 1930, Mrs. Jessie Fellenstein took over Room 1, teaching grades 1 through 4. She's still in Room 1, now in her last year before retirement, teaching the first grade.

The activities of the PTA intensified during the 1930s and 1940s. Monroe C. Roever, 2559 Burchard avenue, served during the 1940s as secretary of the board. "I can remember when we set up a portable dance floor under the stars. Cal Feutz always hired a band and paid for it himself. We'd get such crowds that they had to take turns getting onto the dance floor. One of those dances raised the money to pay for the screens that are on the school to this day. Perhaps I shouldn't mention this but they occasionally sold beer on the side. This was even more productive. I myself put on several minstrel shows, including chorus lines. These too raised a good deal of money."

And now the "new" school is 42 years old. It has been added to no less than twice, to accommodate the vast enrollment increases of the 1950s and 1960s. Today the auditorium is partitioned off into kindergarten classrooms, those rooms above the furnace room are insuffer-

ably warm on days when the furnace is running. The handsome front has been bricked up in order to provide more efficient use of space. And time, it would appear, could be running out for the core unit of the third Twillman school.

[It did not run out after all. The school underwent a complete remodeling program in 1975-76.]



This is John Henry Twillmann (or Twellmann, as it was spelled in earlier days), who came to the Spanish Lake country in 1842 at the age of nine. His parents emigrated from Germany.

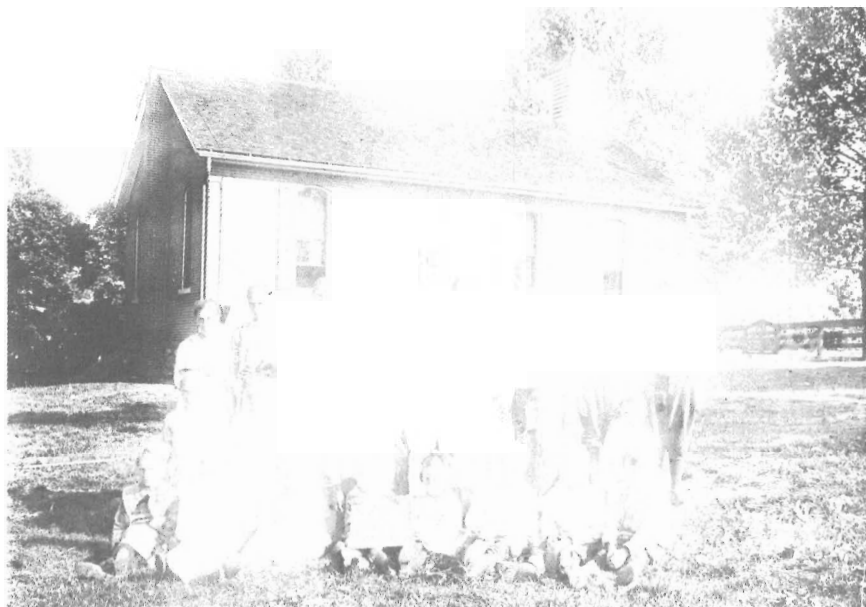
CHAPTER 8

THE BLACK JACK SCHOOL

BLACK JACK. MOST PEOPLE HAVE NEVER HEARD of it. To some it is a wide spot in the road. To others it is a state of mind. To a few it is a way of life and they don't want anybody messing around with it. Black Jack also is a school in the Hazelwood School District, located at 11230 Old Halls Ferry road. But that isn't really at Black Jack the town. Another Hazelwood school, Jury, is much closer (at 11950 Old Halls Ferry). The real Black Jack school isn't a school at all any more — it's at 4655 Parker road, just north of the junction of Old Halls Ferry and Parker. Black Jack the town is at that junction and has been for more than 125 years. The building at 4655 Parker now houses the education offices of the vast school district, which occupies the northernmost reaches of St. Louis County, from the I-70 bridge over the Missouri at St. Charles around to the I-270 bridge over the Mississippi River off Riverview boulevard.

[The building has since been sold to the newly incorporated City of Black Jack, and is serving now as the City Hall.]

It is entirely possible that Black Jack, the town and school, has the earliest history of any of the 13 rural districts which comprise the present day Hazelwood School District. On April 9, 1844, a deed was filed indicating that on October 16, 1840, a William Evans gave "to the surrounding habitation" a tract of 1.02 acres, for the site of a school.



This school picture, taken September 28, 1916, gives a good view of the old brick building. Enrollment was greatly depleted due to the fact that many boys and girls were needed to pick corn, can the summer produce, etc. Front row, from left: Ella Kummer, Mildred Krueger, Laura Hesse, Selma Hartwig, Clara Kleine, Elmer Kuetemann, Edward Hebrock, and Leland Krueger. Second row: Ella Hesse, Vera Jacobsmeyer, May Dauber, Charles Gronemeier, Herbert Krueger, Harold Broughton, Richard Lindhorst, William Couranz. Third row: Leona Jacobsmeyer, Laura Gieselmann, Marie Weitkamp, Lillian Oth, Miss Jenny Cook (the teacher), John Ruegg, Edwin Couranz and George Dauber. Picture was donated by Mrs. Elmer Witte, 12870 Old Halls Ferry road. She is the former Selma Hartwig.

There are substantial indications that a log school was built on that site immediately, and that it didn't hold up too well. *The History of St. Louis County*, written in 1911 by William L. Thomas, a usually reliable reference work, states that on May 12, 1859, a mass meeting was held and a committee appointed to let a contract for a frame building. On the committee were Reuben Musick, Evans, Fred Jacobsmeyer, Walter Carrico and John Leber.

The book states that this building too was removed "after it had served its time and a brick building took its place." No date for the erection of the old brick building could be found, but a good guess would be about 1880. It stood until the present structure was erected

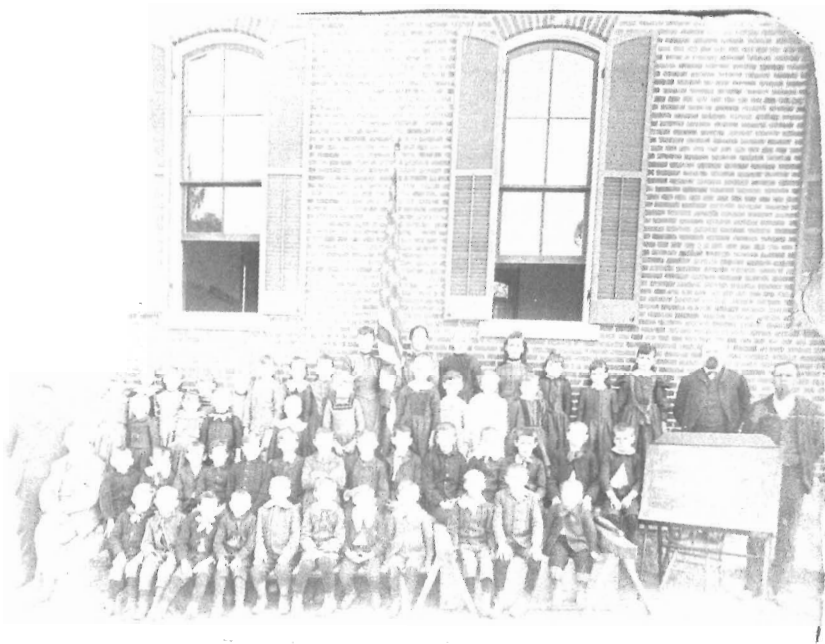


Photo borrowed from Yunker Hamersen is dated 1891. Sign indicated school was established in 1838, but deeds say otherwise. This is the third school. Adults in photo, from left, are Robert Nolte, Charles Lieber, J. B. Breier, and Charles Rosenkoetter. Breier was teacher who later became county superintendent. Others were board members. Nolte was father of Julius R. Nolte, eighth from left in second row, who later became prominent lawyer and circuit court judge. Hamersen, now 89, is fifth from left in front row.

in 1927.

There are many rumors as to how the town of Black Jack got its name. One is that Capt. Reuben Musick, one of the largest land owners in the North County, owned a 6'6" slave named Jack, who stopped at the crossroads during his frequent trips to Baden as a messenger for Musick. The crossroads supposedly was named for him. Another rumor says the town was named for a jack mule which was black. A thorough search of the library of the Missouri Historical Society failed to uncover a shred of evidence that either rumor is true. This is the story that is generally accepted, as it appears in the Thomas book:

“During the early '40s a clump of three phenomenally large Black Jack trees stood at the intersection of the Parker and Old Hall's Ferry



The sign saying, "Black Jack: Here 'Tis" recently disappeared from the "business district." This view is facing northeast along Old Halls Ferry road, with the intersection of Parker road just behind the buildings on the left.

roads. This species of the American oak is usually small and scrubby, but the three we refer to were unusually large and useful and cast an immense and grateful shade upon the tired and heated humanity which passed that way. They were located about twelve miles from the St. Louis city courthouse, and they afforded a shelter and a resting-place for the farmers hauling their wheat and cordwood and garden products to market. Farmers living in the Sinks and outlying districts made these Black Jacks a stopping place, often bringing their heavy loads to this point during the evening, and resuming the journey to the city the next morning. In this way the oaks soon attained celebrity as a point for shelter from the heat, as a rendezvous, as a measure of distance from other points, and were spoken of as the Black Jacks. At that time there was no building of any sort on the present site of Black Jack, but Thomas Fletcher built his home, a modest one-room log house, on the Hall's Ferry road a very short distance from the famous oak trees. A half-mile east on the same road, Peter Obert conducted a blacksmith shop, a general store and also made and repaired shoes, and at this time Mr. Richardson built a large tobacco barn on the Hall's Ferry road. This structure was, a few years later, transformed into a residence by Judge Jos. L. Hyatt, and still later it was occupied by the Utz family, one of the members of which met a tragic fate during the Civil War. This building is still standing and was the second home in Black Jack. It is now occupied by William Uzzell and family."

The little town at the crossroads began to grow. Joseph Leber started a blacksmith shop in the northeast corner of Parker and Old Halls Ferry. John Leber built wagons next door. In 1849 William Bogeholtz established a general mercantile business, saloon and tailor shop about



Fourth Black Jack school building is at 4655 Parker road, and is the educational office for Hazelwood School District. It was built in 1927. [Building has since been sold to the City of Black Jack, which it serves as City Hall.]

200 yards east of the blacksmith.

Other pioneers included Judge Joseph L. Hyatt, Peter Obert, George Sattler, John Wise, George Tyler, French Reyburn, Isiah Parker, Christian Schnecko, Mike and Joseph Tebeau, Joseph De Hatre, Alexander Leber, William R. Hyatt, a Mr. Redman, Musick, a Mr. Purdom, Henry Twillmann, W. T. Doak, Frederick Klausmeier, and an old steamboat pilot, Samuel Henley.

Thomas lists the early schoolmasters as James Feuget, a Mr. Irving and P. G. Ward. Just before the Civil War the settlers were the Rosenkoettters, Trampes, Charles Jacobsmeyer and his four sons: Frederick, William, Frank and Charles. And the Poggemoellers, Burgdorfs, Noltes, Hamersens and Uzzells. During the Civil War Andrew W. Murphy taught at the little one-room frame building. Later the teachers were M. F. Meyers, John A. Storm (from 1865 to 1873), Charles A. Durell and F. J. Beibler. Then came Edward T. Price, John Ruhland, Prof J. B. Breier (for a decade) and then the famed Christian Nolte, who taught from 1892 to 1905, at which time he moved over to the Vossenkemper school, just to the northeast. Nolte was succeeded by E. W. Puelmann.

Although never incorporated, Black Jack received at least semi-official status when the postal department established an office by that name in Nolte's general store. Julius Nolte was the first postmaster. Bogeholz, the general store man, was succeeded by Ferdinand and August Hartwig, who in turn were followed by J. H. C. Ruegge and H. H. Borgman. Charles Swanson ran a wagonmaking shop in post-Civil War years.

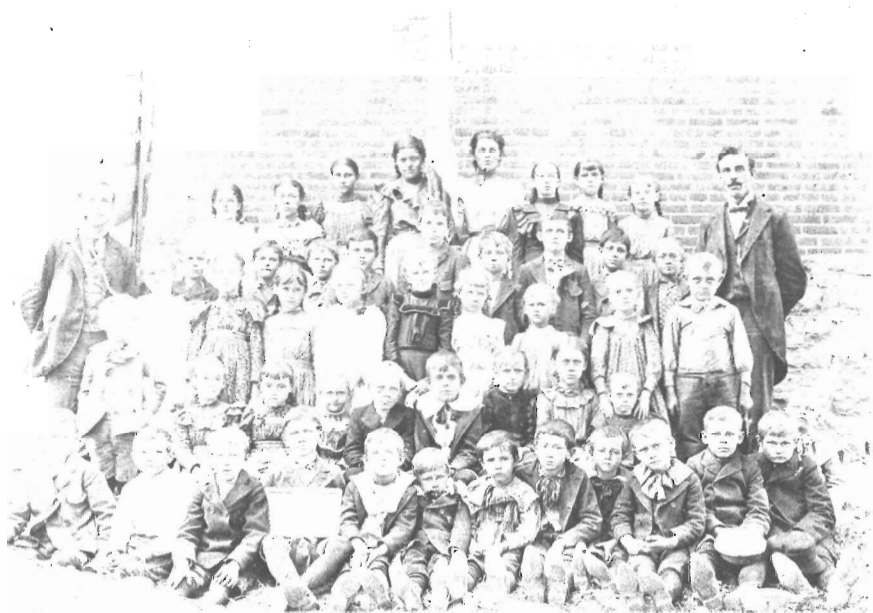
Ferd Hartwig owned a large dance hall in 1911. John H. C. Ruegge



Paulene Uzzell Oellein loaned this picture taken during her fourth year at Black Jack, in 1896. She is third from the right in third row from front. Her future husband, Charles Oellein, is directly in front of her. He died in 1954. The teacher is Christian Nolte. In front row, fifth from left is his future wife, Mamie.



Here are the kids from Black Jack, in 1906 or 1907. The teacher, W. E. Puelmann, was referred to by the children as "Pills." Lee Uzzell is fourth from right in front row.



Nolte is shown at far left in this picture taken along south side of school in 1900 or 1901. Immediately to his left is Kate Kummer. Back row, from left, are Anna Lee, Cora Jacobsmeyer, Paula Meyer, Ollie Lee, an unidentified girl, Miss Uzzell, Meta Rosenkoetter, Linda Mueller, and the county superintendent, Mr. Dennis. Third from right in third row from front is Anna Boad, Mrs. Oellein's future sister-in-law. Her brother, Lee Uzzell, is fourth from right in front row.

ran a fishing resort. Frank and Adolph Hartwig ran a store and saloon. Jos. L. Lindeman sold shoes and general merchandise. H. H. Borgman went into the hardware and farm implement business. Franz Yeager was the barber. Robert Nolte cried the auctions. And farmers came from miles away, increasing business to a healthy point.

One source, dated 1877, had this to say about the community: "Julius Nolte is the postmaster, and he also keeps a grocery store. The town boasts two blacksmith shops, a shoemaker, saddle and harness-maker, and the general trade is well represented. Two schools — a public and a private — and among its enterprises may be mentioned the quarry of Philip Dueker, which supplies the place with building stone. Esquire Silas Garrett dispenses justice to litigants and D. W. C. Lewis physic to the ailing ones. Cross Keys, Pulltight and Jamestown are neighboring villages, and it is said Black Jack proposes to put in a bid for the permanent county seat."

Among the leaders of the community were the Nolte family. Chris-



Mrs. Paulene Uzzell Oellein, 15005 New Jamestown road, displays old record books for Black Jack school dating back to 1850s. Her husband, the late Charles Oellein, attended that school with her, later served for many years on old three-director school board.



Paulene Uzzell at age 26.



Yunker Hamersen as he appeared in 1963.

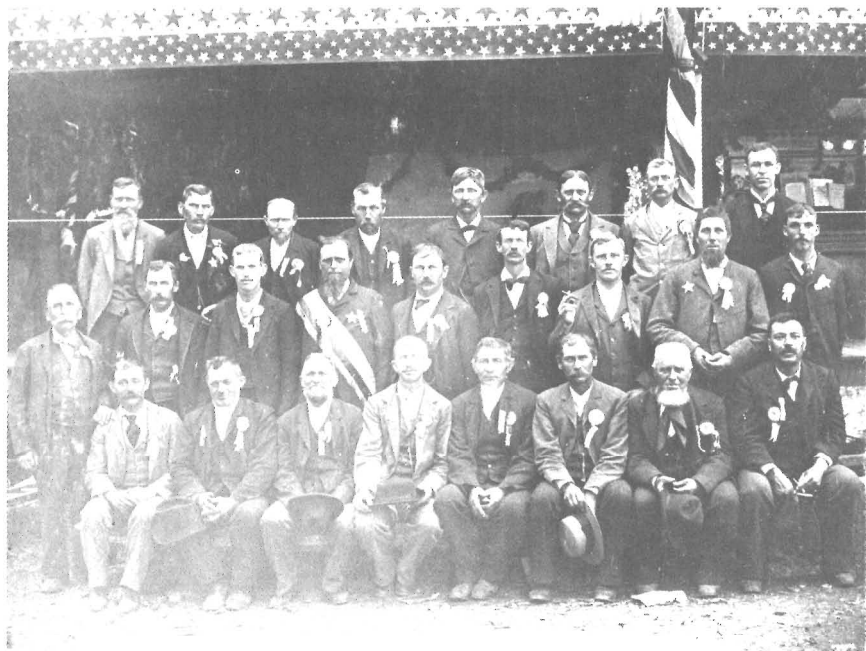


Mrs. Witte also provided this picture, taken in 1923. Front row, from left: Ralph Hartwig, Eleanor Brommelhorst, Josephine Kuebler, Hilda Hesse, Genevieve Brehm, Clara Grote, Shirley Kummer, and William Niere. Second row: Paul Hartwig, Fred Kuebler, Fred Hartwig, Pearl Oellein, Selma Hartwig, John Imhulse, Clarence Grote, and Eugene Niehaus. Third row: Mrs. Lottie Thompson (teacher), Della Brehm, Mary Brehm, Aldine Niehaus, Dora Hahn, Clara Kleine and Ethel Nolte. Fourth row: Waldemar Vorderstrasse, Elmer Kuetemann, Fred Liliensieck, William Couranz, and George Wiemann.

tian Nolte was a teacher for half a century. Not long after he began teaching at Black Jack he married one of his former pupils. The family home was no more than a block south of the intersection, on Old Halls Ferry, and Mrs. Nolte died there just two years ago Christmas day, at the age of 87. Christian died several years earlier. Robert Nolte was an auctioneer in the area for more than 30 years. Julius R. Nolte became the youngest judge to sit on a circuit bench of St. Louis County.

The oldest pioneer in the area, Yunker Hamersen, 89, was interviewed eight years ago for the *Hazelwood News*, and currently is the oldest living officer of the Salem Lutheran Church, long an area landmark. Hamersen, formerly a resident of 5365 Parker road, but now living in the St. Louis Altenheim in Baden, was lavish in his praise of Nolte. "He not only was a great teacher but a great musician too — he could play anything and play it well."

Another pioneer who remembers the era well is Mrs. Charles



From time to time the old graduates from Black Jack held reunions, and this shot was taken during the 1895 observance. William Jacobs-meyer is at right in front row. At far right in the front row is Robert Nolte. Next to him is one of the Leber men, and next to him, William Mueller. At left in the second row is a man named Kuhl. Charles Rosenkoetter is fourth from the left, and next to him are Joe Lindemann William Uzzell (Pauline's father and a former board member), Henry Borgmann, Henry Wiemann, and another of the Rosenkoetter boys.

(Pauline Uzzell) Oellein, who now lives with her daughter, Pearl Blumenkamp, at 15005 New Jamestown road. "I was born in a log house," said the 83-year-old Mrs. Oellein, "on the Bellefontaine road. My first day at school was the last day for Prof. Breier and the first for Christian Nolte. That was in 1892. Later on we lived in a fine brick home for many years, just across the street from the Lutheran cemetery. The house has been gone a year now."

Mr. Oellein was on the school board during the 1940s when trouble broke out at the little school. One boy had taken off to go fishing with his father, and two girls remained home to help with the housework. The teachers, Mrs. Opal Burcke and Miss Kathleen Hirsch, sent a truant officer to investigate, and the parents came to the school to complain. The teachers quit and the school was closed a week, until the county superintendent, Dr. Rufus G. Russell, could get the matter



Mrs. Mary Pohlman of the Jury school cafeteria staff provided this picture of the Black Jack enrollment of 1914, taken on the south side of the building. Back row: Anna Couranz Lindemann, Emma Gronemeier Oth, Catherine Mueller Krehmeyer, Herman Lilensick, a Busch child, Ray Jacobsmeyer, another Busch youngster, Art Jacobsmeyer, Elsie Rehand and Fillmore Nolte. Third row: Miss Jenny Cook, Lillian Zauf, Lillian Oth, Ewald Poggemmoeller, Hilda Kuetmann, Elzey Brackmann, Louis Gronemeier, a Zollmann boy, and George Poggemmoeller. Second row: Alfred Gieselmann, Louise Imhulse, Harold Broughton, Meta Lampe, Pete Lindemann, Hilda Hesse, Leona Brackmann, a Zollman girl, Annie Imhulse, Leona Jacobsmeyer, Ann Kummer, and Ray Rosenkoetter.

Those standing in front row are Carl Gronemeier, Oliver Poggemmoeller, Lee Krueger, Bill Couranz, a Zollman boy, Harold Rosenkoetter, and Ed Couranz. Seated in front are Emma Lampe, Helen Jost, Ella Kummer, Mildred Krueger, Laura Hesse, Vera Jacobsmeyer, Herb Krueger and Tillie Elbert.

ironed out.

The Black Jack district was annexed to the Hazelwood School District on June 22, 1951. Shortly after the two-room building was used as offices for the superintendent of schools and several department heads and consultants. In the mid-1960s some of those offices moved to the Howdershell road site [the former Rosary school], and the building was converted into offices for the elementary and secondary coordinators, consultants, pupil personnel services and elementary curriculum offices.

Soon the little building will have another use, if indeed it remains at all. The board of education currently is studying plans for a new



This is the 1945 Black Jack graduating class, courtesy of Mrs. Ralph Broughton. Teacher in center is Mrs. Mabel Butts. However, Earl McCurdy taught for most of their years in school. McCurdy, who was principal at Elm Grove and McNair for many years, retired from the district last year.

administration building to be built near Hazelwood Senior High, 15875 New Halls Ferry road. Construction should be under way early in 1970, with completion sometime in 1971.

The educational traditions of the area are carried on in the fine new school buildings on Old Halls Ferry — Jury and Black Jack schools.

But even the little town of Black Jack seems to be on the way out, at least its rural aspects. The hills, which at one time would have proved formidable to a billygoat, are now being taken in stride by the earth-movers, as apartment houses and new subdivisions continue to move ever closer. The ground on those corners, which once nurtured those three great oaks, is growing more valuable with each passing day. Maybe it's only a matter of time before that celebrated sign at the junction — "Black Jack: here 'tis" — will be changed to: "Black Jack: here 'twas." There are a good many people up there who hope not.



Present Black Jack School, 11230 Old Halls Ferry Road.

[Black Jack is one of the fastest growing municipalities in St. Louis County, into which great numbers of high-quality homes and commercial buildings have been built.]

CHAPTER 9

THE ELM GROVE SCHOOL

THIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTED. IN THE LITTLE brick building at Taylor and Bridgeton Station road [now U. S. 67], known affectionately as the "Little Red Schoolhouse." A brand new building was being erected just to the south. One by one the farmers trekked into the old building. It was nearly two o'clock on the afternoon of December 10, 1949, and some of them were entering the dilapidated, century-old building for the last time. They were there on more important matters. They had to found the Hazelwood School District.

Those were the last hours of the Elm Grove School, District No. 9, formerly District 2, Township 47, Range 6. It was one of 13 of the so-called "three-director" school districts in an area now encompassed by the Hazelwood School District. Members of that board at that time were Joseph H. Keeven, Clarence Viehmann and Leonard Bilyeu, with Mrs. Lillian Viehmann as secretary (clerk) of the board. And in all probability, those people were the only ones voting who had complete knowledge of the significance of their action. Clarence Viehmann served the board 12 years; his wife 11. They still live at 115 South Highway 67.

The Missouri legislature, mindful of the fact that the state of public



Photo taken December 28, 1960 by Jim Rackwitz of St. Louis Post-Dispatch, shows the old building just before its demolition. It was re-erected on the south side of Interstate 270 just west of Lindbergh boulevard, but without the front anteroom or the library addition on the rear.

education in Missouri was pitifully disorganized in the postwar years, enacted legislation enabling massive consolidations to take place. Such proposals originated with the county boards of education, subject to approval by the State Board of Education. The county school board literally lumped all of North St. Louis County into one district, including old town Florissant and all of Ferguson, and sent the plan in to the state board for approval. Such approval eventually was granted, and the matter was put on the ballot for October 29, 1949.

Dr. Rufus G. Russell, county superintendent from 1916 through 1952, was against such a move as it would tend to destroy the voice those people had exercised so many years in public school education. The farmers knew Dr. Russell objected to it, and he was their wise counselor on educational matters — if he was against it then automatically it was no good. The Elm Grove board had hired Dr. Russell's son, Don O. Russell, to represent them in legal matters, including the bond issue that produced the funds for their new building, and Don Russell was against the proposal too.

"We were able to get the word to all the little three-director districts up here, and they came to the polls and voted. The Ferguson people were sound asleep, and didn't vote at all. As a result, the proposal failed by a two-to-one majority."

Russell realized there was provision in the law for resubmission and



The relocated building has been restored to its probable appearance late in the 19th century. The restoration was product of a determined effort by Hazelwood Historical Society, led by Mrs. Lillian Kortum.

he knew he had to act fast. "If we could just build ourselves to the point where we had considerable area, we felt the county board would leave us alone."

And that was what the December 10, 1949 election was all about. They had to grow, as a means of self defense. They couldn't take advantage of annexation statutes unless they formed themselves into a so-called "six-director town school district."

Don Russell had read the proposal to the old Board, and Mrs. Viehmann had taken it down word for word:

"To organize School District No. 9, Elm Grove School, as a Town School District, in accordance with the provisions of Article 5, Chapter 72 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri, 1939."

The measure carried by a vote of 34 to 0. At the same meeting six directors of the new board were elected: Keeven, J. A. Billington, Homer Blanton, Viehmann, Bilyeu and Willard Thompson.

Within four days a second momentous meeting was held. The board was organized so that Keeven, Viehmann and Billington were elected president, vice-president and treasurer, respectively, and Mrs. Viehmann again was named clerk. It was during this meeting that the name, "School District of Hazelwood" was adopted by the board. The stage now was set for the most rapid expansion of any school district in Missouri history.

Russell moved with characteristic speed. Within nine days, he had a petition presented to the board of education of the Hyatt school district,



For many decades the Elm Grove children followed the tradition of the Maypole dance. This picture was taken in 1916, when Bessie Dale Miles was teaching. She was Alice Wehmer's sister. Mrs. Miles was followed on the job by Mrs. Emilie L. Wehmer Burgdorf, who taught for two or three years.

signed by these patrons: Mrs. and Mrs. Ignatius Herbst, Mr. and Mrs. John H. Behlmann, Lambert Behlmann, Mr. and Mrs. John Boegemann, Mr. and Mrs. John Knobbe, Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose B. Knobbe, Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Loesing, Amalia Langewisch and Emelie K. Rauscher. The petition asked that the Hazelwood School District accept the little Hyatt district. An election was scheduled for Saturday, January 7, at the little schoolhouse which still stands on the east side of Shackelford road, about a block north of the firehouse on Humes lane. The annexation carried by a vote of 11 to 2. The Hazelwood board accepted the Hyatt area in a special meeting January 14, 1950. Now the district line went all the way north to Wiethaupt road.

On identical dates, the Rosary district acted. [The Rosary building still stands too, at 7011 Howdershell road. It formerly housed the office of the superintendent, later was used for storage.]

On December 19 a petition was presented to the Rosary board signed by Howard F. Gamble, Walter Merrill, Christ Schiermeir, Leonard and Joseph W. Gittemeier, M. J. Bossch, Phillip Witte, R. P. Wilsdorf, John and Arthur Dineen, Amy Webster, Florence Teson and Duana Dineen. An election was called for January 7 by board members Emory F. Aubuchon, Fred Snelson and George Behlmann, and the annexation carried by a vote of 22 to 10. It was accepted by the Hazelwood board on January 14 also, so the boundaries now ran all the way



Bessie had just four boys in the school who were big enough to play ball, so she organized them into a team. The youngster on the left is a Kenow boy, and second from right is a Mottin boy. The others are unknown.

to the Missouri River and south nearly halfway to the Madison Ferry road.

And so it went. On February 4, 1950, the Garrett electorate met in their little schoolhouse at Dunn and Missouri Bottom roads to vote 43 to 0 for annexation, which was accepted by the Hazelwood board that same night. The Cold Water board received a petition January 28, 1950, and that annexation passed February 18, 41 to 6, and was accepted by the Hazelwood board at 7 o'clock that night.

Then the Bonfils directors petitioned, voted 32 to 6 for annexation March 18, 1950, and was accepted by the Hazelwood board later that evening. A petition hit the Brown school board March 8, and the annexation vote held in the little one-room brick schoolhouse at Old Jamestown and Carrico passed by a vote of 19 to 1, with acceptance by the Hazelwood board two hours after the polls closed on the March 25 election.

Russell had his case won by this time, with the district boundaries stretching from the approximate path of today's Interstate 70, all the way down the Missouri River to the great bend just north of Accommodation road, then down to the junction of Old Halls Ferry and U. S. 67, with the southeastern boundary being Cold Water Creek and a line about 1,000 yards south of present-day Interstate 270.

There were six three-director districts on the east end of the present



Bessie Dale Miles, who died in 1958, taught at Elm Grove in 1913-14. She was the sister of Alice Dale Wehmer, the first professional to retire from the Hazelwood School District (in 1961.)



Jennie Dale Baseler followed her sister, Bessie Miles, at Elm Grove, teaching a year or two.

Hazelwood School District which waited a year before the stimulus for action took place. The county school board proposed a second reorganization plan, which would bind Pea Ridge, Columbia Bottom, Larimore, Twillman and Black Jack. The old Vossenkemper district beat the county to the draw and petitioned for annexation, which was accepted by the board and endorsed by the St. Louis County Council on May 22,



This portrait of Dr. Rufus G. Russell hangs in foyer of the Russell school, 7350 Howdershell road. Dr. Russell served as St. Louis County superintendent of schools for 36 years, retired in 1952.



Dr. Russell's son, Don O. Russell, has been attorney for the school district since it was formed. In fact, he was the driving force behind the reorganization.

1951.

Russell saw no need to wait for a general referendum, so he proceeded along the annexation route employed so effectively in the west end of the district. Pea Ridge, Twillman and Black Jack all were accepted June 22, 1951, and Larimore was officially in on July 29. This left only Columbia Bottom, with no school since 1942 and only one eligible pupil.

All this time, Lillian Viehmann, the clerk of the board, ran from one little district to another, encouraging the directors to come with Hazelwood rather than allow themselves to be gobbled up by an "outsider" district. "It seemed like I was going all the time. Everybody else was working. Somebody had to do it, so I did," Mrs. Viehmann said.

Don Russell had done his homework well. He knew he could annex Columbia Bottom just as easily as all the other districts were annexed, but he also knew that the school reorganization law in Missouri offered certain substantial additional benefits in state aid — in operating, transportation and particularly in \$50,000 of building funds. Therefore, the reorganization statute was employed to gain Columbia Bottom, and that made the district the School District of Hazelwood, No. R-1. Now it reached all the way to the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi



Mrs. Pat Elmore Coleman started her Hazelwood teaching career in the Little Red School-house, moved to Charbonier school when it opened. She died in 1968. Her husband, Robert E. Coleman, is a director on the Hazelwood school board.



Mrs. Janet Gerken, fourth grade teacher, came to Elm Grove in September, 1952, teaching fourth and fifth grades. Two months later she was assigned to fourth grade only, and she's still there.

rivers, and down the latter to the Chain of Rocks bridge. Russell had established a school district that was exactly 17 square miles larger than the entire City of St. Louis.

(Along with Columbia Bottom came an 80-acre tract at Dunn road and U.S. 367, the site of the present Kirby Junior High School. The old three-director board had sold the ground for a total price of \$1,000 just prior to the reorganization. Through an involved process, Russell presented evidence that this tract was ground designated for use as School Lands upon Missouri's admission to the Union in 1821; was land held by the state; and therefore was not legally the property of the Columbia Bottom board, and therefore they had no right to sell it at all. Russell won his case as usual, refunded the \$1,000 to the purchaser, and picked up a tract for the Hazelwood School District worth hundreds of times that much.)

The records of the ground on which the little Elm Grove school stood



Mrs. Lorene Hitt Lusher, at right in back row, taught at old Brown school, Carrico and Shackelford roads, for nine years, then went back home in Cape Girardeau to teach. She returned to North County in 1942 to teach these children in Elm Grove school. This photo, loaned by Clarence and Lillian Viehmann, was taken November 17, 1942, just two months into the school year. The Viehmanns' daughter, Louise Viehmann Behlmann, is fourth from left in second row. Note the cloak-room on front of the old school building.

for more than a century, go back to 1809. At that time, the land was measured in arpens, as was the custom of the pioneer French. It originally was part of or adjacent to a huge land grant to Baptiste Creely and L. De Hatre. The Hon. Paul Desjarlois, governor of Upper Louisiana, as the area was known in those days, sold a one-arpen tract to Joseph Tresse on October 12, 1809. Tresse deeded it to Michel Fortin in 1817, and Fortin to Peter Meunier in 1850. On November 8, 1852, Peter and Catherine Meunier deeded the arpen — about $\frac{3}{4}$ acre — to Joseph Francis Mottin, Pierre Marishall, and Bernard Henley for \$160, rather a considerable sum in those days. At that time it was known as the Dickson School, District No. 2.

About 10 years ago the author of this series prepared a short history of the school, after interviewing several old timers who received their education in the little building. Included was Louis F. Creely, of 560 Shirley drive, Florissant. Creely, who died in 1966, was a grandson of



This photo was taken September 11, 1941, and shows Mrs. St. Germaine, who preceded Mrs. Lusher on the job. Fifth from left in front row is Thomas Williams. Second and third from left in second row are Roberta Cunningham and Jean Williams Steinbaker. First and third from right in same row are Rozann Williams Hancock, daughter of Mrs. Grace Williams, now reading teacher at Walker school, and Louise Viehmann, daughter of Clarence and Lillian Viehmann.

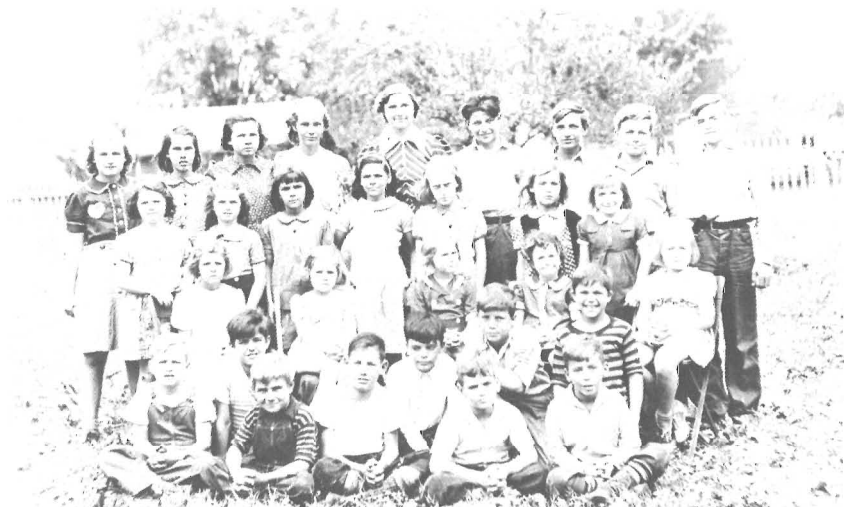
Joseph Francis Mottin, the president of the board when the original building was erected. Creely attended the school in 1890, and vividly remembered his first teacher, a Mr. Pitts.

"Mr. Pitts was a small man with a well-trimmed white goatee, who rode a white stallion to school," Creely said. "He carried his lunch, and a bottle of buttermilk inside a pocket built into the tails of his greatcoat. As the horse trotted across the fields the bottle and the lunch bounced against the sides of the horse."

He recalled that the school had a high pot belly stove in the middle of the single room, and the students moved around the room continually on cold days to keep from being roasted on one side.

"We had solid wood shutters in those days," Creely said. "When we could see a big blow coming up we would close them and the room would be dark as pitch. We would have to light the oil lamps."

By the turn of the century, a lot of the old timers and their descend-



This shows the total enrollment of the Little Red Schoolhouse in 1939.

ants were still around. Joseph J. Burckel was listed as board president in 1903-04, James P. Hanley as clerk (probably the name "Henley" appeared incorrectly in the 1852 deed), and Felix Mottin as director. Eletha Gibson was listed as teacher. (She also served the old Cold Water school for awhile.)

By 1905, Henry Keeven was listed as board president, Leon G. Mottin as clerk, and Baptiste Loraine as director. William McDermott was the teacher. A year later Florence Le Houllier was teaching at Elm Grove, and Frank Creely had replaced Loraine on the board as a director.

From a growth standpoint Elm Grove stood still for more than half a century. In 1923 the board hired a teacher for \$1,035. A decade later they were paying only \$900 for a teacher. There were 18 children at that time and the residents were sustaining their school with a 15-cent tax levy.

By 1939 the salary was up to \$1,080 and there were 35 pupils in average daily attendance, but still only one teacher.

For some reason the directors were not supporting the school operation as well as a number of parents thought they should, and this was the prime reason for founding the Elm Grove PTA. This group was organized March 7, 1940, with the first officers being Lillian Viehmann, president; Mrs. Mac Piper, vice-president; Mrs. Al Aubuchon, secretary; Mrs. William Glassman, corresponding secretary; Mrs. R. Yinger, treasurer, and a Mrs. Reichman, historian.

The school had been in hot water many times with the County Board



This shot of Mrs. Lusher's Elm Grove pupils was taken Sept. 22, 1943, and shows ornamental picket fence which surrounded schoolyard.

of Health. Drinking water was hauled to school and dumped into a cistern. It was pumped as needed from the cistern, with the waste water running back into the reservoir. All the kids drank from one dipper, and the water had a rancid odor and taste.

The PTA people were unhappy because they felt the teacher and the board were substandard. The children had no blackboard, nor was there any operable playground equipment in the school yard.

As a result of the PTA organization the teacher was fired and two board members resigned. A Mrs. St. Germain went on as teacher the following September. On Wednesdays during the winter months the PTA mothers took turns fixing meals at home and bringing them to school for the pupils.

The PTA put a trough on the cistern to drain the waste water away from the well, provided individual drinking cups, soap, paper towels, tissues and a first aid kit. They painted the schoolroom and put mats on the floor. They provided a baseball, a bat, a volleyball, a basketball and a backstop for the playground.

In 1942, Mrs. C. Oscar Lusher was named teacher at Elm Grove, and stayed on as the only teacher until 1949, when she was joined by the late Mattie Mae Elmore Coleman. (Mrs. Coleman was the wife of a current member of the Hazelwood board, Robert E. Coleman.)

Despite the addition of a frame cloak room-vestibule over the main entry to the building, and despite the later construction of a small library annex on the rear, the Little Red Schoolhouse had just about



Hazelwood School District started kindergarten program in 1955, and Mrs. Grace Williams taught it then for Elm Grove youngsters in old Rosary school building, now office of superintendent, 7011 Howdershell road. In 1956, kindergarten was moved to multi-purpose room at Elm Grove. That is the date of this photo, showing Mrs. Williams directing a finger play.

reached the end of the line by the mid-1940s. Enrollment was growing, and there was no end in sight as the farmers contemplated the housing and baby booms predicted after the close of World War II.

By that time the building contained the wonder of wonders, an electric water pump. (It still pumped water from the old cistern). They had a gas space heater, a hot water heater, and a two-burner gas hot plate for the preparation of an occasional hot meal. There was a telephone and a reading table with chairs, and at least the beginnings of a library. But there were 50 children enrolled and seats for 40, so the library room was used for recitation exercises for groups of 10 children.

Keeven, Bilyeu and Viehmann, the board members, hired an architect to design a 10-classroom school building, had plans prepared for a four-room first unit, and retained Don Russell to show them how to put over a bond issue. They had traded their ground even-up in 1948 to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph M. Keeney for a much larger piece just to the south.

The bond issue was passed by a heavy majority and construction started immediately. It was shortly thereafter that the board involved Russell in the changeover to a six-director district and subsequent annexation proceedings. On February 14, 1950, the Monday after a premature Valentine Day party, Mrs. Lusher, Mrs. Elmore and their



Present Elm Grove school, 7215 Lindbergh boulevard at Lynn Haven lane, is on land adjacent to south boundary of old school site.

children walked to the partially completed new Elm Grove school and another era ended.

By this time Mrs. Lusher was the superintendent, serving, as she put it, "under duress." Between the December 10, 1949 election and the January 14, 1950 acceptance of the Hyatt and Rosary annexations, Mrs. Lusher assumed the superintendency.

"They told me it was more or less of a titular thing, and of course I had to agree to help them out, but I made it clear that I would serve only until they could find someone else."

By the following fall Mrs. Lusher found she was the chief administrator, but also she was in charge of instruction, manager of bus transportation, the foreman of all the custodians, director of the entire hot lunch program, in charge of the payroll, keeper of attendance and transportation records, substitute teacher, etc.

"I just didn't like it at all," she said. "I wanted out. I wanted to go back to my classroom where I belonged."

Despite her outspoken dislike for the superintendency, Mrs. Lusher worked hard at the job of converting the district from a hodge-podge of one-and two-room country schools to a modern, progressive educational system. Mrs. Lusher served a final year, 1952-53, after which she was replaced on July 1 by Clifford R. Kirby, who held the job until he was succeeded by Dr. C. O. McDonald a few years ago.

The Lusher school at 2015 Mullanphy road (just west of Shackelford) was dedicated in her honor on May 18, 1958.

In the meantime, those two finished rooms in the unfinished four-room building in 1950 have been augmented to 26 classrooms, plus three sections of kindergarten in the big gymnasium. The enrollment (18 pupils) of the 1930s has grown to 886 today, and the property is now

almost seven acres in size.

[The original site of the Little Red Schoolhouse is now a parking lot for a shopping center. The little building was dismantled and trucked, piece by piece, to the south side of I-270, just west of Lindbergh boulevard, where it stands today as a permanent memorial to an era now gone.]



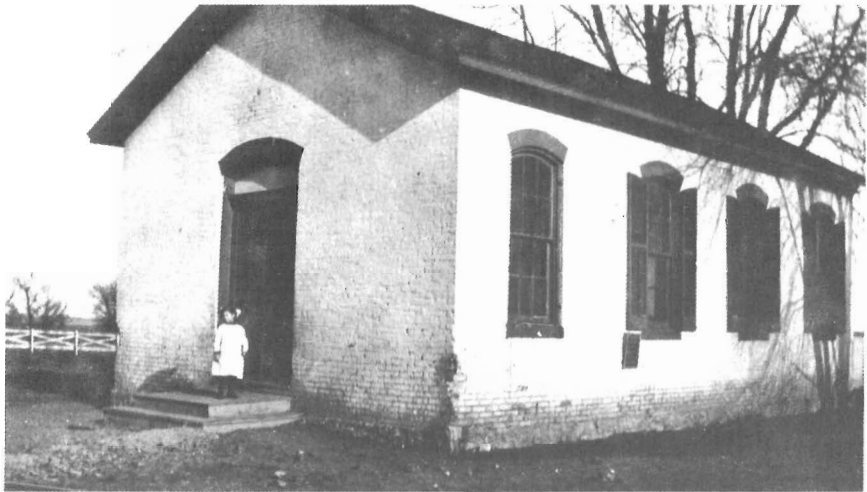
Mrs. Lorene Hitt Lusher, the first superintendent of the Hazelwood School District, retired in 1967 from a lifetime of teaching in the district and its predecessor schools. She and her husband, J. Oscar Lusher, live at 1610 St. Catherine drive, Florissant.

CHAPTER 10

THE HYATT SCHOOL

THE LITTLE ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE, WHICH now serves as a private residence, currently bears the address of 3710 Shackelford road. The old Hyatt (or Hyatt Valley) school was and still is about two blocks north of Humes lane, on the east side of the street. But 60 years ago Shackelford wasn't a street — it was a wide dirt path. Humes lane was just that — a lane. Pretty, 20-year-old Alice Dale would get to the school early in that first spring of her long teaching career. Long before she heard the laughing sounds of her pupils she could hear the hushed sounds of the country. The occasional wrenching of harness leather as a farmer worked his plow down a nearby field, his team straining at the trace straps. Occasionally a buggy would rattle by the dusty road as another farmer hurried in to Florissant to pick up some "steeples" for his fence. The ground for miles was mostly flat as a billiard table, but here and there were little defiles still filled with the mists of early morning.

Alice had quite a little ride every day — three miles from her family home across New Halls Ferry road from the Cold Water school, where she completed the first eight grades of her education. The oldest of



Mrs. Grace Williams, who teaches now at Walker school, provided this old picture of Hyatt, taken in 1911. Child in doorway is either Elsie or Bertha Miles.

eight children and the first to embark on a teaching career, she thought of the note she had received a few short months ago — the Hyatt teacher had broken a leg, and would she take over the job? What a relief that had been.

Alice had been in her last semester at Ferguson High School, then on Wesley avenue. She had to walk from her home at Cold Water past Cross Keys and into Florissant every morning, then take the street car to Ferguson. In the bitter months of winter she would board and room in Ferguson. Now that would be unnecessary. The diploma could come later.

There was no bell atop the building, as there was at most of the other little schools in the North County. Bells, the farmers thought, were an unnecessary frill, and an expensive one at that. They were lucky enough to have a brick schoolhouse for such a small enrollment. Anyway, it was plenty tough providing funds for school operation in those inflationary times. Teacher salaries alone were way out of line — young Miss Dale was getting \$60 a month in her first year of teaching. What were things coming to?

The pastoral mood was interrupted about 8:30 every morning, as the chattering of children bounding across the fields reached the little schoolhouse. One by one they would file into the classroom — sometimes only a half dozen would make it, with many boys helping their fathers in the fields; some other children out sick.

The little Hyatt school had no furnace in those days either — there



Hyatt school was known as Hyatt Valley school in 1911, and usually was referred to simply as the Valley school. That was the year this photo was taken, and the first of a long and distinguished teaching career for Alice Dale Wehmer. Old cistern and pump are visible to right (south) of building.

was a pot belly stove near the west wall, replaced many years later by a coal burning furnace with a blower.

Spring was always a delight in the country, but to the children, Christmas was the time to look forward to. Christmas at Hyatt was no exception.

"I usually would stay in after school," said the former teacher, now Mrs. Alice Wehmer, "and the directors would bring in a blue spruce that evening. We'd all work together putting the decorations on. Next day the children would come in to do their program. First we would pass out cans of water, just in case the tree would catch fire. Candles were on the boughs and I would light them one by one with a flame on a long stick. We would gather around the tree and I would pass out the Christmas bags, prepared by the school board, and the children would look eagerly at the nuts and fruit. The hard candy was passed around in large buckets. Then we'd all sing, and the children would perform the dialogs and monologs they had been working on for weeks. It was wonderful fun."

Miss Dale taught until 1913, when she received a better offer from the Central school at Price and Old Bonhomme roads in Olivette. She taught there five years and in 1918 married Henry W. Wehmer, an engineer, who had attended the old Brown school up near Cold Water. She taught in Jennings for two more years, then started raising her



The Hyatt school as it is today, at 3710 Shackelford road, about two blocks north of the fire station on Humes lane.

five children. In 1925 they bought their new home at 3634 St. Marys lane in Normandy, where Alice still lives with her son, John. She came out of retirement in 1945 to teach two years at the old St. Ferdinand public school at St. Jacques and Washington, in Florissant, and in 1946 she served as principal there. She didn't work at all in 1947, but in 1948 she returned to the old Hyatt school for two more years, until it was annexed by the Hazelwood School District, then taught at Larimore until 1956, when she entered the brand new Lusher school. On July 1, 1961, she became the first teacher to retire from the Hazelwood School District.

Miss Lenore B. Hitt, one of the veteran teachers of the Hazelwood School District, taught for several years at the old Hyatt school too. Her stint started in 1932. Her sister, Lorene Hitt Lusher, was teaching at the old Brown school on Shackelford and Carrico roads. Lenore lived with her and Lorene would drop her off at Hyatt on her way to Brown. Later she replaced her sister at Brown. In the fall of 1943 she returned to Cape Girardeau to get her degree, then taught for eight more years in Cape Girardeau County. She came to Elm Grove in the fall of 1952 to teach seventh grade. She now is chairman of the social studies department at Hazelwood High School.

"I remember the old Hyatt school so well," she said. "There was a little anteroom on the front, which now has been removed. I think it was my first winter at the school that we got electricity there. I know they used it for the first time during our Christmas program.

"And I can remember when we replaced that old furnace. They started moving it out and the floor beneath it was burned almost clear through. It could have fallen through at anytime and that would



Alice Dale was 22 years old in 1912, her second year at Hyatt. One week ago she sat down and identified every one of those pupils from memory — the ensuing 58 years seem to have had no effect whatever on her power to retain knowledge. Back row, from left: Marie Miles, Hugo Loesing, Estella Schuler, Martha Schuler, Antoinette Wesling, Maud Schuler and Susie Schuler. Middle row: Josephine Lindeman, Tillie Schuler, Flora Oellein, Raymond Schuler, Paul Benne, Anna Miles, Viola Wesling. Front row: Helen Loesing, Amelia Lindeman, Everett Wesling, Katie Loesing, John Schuler and Bertha Miles.

have been goodbye Hyatt.

“We had a terrible time with those outdoor toilets. At one time they had been in the far corners of the lot, but in my day they had been moved to the building and attached along the east wall. The Board of Health came out one day and dumped some dye in them. Within a few hours that dye had seeped into the cistern, where we got our drinking water. Right away the toilets were moved back to the property line and the board had the cracks in the cistern all cemented up.”

It was during Miss Hitt’s tenure at the little school that the pupils got a good lesson in brotherly love. An Italian family named Caruso moved into the neighborhood with five boys, all of school age. For some reason the other boys looked down on the Caruso boys. “We had to crack some heads together, but the kids finally came to realize that those Caruso boys were wonderful children. Within a few months they were the most popular boys in school. It wasn’t easy though.”

Grace Loesing Williams, reading teacher at the Walker elementary



Classes never were very large at Hyatt. This is the 1918 student body, courtesy of Mrs. Grace Williams. Back row, from left: Josephine Lindeman Albers, Bertha Miles Ricklemann, Miss Grace McNearney (teacher), Catherine Loesing Barlbort, and Helen Loesing Barlbort. Middle row: Robert Westling, Idell Loesing, Evelyn Beene Frey and Emily Dale Taft. Front row: William Westling, Mabel Lindemann, Augusta Loesing Grob, Alvin Lindeman, and Grace William's brother, Ralph T. Loesing.

school, went to school at Hyatt. (Walker is just around the corner on Humes lane.) "My father, August Loesing, was born on our old home place about a mile north of the old Hyatt school. He went to school there from 1883 to about 1890."

Grace attended Hyatt in the 1920s, later went to the old Ferguson High School on Wesley avenue. She was in the first class to graduate from the new Vogt school at Church and Lewis avenues, in Ferguson. By this time she was driving her own Chevrolet 6 coach to school. She received her BA from Washington U. the hard way, and attended SIU in Edwardsville nights and summers to win her MA degree. She taught at Cold Water in the 1940s, and when it was closed moved to the Elm Grove school in 1954. Her daughter, Miss Ruth Williams, is a former teacher of girls physical education at Hazelwood High School and still substitutes from time to time. Grace's late husband, Earle T. Williams, was an executive with McDonnell Aircraft Corp. and also served for eight years on the Ferguson-Florissant board of education. He died in



Miss Lenore B. Hitt provided this picture, taken in the fall of 1933, when she started teaching at Hyatt. She has been teaching ever since, except for one year which she took out to complete her BS degree. Back row, from left: Lorainne Meyer, Alice Loesing Niehaus, Ethel Niehaus Piemann, Elvira Montgomery, Miss Hitt, Henry Lindemann, Vernon Eggert, Paul Montgomery and Elroy Montgomery. Front row: Robert Thompson, James Thompson, William Meyer, Raymond Orr, Esther Hartwig Cahill, Margaret Lindemann, Mildred Niehaus Offermann, LaVerne Meyer, and Louise Niehaus Sutton.

1964.

"In good weather I had to walk to school," Mrs. Williams said, "but when it was storming I always managed to get a ride in our Model T Ford. I remember bringing my lunch every day and leaving it in the little wood anteroom. Many a time I would bite into a frozen sandwich.

"I also can remember how clean everything was in September, when we would go back to school. Somebody always managed to have the floor freshly oiled. The double seats and desks, which were fastened to the floor, always were polished and shining. The big windows always admitted a fresh breeze if one was blowing. Our teacher was a Miss McNearney, and she was a good one. She died quite young, during my last two years. There were two boys and two girls in my graduation class, and only 15 children in school."

The ground on which the Hyatt school stands has a long history, but the school doesn't. Prior to the Louisiana Purchase it was in the old Florissant commonfields, in a strip owned by Etienne Labante. There is no record of transfer of the property from Labante to a Jesse Richardson, but Richardson sold it to John and Sarah A. Massey in the early 1800s. They in turn conveyed the "one square acre" to the township board of education, School District No. 4, for \$150. The deed was made on December 21, 1869, and it is presumed that the brick building was erected shortly afterwards. It was not, however, until March 5, 1900,



Mrs. Grace Loesing Williams, who now is reading teacher at Walker school, helps pupils with book selection. [Mrs. Williams now is Walker school's instructional specialist.]

that the deed finally was recorded. John L. Hyatt was president of the school board in 1874. Joseph Hyatt also was on the board around that time.

The old Hyatt district became the first of 12 to be annexed on consolidation with the Elm Grove school, to form the Hazelwood School District. Date of the annexation was January 14, 1950. The old building was sold at auction September 1, 1950, to George A. Keim and Louise Martin, for \$3,600. On January 17, 1952, it was sold to Joseph Desloge. On the board at the time of annexation were Henry Hartwig, Herbert Langwisch and Warren Uthoff. Richard Albrecht was president of the PTA and Mrs. Betty Lindeman was secretary. There were only 12 children enrolled at the time.

"I wouldn't want to give the impression that I don't like the boys and girls I teach today, because I really do like them," said Miss Hitt. "But in that little rural environment there was so much more kindness in the teacher-pupil-parent relationship. The children had so much more of a sense of belonging, and they also had a lot more respect for their teachers. I guess the one quality I miss the most could be summed up in one word: warmth."



Miss Lenore B. Hitt, social studies department chairman at Hazelwood High School, and former Hyatt school teacher.

CHAPTER 11

THE ROSARY SCHOOL

TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR THE LITTLE ROSARY school, as indeed it already has run out for nine of the original 13 rural schools which once comprised the Hazelwood School District. During the last regular meeting of the Hazelwood board of education bids were opened for a new administration building, which would consolidate functions now performed in the old Rosary building, 7011 Howdershell road and the old Black Jack school, 4655 Parker road.

Although the bids came in high, it is evident that something is going to have to be done rapidly, because it is a most injudicious use of time and talent to try to administer a district the size of Hazelwood from a pair of broom closets.

And when that move is made, presumably within the next two years, the old Rosary and Black Jack buildings will be surplus. There is one acre at Black Jack, two at Rosary. Far too little for major school sites.

The history of that little plot of land, across Howdershell and a little south of the west end of Lynn Haven lane, goes all the way back to 1770. In that year the Spanish lieutenant governor, Don Pedro Piernas, referred to the tract in establishing legal basis for ownership. It was left to the widow of Nicholas Marechal — along with several thousand acres around it. (She also inherited their home in the four-year-old



The second Rosary school, located immediately to the rear of present Rosary building, 7011 Howdershell road, Hazelwood. This photo appeared in the Eighth Annual Report of Public Schools, published in 1911.

village of St. Louis. The house was described as *poteaux en terre*, or “posts in the ground.” The walls were made of vertical logs placed closely together.)

Having had eight children, the Widow Marechal never had time to learn to write, so she signed the document with the traditional X.

The property for the next several decades changed hands many times and finally, on July 23, 1867, Francis and Victoria Teson deeded one acre, described at that time as being on the “Commonfields of St. Ferdinand,” to the board of education of Township 47, Range 6 East, for use of District 3, in exchange for the sum of \$150.

Two years later, on April 9, 1869, Francis Aubuchon traded the school district a 12-foot strip on the west of his property for a 12-foot strip on the north side of the school property. The tract was described as being on the Rosary county road, as Howdershell obviously was known in those days.

That would be the extent of the history of the land itself, except for some mysterious entries in the 1911 annual report of the schools of St. Louis County. This appears on page 22:



Mrs. Lillian Mareschal, who retired from Hazelwood School District in 1966, started teaching at Rosary in 1916.

“The origin of this school dates back to 1851 when the people of the neighborhood feeling the need of a school for the education of their children organized a rural school district and elected Franklin T. Utz, Levi Smith, and George Sullivan as directors. Mr. Smith gave the lot for the school and the men of the neighborhood furnished the brawn and muscle that converted the virgin timber into the ‘little log school house’ that went by the name of Smith school until the present frame building was erected, and named Rosary. The first teacher was John Dailey who was followed by Frank Morton and he by Andrew Murphy



This class picture was taken September 21, 1939, when the little school was extremely overcrowded. Mrs. Mareschal is at right in back row, and Mae Mensendieck is at left. Other teacher is Rita Litteken Maiteson.

who subsequently became Superintendent of Schools of the county. The growth of the school has been gradual but steady, has all needful apparatus for good work, has a library of over 300 volumes, and a ten months term is maintained."

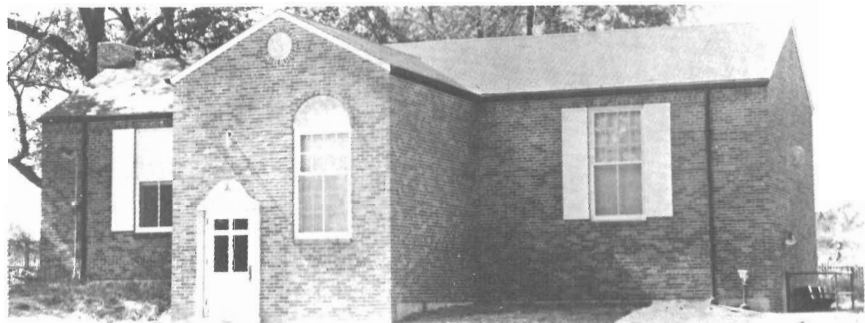
The report describes the school as being one of the first accredited rural schools of the county.

How does this jibe with the known facts? Not well but there is too much circumstantial evidence to disregard it. It is possible that Smith never actually deeded the land to the board of education, that he sold it to the Tesons, who did.

Public school people often have wondered why the school bore the name Rosary, and the answer has not survived the century that the school was in existence. The answer, in all probability, is obvious in light of the fact that the area was almost entirely Catholic until the last couple of decades. It was rare indeed when a Protestant served on the board of education. The heritage of the old town of Florissant was Catholic, and the tract once was a part of their commonfields, in the days when Florissant was legally known as St. Ferdinand. It is only logical that the area would have a strong French Catholic settlement.

There is a strong tie with the school, from that dim day in 1770 to today.

Out on Dunn road, just north of the Ville Maria subdivision, is the home of Mrs. Lillian Mareschal. The same Mareschal as the Nick that



The present Rosary school building was brand new when this picture was taken, after completion but before classes actually started. It was built right in front of the old school.

passed away sometime prior to 1770? "I don't know," Lillian said. "He spells his without the s but chances are there is some lineage in there someplace."

Lillian Mareschal was interviewed because she is something special — a sprightly former teacher, one of the very few who have retired from the Hazelwood School District.

Lillian Jeske was born and raised in the Ferguson area, but a couple of years after she graduated from Ferguson High School she came to work at Rosary school as a teacher. She taught for five school years and then moved over to the Fairview school in what was then the West Walnut Manor district, which in recent years merged with the Jennings School District.

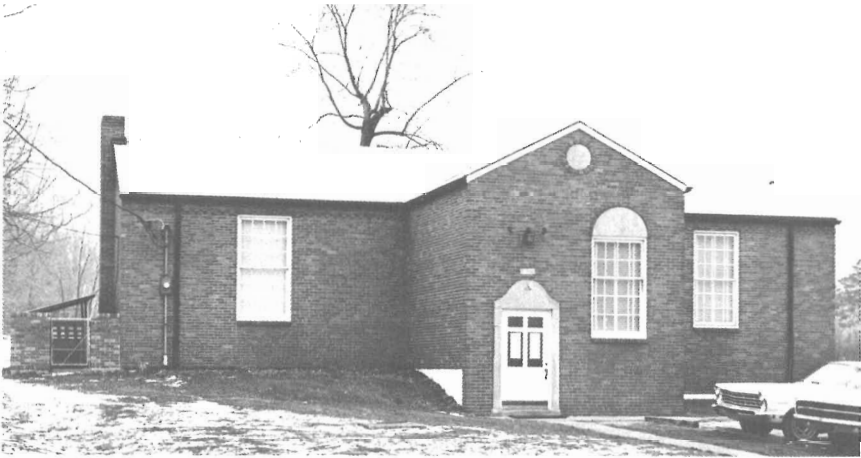
"I taught there for awhile," she said, "and then I married Leo Mareschal. We came out here to our 60 acres and farmed. I raised three children, but back in 1936, when my youngest one was five, Leo was so ill he couldn't work any more, and it was then that I realized how lucky I was to have trained as a teacher. I applied at Rosary and got my old job back."

The Rosary district and the Hyatt district merged with the School District of Hazelwood (the old Elm Grove school) on the same evening — January 14, 1950. Lillian taught as long as the rural school existed as such, then moved over to the new Elm Grove school in 1953.

"I kept on teaching until 1966 when I retired. First grade all the time, because that's what I really wanted anyhow, all my life."

Did she see any of her former pupils go on to greatness? "No, not really. A lot of them became quite successful, of course, but then I suppose a lot of them didn't, too."

And then she uttered the one remark that is typical of all outstanding teachers, regardless of age, where they are, or who they teach: "But



The building has changed little in the past two decades. Now it houses offices of superintendent, business director, and other administrative officers. [Building has since been sold to a church group.]

they were all good kids.”

A picture of the old Rosary school was published in the Eighth Annual Report of the Public Schools, issued in 1911. It shows a symmetrical building with a gable roof, and right under the peak are the words, Rosary Public School. Clearly visible is the ornamental iron fence along the front that Mrs. Mareschal remembers so well.

“We just had a plain picket fence around the sides of the property. And a rickety old coal shed right out in back, and the usual outdoor toilets on either side. We had a cistern for water, but often the children would go next door where they had cold, clear well water.

“I remember it was so terribly dusty in the classroom. I begged the school board to buy some oil so we could oil the floor but they wouldn’t do it. Finally I got disgusted and just bought the oil myself and put it down with an old mop. Now that was progress! And after that the board always bought the oil for me.

“When I first taught there we had one big room with a lot of children. There also was a little wood anteroom, which served as a cloak room and library. We had so many children we had to convert the anteroom to a second classroom and hire another teacher. Then we finally built the new school you see there today, which had two classrooms, and almost right away we merged with Hazelwood.”

The Mareschal name cropped up in 1904, in the Third Annual Report. Leon Mareschal was listed as president of the board. Charles W. Rosner was clerk, and Leon Laramie was director. Leon Mareschal was Lillian’s father-in-law.



Mrs. Mareschal is at left in this picture, made January 24, 1944. It appears as if the kids are freezing to death. Note picket fence in background.

Two years later the board makeup was still the same. During those years Eunice S. Morgan was listed as the teacher.

In 1907 the school was able to boast of two graduates: Maud Rosner and Wilfred Loraine. In 1911 there was another, Gesina Behlmann, and it was in that year that the school was approved by the county superintendent. Eunice Morgan still was listed as teacher and was described as having been there 23 years at that time.

The name Leon Mareschal was associated with that board of education until 1924, at which time Fred Berkemeier took over as president. Also serving in those years was a man named B. C. Hoorman. He was clerk of the board until 1935, when the name of Paul Vasquez pops up in that capacity. Paul is still with us, and we talked to him in connection with this history. Now about 80, he lives at 6439 Howdershell road.

We asked him if he was any relation to "Old Vaskiss," spelled phonetically by Bernard DeVoto in *Across The Wide Missouri*. This was the fabled Louis Vasquez of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, who operated as a trapper and mountain man during the 1830s in the transmontane West. "I think so, but we go back further than that," he said. "My great-great-grandfather was on the St. Louis riverfront about the time of the founding of St. Louis."

Indeed, a Benito Vasquez is in the records of the Old Cathedral, in the big vault in the rectory, as a signer to the baptismal certificate for the old bell now in that church's museum. It's a small world.

[The Rosary school recently was sold to a church group, which has rehabilitated the building for use in religious services.]

CHAPTER 12

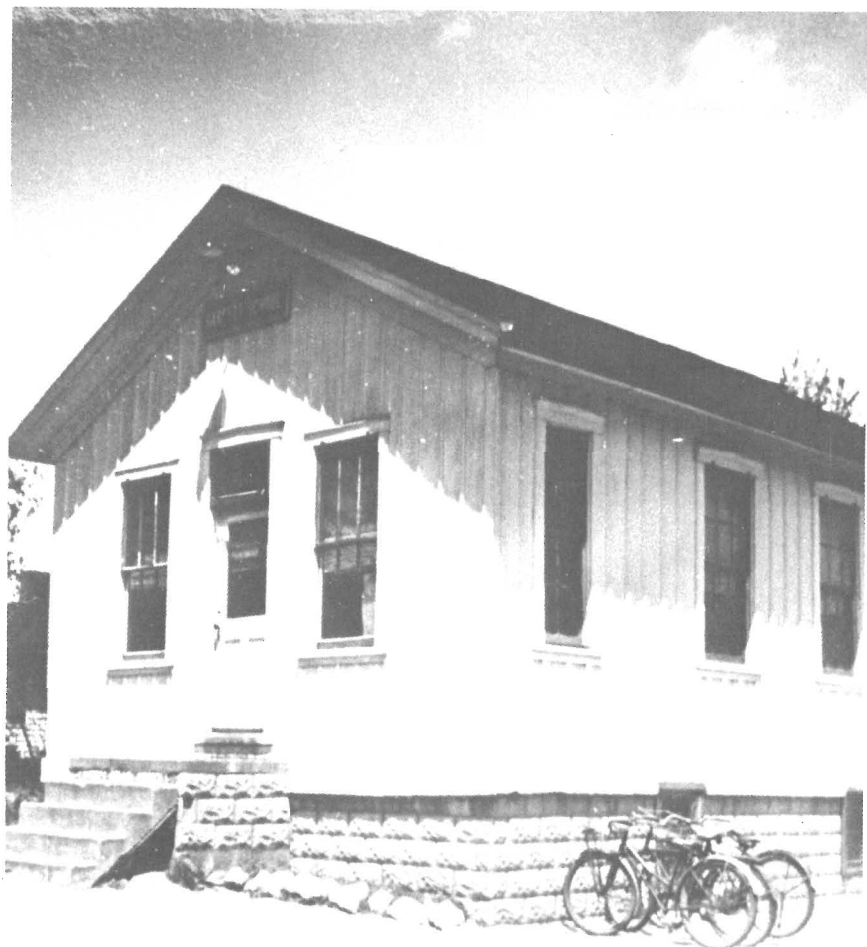
THE GARRETT SCHOOL

FOR YEARS FATHERS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING the Hazelwood schools have been boring their children about how they (the dads) had to walk a mile to school when they were kids, and how the kids of today have it pretty soft riding the big yellow buses and walking on paved sidewalks or streets.

That isn't going to work anymore, because the *Hazelwood News* has uncovered a going-to-school tale of woe to put all others to shame.

Back in the 1920s and 1930s there was a family by the name of House living on a little island in the Missouri River, just a slough away from the St. Louis County bank. And those kids had to row to school every morning of the year. It was safe enough on the water, but once they hit the Bottoms they had to plow through gooey mud for more than a mile to hit the high ground on which the little old one-room country school was built. It was dark when they left home and dark when they got back.

Manuel Aubuchon, now of 193 Taussig road, remembers it well. "The oldest girl was named Doris. The high water often came in May, so when Doris was in the eighth grade her folks asked if she could



Garrett school in the late 1930s, after basement and central heat had been added.

spend the last three weeks of school at our house,” he said. “They didn’t want her to miss graduation, and she didn’t, either.”

Aubuchon, now 80, started attending school at Garrett in 1895, and went there for seven years. “We had a big truck farm of more than 100 acres out on the Bottom,” he said. “Just a mile due north of the school.

“My first year I was taught by Jennie Miller. Then Minnie Grote came along and taught for several years. The last year we had Edith Redline.



This photo, provided by Manuel Aubuchon, was taken about 1898. Front row, from left: John Lajeuness, Manual Laramie, Jessie Lajeuness, Dave Baker, Manuel Aubuchon, George March, and Joe Lajeuness. Second row: Pearl Teson, Ida Teson, Delia Lajeuness, Florence Lajeuness, Art Moser and Mary Moser. Back row: Alfred Laramie, Ida March, Lizzie Laramie, Oscar Reed, John Baker, Ignatius Moser, and slightly in front of him, Steve Lajeuness. Teacher is at left, Minnie Grote, who took street car from St. Charles and walked more than a mile to Garrett school from Bonfils station on Taussig road. Mrs. Ida Grace, the other lady, was a mother who happened to be visiting school the day the photographer came. Names were not written down, but recalled from memory by the 80-year-old Aubuchon. Old school is in right background, with south being toward left side of picture. In those years vestibule was outside of building. Sometime later front was extended to encompass vestibule, but walls were left inside.

“Mrs. Grote had a tough job. She lived in St. Charles and she had to take the street car into Bonfils station, more than a mile away, and walk through the fields every morning.”

Aubuchon was a member of the old Garrett school three-director board of education. He went on the board in 1925 and stayed there until he moved out of the district in the late 1940s, just prior to consolidation with the Hazelwood School District.



Hazel Botkin Osborn, a former Garrett teacher, took this picture of her Mothers Club on Picnic Day, during the depression years. This group was predecessor of present day Garrett PTA.

The old school is located at 12747 Missouri Bottom road. This is in the middle of a series of jogs which run through the Ville Maria subdivision, just west of I-270. It sits atop a steep bank high off the north side of the road, and now it is scarcely recognizable as a former school.

It was on February 4, 1950, when the Garrett school became the third to be annexed to the School District of Hazelwood, and on July 26 of that year Lillian Viehmann signed a board resolution to sell the building and acre of ground. Pontiac Investment Company evidently was low bidder, because a deed to them was recorded August 7, 1950. Five days later it was re-sold to David Paul and Jo-Ione Chappell. On July 9, 1968, it was sold to the present occupants, Mr. and Mrs. Mark T. Grimmer.

The Chappelles added a long room to the east side of the school, plus a front porch and a block foundation beneath it. The Grimmers closed in the porch and made substantial improvements to the interior.

The ground has quite a history in itself. At one time it was owned by Peter (Pierre) Chouteau. It was sold to Francis Creeley, son of a noted Florissant pioneer, in 1832. In all probability the Chouteau grant was made by the governor of Upper Louisiana when the land was under the flag of Spain.

Antoine Creeley Sr. and his wife, Felicity (neither of whom could write and it appears the recorder couldn't spell very well either) were the ones who, on May 12, 1871, deeded the ground to "Board of Education, Township 47, Range 5 East, District No. 3." This deed was re-



Every morning before classes the children would line up on front of building. Bernice Botkin DeHater, Hazel Osborn's sister, also taught at Garrett and took this picture of children around flagpole. In background is curve in Missouri Bottom road. Note great earthen embankment at left. Area in background now is Ville Maria subdivision. Photo was made in May, 1941.



It was recess at the little Garrett school in the spring of 1941. Elvus Aubuchon found his own jungle gym.



Recess for most of the boys and a few of the girls meant an inning or two of "workup."

corded October 10, 1871, and showed a payment of \$100. The land seems to have been acquired by Antoine Creeley in 1867.

"As far as I know," Aubuchon said, "this is the only Garrett school site, and this is the only building that ever stood on that site."

The Third Annual Report of Public Schools of St. Louis County, for the year ending June 30, 1904, showed that Joseph Peoria was president, J. G. Moser, a prominent Garrett area farmer, was clerk, and Fred Schroeder, who lived next door west, was a director. The teacher was Elsie Frank.

The fifth report, published two years later, indicated that a man



Sometimes Mrs. DeHater had a little extra film in her camera. In the background is one of the Garrett outhouses.



It never fails. Just when the photographer thinks he has a good one some kid makes a face.



This is the Garrett graduation class of 1939. At left is Doris House, whose home was on an island in the Missouri River between Missouri Bottom and St. Charles. They rowed a boat from home to shore and then walked about five miles to school every day. They would leave before daylight and get home after dark. Next to her is Helen Aubuchon, Manual's daughter. Then Catherine Dunn — Dunn road was named for her grandfather. The teacher is Hazel Osborn.



This is the Garrett graduating class of 1941, taken at the school picnic on the schoolhouse grounds.



A warm teacher-pupil relationship requires a special ability — one that Bernice DeHater possesses to this day.



The Botkin girls, two of the best teachers Garrett ever had. Hazel Osborn is at left, Bernice DeHater at right.



Farm children in the 1930s were subject to routine more than today's youngsters, but once in awhile something unusual happened. This cowboy and Indian act passed by one morning, promised to come back next day to do a show if each child brought 10 cents. Cowboy did rope tricks, "Indian" was a fire eater. "It was a good show," Mrs. DeHater said, "and we all enjoyed it immensely."



The old pump still is above the cistern, and it still works, too.

named William McDermott had become the teacher. The 1911 report showed Schroeder still on the board, Moser still the clerk, and Mike Revoir as director. The teacher was Grace Goddard. That year 181 pupils in St. Louis County took the graduation exams in Clayton, and Lee Goddard of the Garrett school was one of the 123 who made it.

By 1923 the district was levying a 50-cent tax, and paying the teacher \$640 for an eight-month school year. William Hallbruegge was president, Thomas Murphy clerk, and Ernest Schroeder was director. The Schroeders, Mosers and Aubuchons then stayed on the board through the years until consolidation.

Many of the area children had a little extra education, as they were brought up in homes where French or German was the domestic language and school was where they learned English. To this day many of the Garrett pioneer families are multilingual.

Mrs. Hazel Botkin Osborn, 23 Tamma lane, and her sister, Bernice Botkin DeHater, 11736 Talbott court, both taught at the old Garrett



This is Hazel Botkin Osborn in the 1930s, when she was a teacher at Garrett school.



Manuel Aubuchon, former Garrett school board member, farmed more than 100 acres of bottom land a mile north of school. He enrolled in school in 1895. His brother started there in 1875, when school was only four years old. Aubuchon still retains French accent in speech — most of families in area spoke French as domestic language, but English always was language of the schools.

school. Mrs. Osborn now teaches the pre-school for St. Francis Episcopal Church, and Mrs. DeHater has been teaching primary grades at Twillman since 1956.

Mrs. Osborn started teaching there in the fall of 1932. She succeeded Mrs. Mary Lee Hubbard. "I got married in the fall of 1935," Mrs. Osborn said. "I waited until after school started because I knew what would happen. Sure enough, I got fired that spring. They just didn't want any married teachers."

Mrs. Osborn evidently left quite an impression, because she was back on the payroll (by that time nearly \$100 a month) two years later. In the interim they had dug out a basement beneath the old building and replaced the pot belly stove that stood in the southwest corner of the room with a new central heating system. And, happy day, they installed electricity! This was in 1936 or 1937.

Then the WPA came in and poured genuine concrete foundations for the outhouses, converting them to chemical facilities. They stood (and still stand) at the bottom of the hill toward the rear of the lot, in the ex-



The outdoor toilets are still standing on back of the Garrett lot.

treme corners.

"It certainly was wonderful having that nice basement for the children on rainy days. And the electricity meant that the people who often could meet here at night no longer had to bring gas or oil lanterns from home. Just flip a switch and we would have light!" said Mrs. Osborn.

The two teachers remembered well the vestibule that stood inside the building. It was a narrow little room, much like the vestibules on other old time schools except it was built inside the front wall instead of outside. On one side was a space for coats and lunches, and the other side was a series of book shelves.

"Whoever furnished that room must have been a teacher who was just as afraid of old Dr. Russell as I was," Mrs. Osborn said. (Dr. Rufus G. Russell was the county superintendent.) "There was a long platform across the front of the room, and that is where my desk was. It was arranged perfectly. I could look out the west window on the front of the building and spot Dr. Russell as he would come in Schroeder's driveway and park. That would give me time to settle the kids down before he could get through the front door and then the vestibule door."

Bernice DeHater succeeded her sister in the little school, teaching there from 1940 to 1947. In 1947 she taught at Black Jack, and later taught five years in the Berkeley school district. She returned to the Hazelwood system in 1956, and has taught either kindergarten, first or second grade in the Twillman school ever since.

"We had a very informal way of getting a raise or a contract renewal," said Mrs. Osborn. "We would go talk to the board member we thought would be easiest. He usually would say it was all right with him if it was all right with the other two. Then we would go to the next one. I can remember going out in the field where Mr. Aubuchon was plowing with his mules and he would have my contract in the pocket of



This picture was made by Earle T. Williams in the early 1960s, long after Garrett had been sold and converted into a private home.

his bib overalls. We'd fill in the amount and sign it right then and there."

Both Mrs. Osborn and Mrs. DeHater attested to the fairness of the early boards of the old country school.

"They surely were good to the teachers," Mrs. Osborn said. "They had a janitor for us every day. He would keep the place clean and the floors oiled. He'd start the fire for me in the morning (although we had to keep it going and bank it at night.)

"It surely could get cold in those old days," she said. "One morning I came in and the fish bowl was frozen solid, fish and all. When the old potbelly finally got the room warm the ice melted and you know that fish started to swim just like nothing had happened!

"My old Model A Ford used to sit out on the hill every day and on the very cold days it was almost impossible to start. So the board built a little garage for me.

"And the kids were awfully good too," she continued. "In the spring they would go down into the woods at the back of the lot and bring back lots of mushrooms for me. Sometimes the children were entirely too good. The Bottoms people were always catching turtles from the Missouri River and cooking them. I made the mistake of telling the



This is the old Garrett school today. Flagpole is still there.

class that I had never eaten turtle before.

"The next morning Mr. Aubuchon's daughter brought me a turtle sandwich and I turned a little green. Come lunch time I told her I wasn't hungry and would eat it later. That child just hovered over me. I decided to face the music and ate the sandwich. And you know it wasn't bad at all. I know Mrs. Aubuchon had done this for me, and, in addition to being the wife of the board president, she was a stalwart in the Mothers Club. I'd eat her turtle sandwiches any day."

Both teachers agreed that the Mothers Club was a wonderful institution. They raised the money to provide a piano for the school. Each year they took over the Christmas program — using money provided by the board. In the closing days of the school year they started planning the graduation ceremony, and that was always a day to be remembered.

"The eighth grade examinations would come in sealed envelopes from Dr. Russell's office," Mrs. DeHater said. "We'd administer them in the early spring and send them back to Clayton. Soon we would learn who passed and that was a happy day. The mothers would bring flowers from their gardens and decorate the platform. There would be colorful crepe paper all over the place. And after the ceremonies, we would all go outside, where the kids would participate in games. There was all the ice cream and soda you could hold. The board would buy prizes for the winners of the games — and there were as many games for adults as there were for the children.

"You have to remember these were depression years and the people had no money for travel or entertainment. They were stuck near home whether they liked it or not. So this school picnic institution was a thing to look forward to."

There also was a hike day in the spring, and the children would pack



The little sign that was in the gable of the Garrett school now is in the barn of a neighbor. (Sign is shown in position in photo on page 130.)

their lunches and start walking west, across the bridge over the Missouri River and over to Blanchette Park in St. Charles.

Mrs. Osborn remembers the Lester family, which then owned a music store in north St. Louis (and now appears locally on television on Sunday mornings.) They would come to the school and contract for group music lessons. "At the end of the year these kids would be very, very good," she said, "and they would perform as part of the picnic program.

CHAPTER 13

THE BONFILS SCHOOL

IT'S NOW ALL OVER FOR THE OLD BONFILS school. As this is being written, in May, 1970, bulldozers are poised in the 100 block of Taussig road, ready to move onto the site and level the old derelict, which brought the lamp of knowledge to a generation of kids between the 1930s and the 1950s. Actually it was all over for old Bonfils on the 18th day of March, 1950. That was the day the people voted to merge with the School District of Hazelwood, which in itself was only three months old. The people had been told that their tax rate would go up from the \$1.25 they had been levying to about \$1.50, and since all the graduates had to go to the Pattonville high school for advanced education, it seemed like a good idea to join in the merger which would provide resources for a new high school.

Bernice Botkin DeHater, who currently teaches at the Twillman school, taught there from 1948 to 1950, and remembers campaigning for the merger.

There was school at old Bonfils for a few years after that, and finally the building was phased out as better schools were built, closer to the



Bulldozers may have done their job by the time this chapter is printed, and old Bonfils school, 151 Taussig road, will be no more.

center of population. The Hazelwood school board sold the tract, which by that time was 3.29 acres, to Robert L. and Evelyn Mareschal, 192 Taussig road. Then it went to the Wabash Railroad, now the Louisville and Nashville. Now it has been sold for a big new plant, which will go up on the site. For awhile it was used as an auction building but even this function has been terminated.

The deed records to the old tract go back to the very beginning of legal ownership, when a special grant from the Governor General of Louisiana, acting on behalf of the King of Spain, was made to Peter (Pierre) Chouteau, younger brother of the founder of St. Louis. This was made on March 3, 1797, and certified by the United States on August 21, 1808, just a few years after the Louisiana Purchase.

Pieces of the great farm, totaling 1837½ acres, were sold to John Mullanphy, Baptiste Creely, the Aubuchon family, and others who figured so prominently in the history of St. Louis and Florissant.

Through several pages of changes in the records, the land passed to George and Therese Withinton. On page 227 of book 482 of the old records stored in the basement of the St. Louis City Hall is an entry to the effect that the Withintons sold a piece of ground 105 feet square (about ¼-acre) to the Board of Education, Township 47, Range 5 East, subdistrict No. 2. The deed was notarized on May 6 of that year, and recorded October 20, 1873. The board paid \$1 cash and issued a note for \$50, to bear interest at the rate of six per cent a year until paid out. The school was named for a Dr. S. F. Bonfils.

The site had a built-in problem — it was landlocked. An arrangement was made with John Foerster, who owned the 113½-foot strip

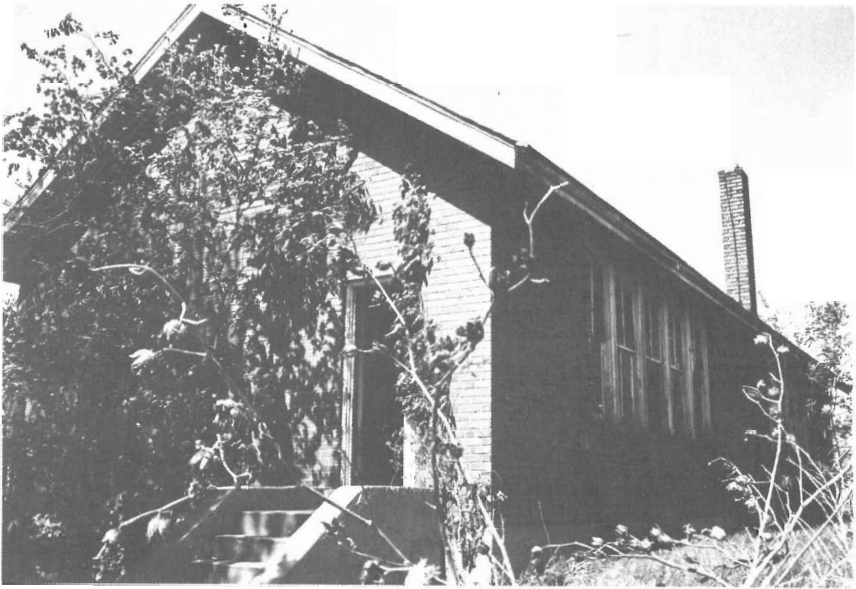


Each of the seven lights above main entrance bore letter from the name Bonfils. Now old car body decorates front yard as foliage is growing through cracks in front steps.

of ground between the school site and Taussig road, for an easement 10 feet wide.

In 1925, the record shows an additional piece of land sold by Ernest and Anna Borgmann, for \$200. This too was a quarter-acre. Three acres were added to the site by the School District of Hazelwood in 1951, through a purchase from Ben and Theodore Hagner, two brothers who owned the adjacent farm. But then the enrollment growth patterns changed, and that sealed the doom of old Bonfils.

In its day Bonfils was a lively enough place. Certainly Herman G. Kern thought so. The son of Edward Kern, who was on the old three-director board of education for nine years starting in the late 1920s, young Herman started attending the old one-room brick building in



Weeds and vines have gained the upper hand at the south entrance to old Bonfils.

1924 and finished up in 1931.

"We walked it almost every day," he said. "It was only 2½ miles and we could make it in less than an hour."

Herman remembers the old school was built on a rubble stone foundation, without a basement, faced south (the present building faces Taussig, or west), and sat down considerably lower on the site than the present structure.

"There were outdoor privies on the corners of the east edge of the lot. They always went over on Halloween, but I never was involved in it. There were more than enough out houses to keep me busy closer to home," he said.

Mrs. Irene Kern Kopadt, Herman Kern's sister, said there also was a cistern on the east end of the building, and the kids got their drinking water by cranking the old chain pump. The cistern probably still is there, but now it is obscured by knee-high grass and weeds.

Edward Kern said that as far as he knew, the brick building that was demolished to make way for the new two-room school in the summer of 1932 was the first school to be built on the site. "As long as I served on that board I can't remember anyone ever claiming that there was ever another building there," he said.

Herman Kern remembers the interior well. "There was no vesti-



A barnswallow, left arrow, circles his nest, right arrow. That's about all the activity that remains in the last days of old Bonfils school. Scars from blackboards, installed in 1932, still remain. Nest is built above line where folding wood doors divided space into two classrooms. Vestibule at left was flanked by cloakrooms. Building had no electricity until middle 1930s, and never did have inside plumbing.

bule at all," he said. "The boys hung their coats to one side of the door, the girls the other side. The main body of the room was crammed with seats — the old school always was awfully crowded. Then on the north end was the teacher's desk and, to her right, the old stove. There was just one blackboard and it was on the wall behind her. The side walls each had three large windows in them.

"My first teacher was a young girl, Miss Ruth Anselm. Some of the kids were awfully big and once in awhile they would bully her around and she'd get so frustrated at the situation that she'd break down and cry in front of the whole class. Of course we thought that was great fun.

"A bunch of the older boys would chew tobacco. Of course that was strictly against the rules, so they would have to be very careful. They would take a big chaw and after a bit something would have to give, so they would spit in the inkwell. When Miss Anselm wasn't looking they would dump them out the window. Once in awhile a paper got turned in with brown ink."

Later teachers included Miss Gertrude Mudd, who was there from the fall of 1928 until 1932. After the new building went up there were



Last school picture made at old Bonfils, taken on St. Patrick's Day, 1932. Wire gratings were placed over all windows in old one-room building to prevent glass breakage from accidentally misdirected baseballs. Picture was provided by Mrs. Irene Kern Kopadt. Front row, from left: Orville Kuhlmann, Ralph Witte, unidentified, Harold Grau, unidentified, Willis Kuhlmann, Cyril Witte and Ray Scholle. Second row: Robert Lueck, Marvin Schroeder, Gist Brewster, Robert Perry, Ray Meyer, Vernon Kuhlmann, Ralph Kuhlmann, unidentified. Third row: Shirley Jane Brewster, Adelle Kennedy, Irene Kern, unidentified, and Lucille Reichardt. Fourth row: Ruth Schroeder, Myrtle Kuhlmann, Alice Rau, Lorraine Blades, Helen Reichardt, unidentified, Lorraine Schroeder, Dorothy Schoole, and Bernice Schroeder. Top row: Laverne Hollenberg, Dorothy Blades, Clara Farley, Lorene Grau, Helen Grau, Aileen Hollenberg, Mary Ann Andrews and Mary Reichardt. The teacher is Miss Gertrude Mudd.

two teachers, Miss Marie Stevenson and Mrs. Hattie Meatte. Then there was Mrs. Elmira Reichmers, Miss Evelyn Poll and a Miss Trump.

Irene Kern, Edward's daughter, went to the old school from 1928 to 1937. She remembers the transition from the old building to the new one. "I guess that was about the biggest thrill I had in my life — the day school started with the new building. I was in the fourth grade as I recall."

"We had quite a time with the new building," Edward Kern said. "Contractors were desperate for work then, because of the depression, and the low bid came in at \$4,500, and believe me that was low even for



The next fall the kids came to a brand new building. This shot was made on September 8, 1932. First row, from left: Elroy Witte, unidentified, Kenneth Grau, Ralph Witte, Orville Kuhlmann, Raymond Scholle, Kenneth Grunwald, Clinton Dalhoff, Willard Farley, Jack Row and Vernon Branneky. Second row: Betty Krechel, Irene Kern, Adelle Kennedy, Doris Hollenberg, Shirley Jane Brewster, Lydia Farley, Bernice Schroeder, Myrtle Kuhlmann, Ruth Schroeder, Alice Row, Helen Reichardt, Dorothy Scholle, Lorraine Schroeder, unidentified. Third row: Lorraine Blades, Doris Hollenberg, Mary Reichardt, Miss Gertrude Mudd, Lorene Grau, Miss Marie Stevenson, Dorothy Blades, Bernice Lajeuness and Loretta Farley. Fourth row: Clark Smith, Robert Peoria, Ralph Kuhlmann, Vernon Kuhlmann, Marvin Schroeder, Harold Kuhlmann, Robert Lueck, unidentified. Fifth row: Harold Grau, Leslie Nolkemper, Carl Feuchter, Gist Brewster, Walter Hahn, Willis Kuhlmann, Elmer Farley and Cyril Witte.

1932. The 'winner' was a man from St. Louis, but he couldn't have helped losing heavily with a contract like that. He finally skipped owing some \$150 worth of bills. We went in to Oakland avenue to try to find him but he never was around. We had to make it good."

They all remembered the old street car line which ran from the Wellston loop all the way out to St. Charles. It paralleled the Rock Road most of the way and at Taussig road it went right over the location of the present Rock Road. A bridge carried Taussig over the tracks and there was a little three-sided waiting room beside the tracks.



Edward Kern, center, now 83, spent nine years on old Bonfils school board. His home was on site of Lutheran church, Gist road at I-270. At left is his son, Herman G. Kern, with whom he lives at 2113 Lackland road, Overland. At right is his daughter, Irene, now Mrs. Howard Kopadt, 1434 Craig road, Creve Coeur. Both attended Bonfils school.

Other old timers remember the action at the little Bonfils station settlement — one in particular being Manual Aubuchon. Manual served for years on the old Garrett school board, but now lives just four houses south of the old Bonfils school.

“If you went straight out the drive of the Bonfils school,” Aubuchon said, “you would cross new Taussig and get onto old Taussig. Old Taussig then turns back north to meet the new road under the Wabash (now L&N) underpass. If you kept going straight a few yards past that turn you would hit the old right of way. The Bonfils station was on the south side, along with a store and post office. On the north was a blacksmith shop. There is a huge well there, where the steam engines used to pump up water for their boilers.” Aubuchon has a memory that would shame that of a man half his 80 years.

The third public school report of St. Louis County, covering the 1903-04 school year, shows that Peter Stein was president of the board, William Branneky was clerk, and Henry Pilgrim director. Branneky was the father of Herbert Branneky, who served on the Bonfils board of education for many years, along with Kern. Elsie Frank was listed as the teacher then, and three years later she had been replaced by

William McDermott. That year, in 1907, Bonfils had a graduate — an Ethyl Gist. The 1911 report shows Joseph Kuhlmann as board president, William Branneky as clerk, and George Boenker, director. Flora J. Lee was listed as the teacher that year.

And now there is a deadness about old Bonfils. Standing on the front step today one can't see the progress. The decay is visible enough. Looking out over the old Bonfils Station settlement one can see rusting automobile bodies and great loads of trash. And as far as the eye can see, rich alluvium of the Missouri bottom, spotted here and there with cottonwoods. (Back in the later 1700s Bridgeton was called "Marais de Lairds," or marsh of the cottonwoods, by the pioneer French settlers.)

The seven lights above the front entrance — each carried a letter of the name "Bonfils" at one time — are broken now. Great weeds flourish in the cracks of the steps, and an old car rusts in the front yard. The little roof over the basement stairs is open now and rain smells permeate the basement. Snakes lurk in the tall grasses to the back. A nest of barnswallows is on the soffit which carries the track for the wood door panels that once divided the area into two rooms full of lively children.

Daubs of dried mastic mark the areas once covered with blackboards. And down in the weeds, by the door in the south end of the building, a doll rests, decapitated, in the mud. It's all over now for old Bonfils. It's all over for the whole era. Today, it's a brand new ball game.



Broken doll from a bygone age is imbedded in side yard at old Bonfils. School has been out of service since early 1950s.

Epilogue

THAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE HAZELWOOD School District; or at least the history up to the early 1950s, when the 13 little rural schools banded together to form what was to become the largest suburban district in Missouri and the third largest of all the state's systems, behind only the City of St. Louis and Kansas City.

Were they the good old days? Some might think so and most do not. The physical discomforts were considerable. The old buildings were improperly heated and dangerous. Sanitary conditions often were shocking. There was no public transportation and many children had to bundle up like Eskimos to make the trek of up to three miles every morning.

And what about the education — was it really better than that given to the children today? Any question like that must be answered relative to the times. Surely those eighth graders of 1910 would be hopelessly lost in the new math. They would bomb on a unit on aerodynamics. That's not because the kids of today are any smarter, but because of the enormous strides taken by the world in the past half-century — and also the great advances in the art of teaching school.

The boys and girls of today, on the other hand, are not nearly as wise to the ways of the world as those who went to the old country

schools. The farm kids of a couple of generations ago had to have a high mechanical aptitude — they were raised with machinery and the practical arts. The boy who couldn't plow a straight furrow for 100 rods was an object of derision. They had enough sense to stay on their feet in the pig lot and to keep a tight "holt" on the slop bucket when feeding the spookly new calf.

No question but what the life of 1910 was a good life in many respects — certainly it was a more wholesome life. But it was a tough life for a teacher trying to make ends meet. The pay was lousy, even for then, and the teacher had a tough time getting a raise. The kids were somewhat more respectful (although not nearly as respectful as they now claim they were.) There were a few bad apples then just as there are now.

So, after all is said and done, what have we learned from this study? Have we really abandoned all the virtues of another age, only to find our children being de-educated by a system that is neither understood nor effective? No, that isn't true at all. Some of the callouses have gone. Nobody is going to walk three miles to school when a nice warm bus stops a half-block away. Maybe we've allowed the kids to get a little flabby, but they surely aren't flabby upstairs. The Hazelwood system now is one of the finest in the nation. We're among the lowest in spending per pupil in the entire St. Louis County, and yet we have one of the highest percentages of kids who go on to college, and also of those who actually complete college.

We have kids that leave school and go right into apprentice programs with the labor unions — boys who already know how to weld, how to build a house, how to wire a panel box. We turn out girls that can cook quite well, who can sew a complete wardrobe, who can type 80 words a minute and take shorthand at 100. We have kids that made more money in their senior year selling shoes half days than their grandfathers made off the entire cabbage crop in 1925.

So when we talk about the good old days, let's recognize that those old days were good only in relationship to their times. They would be bad old days indeed today. Sure the kids of 1910 who held eighth grade diplomas could go out into the world and complete favorably, and there are plenty of old timers still in this school district who are living proof of this.

But the Hazelwood High School seniors of today probably are even better equipped to compete with their peers than were the eighth graders of a half-century ago. There were no records to prove that the eighth graders from our revered little schools of 1910 were better than any other eighth graders in the state. There are pounds of records to

prove our Hazelwood High grads are performing markedly better than graduates of other high schools across the nation.

The people of this school district do owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneers who started public education in the North County. And they should take off their hats to those farsighted farmers who could see the great advantages of consolidating with the other rural schools, rather than being gobbled up by other school districts with less attractive programs or tax bases.

Much of the heritage of the hardy pioneer stock is reflected in the kids of today, and that is of greatest importance. The people of this district have remarked time and again how wonderful it is that our schools have been relatively free from the lawlessness that has hit the more affluent districts. Why? Some feel it is because Hazelwood kids come from working parents, and consequently they know the value of the dollar and of public property. Some feel that children who have to work to contribute to their family's well-being are going to be more respectful of authority too.

True or not, they are good kids. They were good kids in 1892 and 1912 and 1938 and 1955. That hasn't changed much. They were, and they still are, our most priceless asset.

