

History of Vienna Township No. 5 School

December 20, 1934

Dedication

To those who have homes in Vienna Township now, and to those who in the past, have lived here and helped to make this community a training ground to prepare for the home above, this is lovingly dedicated by

The author

Reuben E. Zink

Forward

In gathering the needed information for the history of Vienna Center school I find it quite necessary to include a little more territory than the present boundaries of No. 5 district.

The information that I have been able to gather so far dates back to 1862, at which time the first three schoolhouses in Vienna township were built, including the Center schoolhouse. All things must have a starting place, so I will try to touch on some of the more important events dating from that time to the present, and would like to give the credit to a few of our old settlers, who saw some real pioneer life in this community, and who were so willing to give the needed information as they remember it.

First, I would like to mention a few of the contributors who have made this history possible.

Mr. Phil Russie, known as Uncle Phil around here, started to this school in 1867, which at that time was located three-quarters of a mile west of it's present location, or on the farm now occupied by James Stackhouse. Mr. Russie has lived his entire life in this district, now residing one-half mile east of the schoolhouse. He has a very unique record inasmuch as he spent his entire school days at this school, his children, four in number, did likewise, and also two grandson's, who have finished their eighth grade here, and now are attending high school at Green Mountain.

Next is Geo. F. Zink who started to this school in 1869-70, his first school. Later his five children all completed their grade schooling at No. 5 and now five grandchildren of his, children of Mr. and Mrs. Reuben E. Zink, have completed their grade schooling here. I would like to mention at this time that Mrs. Zink completed her grade schooling here and also her father, the late John M. Nickerson, also attended this school in the early '80's.

Next is Mr. Arthur Hill of Green Mountain, who started his educational career at this school in 1875, and spent his entire grade school days here. His children and grandchildren also attended this school, and some completing grade schooling at this place.

Mr. Chas. Nickerson has also contributed some valuable information. He attended this school in 1880 and has spent practically his entire life since then in this community, now residing just across the road from the schoolhouse.

Mrs. Lottie Simpson Brown, or better known as Mrs. Myron Brown, who has lived since her childhood, the early sixties, in this vicinity, and at present is living on the old Simpson homestead, the place of her birth, one mile west of No. 5 Schoolhouse.

"Aunt" Belle Irvine and Allie Irvine Crystal have added a great deal to this narration, adding a bit of humor on different occasions. Aunt Belle has a distinction, I doubt can be equaled in this state, as she taught this school in 1871 and '72, later teaching in every one of the nine school districts in Vienna township except number one, teaching in all, 15 years in one township and 18 years in all, and in her own words "Still going strong".

Aunt Allie taught part of the year 1870 substituting for her older sister, Mary. They tell many interesting and thrilling instances. Aunt Allie tells of the difficulties in walking to and from her school, about 3 miles. She had several sloughs and creeks to cross, so she would take off her shoes and stockings till getting in sight of the schoolhouse then putting them on so the scholars wouldn't see her bare feet.

Until 1862, no school of any kind was located in Vienna township. The closest school being in Albion. One of the pioneer families by the name of Simpson living just west of the center of the township had a daughter, Helen, (Now a Mrs. Ed Smith of Chicago) who reached the age of 12 years before she had an opportunity to attend a school and then had to go ten miles

to Albion, to a school which was known as the Albion Seminary. After attending this school about one year, there were three schoolhouses built thru the center of Vienna township east and west. At that time this township had one extra mile on its west line which made it 7 miles east and west and extended to highway No. 14 or what was known as the north third avenue road. The center schoolhouse was therefore located about three-quarters mile west of the present center of the township and accomodated a territory about 3 miles east and west and 7 miles north and south.

At this country schoolhouse is where the above taught school or sought their education.

For a number of years during the '70's a post office was maintained one-half mile north of Vienna Center, (more recently known as the John Nickerson farm), with Alec Weatherly as Postmaster. Mr. Solon Beaman hauled the mail with a buck-board once a week from Marshalltown. His route continued on to Grundy Center and Buck Grove.

I will not attempt to give a complete list of the scholars who attended the first year of school as the only information available at present, is of Helen Simpson above mentioned, the late Jennie Hunsdon Wilson, and probably the late Tommy Simpson.

Of the scholars a few years later or from 1867 to '70 we have a little better record as we still have at least six living who attended at that time. They are; Mr. Phil Russie, mentioned above; Mr. John Bowles of Nevada, Iowa; Mrs. Lottie Simpson Brown; Geo. F. Zink, Marshalltown; Oliver Russie, Green Mountain and Joe Grombie, who is now in the Odd Fellows home at Mason City.

A little later from '70 to '80 we have with us some old timers as follows; Mr. Arthur Hill, who started to school in 1875, and now living in Green Mountain, and C. E. Nickerson, who lives across from the present No. 5 school. Some of the earlier teachers prior to 1872 were Hattie Simmons, Maggie and Lydia Hanna, Mary, Belle and Allie Irvine. It was in the '70's that the residents of the east two-thirds of the district were not satisfied with their school so far from the rightfull location, as it worked a hardship on the majority, as against a benefit for a few, so the matter came up as an issue at the spring election, 1875; With the result that when the new board reorganized, the personal was as follows: Edward Dowler, President, Daniel Russie and E. N. Hill, the other two directors. The new board immediately proceeded to carry out the wishes of those who had elected them, with the result that the building was in place at its present location in time for two months school before harvest.

The work of moving the schoolhouse was not accomplished without strong opposition, and entailed an immense amount of hard work, and sacrifice; but perseverance and justice won. The building site was leased from Alem Gray, for 99 years, or so long as used for school purposes, and is still used as such.

The first teacher at the new location was Mrs. Frost, teaching two months in the spring and two in the fall.

Late in the fall it began to look like "no school" for the winter, as no teacher had applied, and none in sight. Teachers were not as plentiful then as at the present time; so two members of the board, Russie and Hill, made a trip to Marshalltown on horseback, as that was the only way to go on account of mud;

and at the county Superintendents office they found a young man from Missouri, by the name of Silas Dinsmore, looking for a job of teaching school. They hired him and he taught this school that winter, three months, 1875-76. During the winter Mr. Dinsmore gave a demonstration of the telephone, which was a new thing, just invented by Alexander Graham Bell, by using two tin cans, similar to present day tomato cans with both ends cut out and one end covered with a stiff paper, and the two connected by a hard twisted thread. With one person in the house, another about seventy five or more feet distant, a conversation could be carried on. Little did any one then think that they would see the time when one could talk, and be understood across a Continent, but that and much more has been accomplished, and in less than sixty years time.

Among the teachers following those mentioned and I believe the first, was Miss Susan Smith, a sister of the late Mrs. Adam Jackson, who came from New York, to make her home with her sister, who has a record of over 50 years teaching.

It was during the winter term of 1877-78 that the pupils had their first experience with a written examination; school life was not all roses, even then, but they all survived. Miss Smith was a very conscientious teacher, and she made a mistake that so many teachers do, mildly correcting a boy, "who well deserved it", but belonged to a family who "spared the rod" and let the other scholars suffer.

The result of the trouble that this family made for the teacher was that the board hired her for the next full year, three months in spring and four in winter, and this proved to be as popular a school as sympathy and effort could well make. The parents saw to it that their children understood what they attended school for, and that it was co-operation that counted. After other schools had closed about March first, a number came from outside, the enrollment increased to forty.

Other teachers who served No. 5 that we remember are; Dora Burchard, Nellie Thorpe, John Reed, Lottie Miner, James Simmons, Alice Lincoln, and in 1894 and '95 Miss Emma Smith from Conrad. Shewas then married to Walter (Watt) Lee and they are now living in California. Another teacher of the nineties was Hetty Hauser from Albion and is now Mrs. Furland who lives on a farm in Grundy county.

As to wages, these teachers received from twenty-five to thirty-three and one third dollars per month of twenty days school with the privilege of doing their own janitor work, and paid two and one half to three dollars per week for board.

In 1882 a new school house was built, which with an addition and some other improvements is the present No. 5 school house. It was at this time that Vienna township was organized into independent school districts. No. 5 school house being built by two local carpenters, Wash Sylvas and Henry Russie, an Uncle of Phil Russie.

From that time till the present day No. 5 has been an old land mark and the center of numerous activities. Regular religious services were conducted from 1888 until about the advent of the horseless carriage, which offered a faster mode of transportation and an opportunity of attending a church of the denomination they chose. Until that time little was thought of or said as to denomination, as ministers from Beaman, Green Mountain and Gladbrook conducted services, usually in the afternoon as they had their

own charges to serve in the morning. If the minister came from Beaman, it would be Methodist, if from Green Mountain, Congregational and from Gladbrook, United Brethren. The Dunkards also held services at No. 5, the late Rev. Frank Wheeler preaching. Besides preaching services, Sunday school was held in the morning and Christian Endeavor in the evening. Sunday school conventions were held here annually from that time for something like 25 years, after which they were held at the Chapel Church or neighborhood. Also several revival meetings were held, singing schools etc.

Literary programs were held through the winter months for a number of years, which always drew a packed house. They had very good programs, including debates, readings and last but not least, music. I don't believe any community can boast of more talent and ability in the line of music than No. 5 has had.

Teachers meetings in which nearly everyone took part were also held at this school house, and these probably could be truthfully called the true parent of the present Parent Teachers Association.

Several organizations held their regular meetings here, namely the W.C.T.U., who conducted contests in speaking and gave medals, silver, and next gold for the best readers. That is, a silver contest would be held, the winner of this would then be entitled to enter a contest for a gold medal, the losers could enter another silver contest. The National Grange also had a post here with quite a large membership.

In 1920 when the Farm Bureau made their national drive for members, Vienna township was the banner township in membership and their regular monthly meetings have practically all been held since that time at this school house.

The latest of the organizations to date is the Parent Teachers Association which was organized in October 1929, with Mrs. Chas Hill the first president. It is at present a member of the National Congress of Parent of Teachers, and the County Council of Parent and Teachers. The association was made standard in 1930, and has a charter from the Iowa Congress of Parents and Teachers.

A great many of the scholars from No. 5 have gone on to seek higher education and have become successful teachers. Others have gone into other lines of work. Right here I would like to mention one of distinction. In the fall of 1894 a small boy came into this community. We might well call him an orphan. He attended this school intermittently until about 1900, during which time he had to work for his board, room and a small wage. At this time through his previous perseverance and hard work he was able to pass a teachers examination, after which he applied for the same school (No. 5) that he had previously attended. The directors feeling that he was a well qualified man, hired him, and he taught the school satisfactorily for two terms. He taught other schools in the township and later made his way through Iowa State Teachers College, at which time he had broken down in health and had to spend a long period of rest at the State Sanatorium at Oakdale. With the same determination he fought himself back to health and is now known as Prof. Fred D. Cram of the Iowa State Teachers College.

Contrasting to this record we have another small boy of financially poor parents, but nevertheless with an ambition, who spent most of his school days at No. 5. While still in his teens, and a few years before the World War I, he learned the art of flying at a school in Minneapolis. When the United States entered the World War he immediately enlisted his services to Uncle

Sam. To his great disappointment, instead of being sent to the front linewhere he expected to see plenty of action, he was kept on this side of the ocean to teach flying to new aviators, which he did until some timeafter the close of the war. He was then transferred to the mail service, blazing new air lines and carrying mail, at which he is still engaged. The last record I've seen published about him runs something like this, "E. Hamilton Lee has flown over 2,000,000 miles and without any serious smashup." He is now flying the mail and carrying passengers from Omaha to Cheyenne.

I can hardly bring this history to a close without relating a few of the many interesting episodes as given me personally by a few of the pioneers.

Mr. Phil Russie tells of the extremely cold winters he witnessed in the '60's and '70's when their house consisted of merely a frame work covered with one-half inch lapsiding. At night they would lie awake and listen to the water pail freezing with its snapping and cracking sounds, and in the morning his father would get up, start a fire and then proceed to cut the bread for breakfast. This he did by using the ax to chop off the slices and put them in the oven to thaw out.

Mr. Russie also told of going to Tama City about 30 miles for a new walking plow, which at that time, were being manufactured there. When asked the price of a plow in those days, he answered, "one dollar an inch," which meant a sixteen inch plow would cost \$16.00/

Geo. F. Zink tells of his early school days, and of at least one occasion, the teacher and pupils went out back of the school house some distance and set the prairie on fire, which he now says was a very dangerous thing to do. After it had burned over several acres they all went out and gathered prairie chicken eggs. These were divided up and taken home. The next day they all had hard boiled prairie chicken eggs for dinner at school.

Aunt Belle Irvine tells of Charley Nickerson coming to school when he was in the second reader and in her own words, "He was as near a perfect boy as a little boy could be." He still possesses a prize, a little book he received from her for his good behavior and perfect attendance.

Our school days are soon passed and we have acquired more or less the fundamentals of education, but what we learn to do and to be, from then on, is what really counts, and also shows what is in us.

Compiled by R.E. Zink

POSTSCRIPT

Mabel Jean Thomas was the last teacher of our school. She taught in the fall of 1939 and the spring of 1940 with only five pupils attending. In the fall of 1940, the little school was not reopened. George Holl entering 8th grade, Leona Holl entering 4th grade and Myrta Niedermann entering 7th grade, attended school at Beaman, while Jeanne Keefer entering 8th, and Marilyn Keefer entering 6th, attended school at Conrad. It was a shame to see such a fine country school close, with its dandy little stage that still could be set up and some fine other equipment surpassing the usual items of most country schools; but progress must be met and accepted. The school building was sold in the fall of 1940 to Graham Rolston who moved it to the town of Green Mountain where it was remodeled and is now being lived in.