

. . . for more than 100 YEARS

by Ruby Jennings



An Address delivered by Ruby Jennings
at a meeting of the Greater Lansing
Historical Society.

May, 1966

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My heartfelt thanks to the COMMUNITY SCHOOL
P. T. A. , the Centennial Committees, and especially
to Mrs. Walter Seward who compiled the scrapbook
from which most of this information is taken.

Ruby Jennings

Sunday, February 20, 1966, dawned cold, crisp and clear. Too cold almost to think of going from a warm house, to a warm car, to a warm school to attend the dedication of Post Oak School -- the new school that was replacing COMMUNITY -- COMMUNITY, soon to be razed for a modern super highway. There had been a school on the COMMUNITY site for more than 100 years. Part of District #5, Lansing Township, had been annexed to the city schools three years previously and the district dissolved, but the school itself had been in continued use.

Let us go back then to the day, April 22, 1860, when Jacob Wheeler of the Township of Newstead in the County of Erie in the State of New York leased to School District #5 in the Township of Lansing and County of Ingham and the State of Michigan the following parcel of land:

"Six rods square from the center of the road out of the North east corner of the South Sixty acres of the West half of the North east corner of the South Sixty acres of the West half of the South East quarter in section Two to Four North of Range Two West on the south side of Pine Lake Road with all the privileges and appurtenances the reunto belonging And to Hold the same for and during the term of fifty years if occupied for a school but for no other purpose".

For this tract of land School Dist. #5 agreed to pay the sum of Eight Dollars for the whole time and the State of Michigan agreed to move the fence and keep the same in good repair.

Even before this agreement was signed there had been a log cabin school in District #5. The School Inspection Report of 1859 states, "District #5 schoolhouse burnt a few days before the expiration of a 3 months school. Teacher was paid for a full 3 months term". William P. Scammon, Director, and Eldridge Thornberry, Moderator, reported that twenty-one children attended this school.

In 1860 sixteen children attended. They were taught by Miss Sarentha Nichols who worked for two and one-fifth months for \$1.50 a week plus room and board.

In 1861 school was in session for six months: taught three months by a qualified teacher and three months by an unqualified one. Their total salary was \$45.50 plus board and room. The schoolhouse was valued at \$183.00 and

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31 children between five and twenty attended school. Commenting on the Township schools in 1862, William Scammon, Director said, "The majority of the school houses in this township are large enough for the attendance of the children that attend the school. And possibly comfortable. There is no school apparatus in the Districts in our Township. Outline maps only in one school district. Libraries are quite limited in the number of books, but think there is more read than when in the township library. The condition and progress of the Schools are very good. Good order prevails in all. Morale good. The pupils attendance very regular. General behavior good." By 1864, attendance had dwindled to seven children attending for three months. The value of the schoolhouse and lot was listed at \$175.00.

At the annual meeting in 1865 it was voted "to raise a tax of \$2.60 for repairs for the schoolhouse." Henry Baumgas was chosen librarian for one year. This year 17 children attended school for a period of three months. The teacher was paid \$28.00. The following year, \$44.05 was levied to pay for books and other contingent expenses. The 1866 and 1867 salary was recorded as, "Teacher paid, \$26.00; Teacher board, \$36.00."

The year 1867 and 1868 marked the first continuity of teachers. Mary E. Swift, who started teaching at fifteen years of age and for a salary of \$26.00, stayed on through 1868 for a salary of \$39.00.

In 1869, twenty-one children between the age of five and twenty years were shown on the census. Only six attended school which for this year consisted of a summer and winter term. Construction was also started on the first school at the COMMUNITY SCHOOL location. It was a one room structure with a big pole in the center of the room, which the boys climbed. Heat was provided by a pot-bellied stove. Children sat on hand-made double seats with straight backs. In this same year, each of the families set out a tree on the school grounds. They also voted to raise, by tax, the expenses for two "necessary" buildings. These buildings were to be "four by six feet in size, stungled with pine, with good batten doors, and hung with bolts and screws, Seats were to be planed and latches were to be put on the doors." The building was to be white-washed inside and out. Families sending children to the new school were required not only to pay their share of taxes but also to furnish one-half cord of wood per child, "birch or maple, twenty inches wide, sawed

and fitted for the stove. " Apparently this did not work too well for in 1871 wood for the stove was purchased by the District. The value of the new school was set at \$350.

By 1877 the original seats in the school were beginning to wear out and authorization was given to purchase one dozen new seats and benches " provided they can be bought for no more than fifty cents each. "

All the Directors Reports for this decade indicate the difficulty of raising even enough money for bare necessities. At one time, the directors had to raise an extra \$3.00 to pay a teacher for a deficiency in public money. Another special tax was necessary to buy books for the record book from which much of this information was taken.

The next ten years witnessed a constantly changing staff and demands on the Directors from both parents and teachers. In 1891 there was a motion at a Director's Meeting to compel the teachers to remain at school during the noon hour. The motion was defeated. A vote to raise \$20.00 for two " necessary " buildings passed -- by this time, the original " necessary " buildings were more than twenty years old. Screens for the windows were purchased at a cost of \$20.00.

By 1892 there was a need for a new school. At a special meeting of the board, a committee was formed to make arrangements for a new school. It was voted to continue at the same site with the " new school to be brick veneer, cost not to exceed \$600.00 exclusive of furniture. " The school was built and for a period of time was known as Moore School.

The following statement of school district monies again illustrates the narrow margin of funds around which the district was functioning:

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Lansing Jan. 13-1898

J. G. Baumgras,

Director School Dist-No 5: L & Dtt

Dear Sir:

The following is a statement of School
Money belonging to your School Dist.

		\$
Mar. 30-1897	Bal. on hand.	76.75
May 25-1897	Primary Money	32.23 19.34
May 25-1897	Dog Tax	11.88
June 26-1897	Library Money	2.86
Dec. 1-1897	Mill Tax	61.72
	Voted Tax } S	217.87
	Mill } Dtt.	3.40
	Voted }	12.00

Respectfully

E. J. Collins, Clerk

The decade of the 1890's continued the high turnover rate of teachers and saw the retirement of J. G. Baumgras from the board.

Records from 1904 tell of paying "\$5.00 per year for water from Mr. Gibbs, who lived across road from school. The board voted to have the school-house mopped every two weeks, and to abolish swings and teeters from the school grounds." A concise statement suffices to tell of the popularity of this move, the 1905 board "voted to put swings back on play grounds at school."

Contract issued in 1910 between Ethel Andrews and the District Board shows a definite improvement in salary. It is as follows:

It is Hereby Contracted and Agreed Between the District Board of School District No. 5, in the Township of Lansing & Dewitt, County of Ingham and in said Township, that the said Ethel Andrews, shall teach the school of said district for the term of four months, commencing on the 6 day of September 1910, and the said Ethel Andrews agrees to faithfully keep a correct list of the pupils, grading and the age of each attending school, and the number of days each pupil is present, the aggregate attendance, average daily attendance and percentage of attendance, and to furnish the director with a correct copy of the same at the close of the school and to observe and enforce the rules and regulations established by the District Board.

The said district Board, in behalf of said district, agrees to keep the schoolhouse in good repair, to provide the necessary fuel to keep the schoolhouse in comfortable condition, and to pay said Ethel Andrews for the said services as teacher, to be faithfully and truly rendered and performed, the sum of Thirty Five -- 0/100 Dollars per month, the same being the amount of wages above agreed upon to be paid on or before the 24th day of December, 1910: Provided that in case said Ethel Andrews shall be dismissed from school by the District Board for gross immorality or violation of this contract, or shall permit her certificate of qualification to expire, or shall have said certificate annulled or suspended by the county board of school examiners or other lawful authority, she shall not be entitled to any compensation from and after such annulment, suspension, or dismissal.

This contract was dated August 20, 1910 and signed by Frank Smedley, Director, C. G. Valentine, Assessor, and Ethel Andrews, teacher.

During the school year 1910-1911, eighteen out of the 26 shown on census pupils attended school. The year also marked the beginning of a controversy that was to continue for the next 50 years; i. e. whether to retain the school or send children into the city. The decision in 1911 was to continue operating the school.

In her Annual Statistical Report for the year ending 1911, Ethel Andrews stated that she taught nine months for \$315. She also reported that the school had a dictionary, a globe, maps, and "other supplies required by law." Text-books were: Milne's arithmetic, Ostrander's civil government, Frye's geography, Overton's physiology, Baldwin's readers, Montgomery's U.S. History and a grammar called Steps in English. At this time the library consisted of 30 books, the value of school was listed at \$800, the District had no indebtedness and was operating on a budget of \$660.45.

The population of the District grew so that by 1917, fifty students were enrolled. An addition was made to the heating plant, chemical toilets were added and the name was changed to COMMUNITY SCHOOL. The improvements increased the cost of insurance \$1.50 per year. An item of \$26.25 paid the Lansing Board of Education for tuition and six school seats indicates that some of the older students were being sent into the city for school.

By 1923 the format of the annual report had changed, and a new interest in the teacher and her problems was shown. Of the 42 pupils enrolled, the average attendance was 36. In answer to the question "are you troubled with truancy?" Doryce Holmes answered, "Yes." She was asked if she was complying with course of study, had a planned study and recitation program, observed all Legal Holidays, made a study of Reading Circle Books, was a member of the Teacher Association, and what educational papers she read. (Miss Holmes read the Literary Digest.) The library had grown to 156 books, Overton's physiology and Baldwin's readers were still in use, and the salary had been increased to \$110 per month for the nine month school year.

The size of the school was doubled in 1932 and the yard fenced in 1935. Early in December, 1937, the following notice was sent to all electors in the district:

There will be a school meeting held at the SCHOOL HOUSE of School District No. 5 frl., Lansing Township at 8:00 o'clock P.M. on December 7, 1937.

The Purpose of this meeting is to find a solution of the present crowded condition in your school, the last report of which showed an enrollment of 51 pupils. Your school board desires to consult and advise with you regarding the following solutions:

1. Send the sixth or the fifth and sixth grades to some other school.

2. Have two or three of the lower grades attend school only one-half day, each day.
3. Put another teacher in the basement, which is damp, poorly ventilated and lighted.
4. Start school earlier in the morning and have the lower grades attend in the forenoon and the upper grades in the afternoon.

The above are some of the solutions offered. The building of an addition or a new building and the enlargement of the school site will also be discussed.

The school board feel that our school problem is one that every school elector is and should be interested in and that there should be a free and full discussion. They desire that every one should be present and express himself or herself.

Commissioner Searl and perhaps other school officials will be present to answer such questions as may be asked.

Signed:

Harriett Baumgras
Director
D. A. Mote
Moderator
Nelson Farr
Treasurer

This meeting resulted in a decision to build a new addition consisting of one large room, a small library, 2 chemical toilets, a basement and a new stoker furnace. Reports to the Works Progress Administration Nov. 2, 1938 show expenditures (other than payroll) of \$4,747.55, and payroll, \$894.50. With a steady increase in population, a kindergarten, sixth grade room, office, toilet rooms, and large hallway were added in 1950. In 1958 an additional classroom was added.

In 1939, the Community School P. T. A. was formed. Its programs and activities give, as did the old Annual Reports, a good picture of ever recurring problems. This group concerned itself with such supplies as bulletin boards, book cases, a piano, library drapes, plants, pictures, rhythm band instruments, record players, coffee percolator, electric stove, etc. A hot lunch program came under consideration in 1944. Equipment and dishes were purchased in 1946 and the program was continued with the support of parents until 1950.

In the late 1950's annexation was again being considered with speakers from both Lansing and East Lansing giving their views. In the midst of the controversy, COMMUNITY SCHOOL hosted a centennial celebration for "School District No. 5." The December 3, 1960, program included the operation of a

country store, a barber shop quartet, a punch and judy show spoofing centennials, a pantomime, " Mr. Custer, " and recognition of three generation COMMUNITY SCHOOL families: Mr. Julius Baumgras, Mrs. Cecelia Blake, and Chan Blake: Mrs. Cecelia Walter, Mr. Nelson Walter, Bruce and Lee Walter: Mr. Don Carpenter, Mrs. Salley Bennett, and Cindy Bennett. The remainder of the evening was spent in remeniscing. Of particular delight to the people was the following letter sent from the Wests, decendents of one of the original settlers.

The old frame schoolhouse was new when father was about six years old and his mother sent him to school in the spring. His teacher was Harriet Jones who was the first white female child born in Lansing township. Her folks were the first settlers in the north end of L. township. Her father was Coe Jones who owned the land Jones Lake was on.

Father thought they only had six months school in those days, three in summer & three in winter. Later they had just summer school for three years. Miss Lottie Camp (1866) taught one term and then Mary Swift taught two terms. (1872). She later became Mrs. Wilson Moore. Afterwards Mary Marsh & Mrs. Kennett each taught a winter term.

Some of fathers schoolmates were Wm. E. Taylor, Wallace M. Hilbert & Mattie Moore who later was Mrs. Martha Tooker.

Father remembered one summer day at school (of) seeing a cloud of dust down the road. The teacher locked the doors & made the children keep back from the windows but they could see the squaws leading the ponies that were drawing the poles that were loaded with blankets, tents & kettles. Later Miss Jones took them to their camp which was on the land back of Mrs. Baileys house (on Lake Lansing Road, between the school and Wood St.)

For several years small bunches of the Pottowatomi tribe strayed from the rexervation at Athens encamped on the cold Spring lot making maple sugar. This sold readily in Lansing to merchants who shipped it east.

The Cold Spring lot was on the farm cleared & owned by John Melvin.

The Wests
(Anna, Alice, Grace and Robert)

Of the 225 families in the district, 250 persons attended the celebration.

With the centennial scarcely over, residents found themselves asking, "Where, oh, where will our seventh graders go?" Early in May, 1961, the joint boards of education of Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties approved COMMUNITY's request for the transfer of part of their district to Lansing. Residents of the area voted 63 to 3 in favor of it. The Lansing Board vigorously opposed the transfer on the grounds that it by-passed a Board policy

requiring political merger before school mergers and because of the added costs it would place on the school system. An appeal was filed with the State Board to prevent this forced merger and a special hearing held. On July 26 the State Board of Education announced a decision upholding the action of the joint Boards of Education. A special meeting of the Lansing Board of Education was called and officials instructed their attorney to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court to set aside the ruling. This action, taken July 31, 1961, delayed the transfer of COMMUNITY SCHOOL to the Lansing system.

In spite of two boards of education, meetings, legal opinions and switching members on a combined Board, school opened September 8 for the 1961-2 school year with seventh graders going to East Lansing Junior High.

The district being transferred to Lansing was the area west of Coolidge Road. It had an estimated equalized value of \$185,000, one school building, and 119 students.

One year later, September 11, 1962, the Supreme Court handed down a precedent-setting decision forcing the Lansing School System to accept the fore-mentioned Community District. In handing down this decision, Justice Thomas Kavanagh wrote:

"Control of our public school system is a state matter delegated and lodged in the state legislature by the constitution.

Unlike the delegation of other powers by the legislature to local government, education is not inherently a part of the local self government of a municipality except insofar as the legislature may choose to make it such. "

In addition Lansing was ordered to pay the unattached remainder of the District \$29,471 for school facilities in the attached area. The Lansing Board again appealed to the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the school code in authorizing the merger and in providing for the payment. The State Board of Education was charged with not giving the matter a fair hearing. These charges were all rejected and within a week, machinery was set in motion to make COMMUNITY SCHOOL a part of the Lansing system.

Scarcely were the parents, teachers, and children able to get their breath before the State Highway Commissioner announced plans for a connector route from I-496 to U.S. 127. The interchange at Lake Lansing Road would go right

through the school playground. With this prospect in mind, and a rapidly growing suburb to the south, the Lansing Board of Education announced on October 1, 1964, that \$350,000 had been allocated for construction of a new elementary school near Darien Street and Post Oak Road. Pupils in the COMMUNITY SCHOOL District would be transferred to the new school the following September.

I need not repeat here the problems of this last transfer and the first days of Post Oak School. You know them well. It is suffice to say that this rather spotty history of District No. 5 (COMMUNITY SCHOOL) might well be the history of a hundred small districts throughout Michigan. Its problems were many, sometimes almost overwhelming, but in them we see the problems of our present generation.