

1903 Red Brick Schoolhouse

The program for the Eudora Area Historical Society meeting on September 26 focused on the 1903 Red Brick Schoolhouse, 626 Church Street. Lois Neis gave a short history of the building before a large audience of former teachers and students.

The red brick building, which replaced an earlier stone and brick school, still stands today. It is located in the six hundred block of Church Street and since 1951 has been used as a residence although its second floor



and belfry have long been removed. When the building was used as a school, it was a 2-story structure with 7 rooms and a basement. The primary grades attended classes in 3 rooms on the first floor. In 3 of the upstairs rooms, one on the north and 2 on the south, high school classes were held. The fourth room, on the west, was the school library and equipment room. In the basement were the bathrooms and play area for days when the weather would not permit the students to go outside. Students played basketball on outside courts.

In 1898, the first year that records are available, 227 children attended school in Eudora. Four teachers taught both black and white students. In 1902, high school level classes were offered. Students in attendance (including 11 high school students) numbered 182. Subjects taught included English, physics, algebra, bookkeeping, drawing and geography. By 1904, when the red brick schoolhouse was completed, attendance had risen to 189 with 15 high school students. Mr. O. J. Lane was principal, and there were 5 teachers.

In 1905, students numbered 231 (29 high school students), and Eudora High School had its first high school graduation. Among the students were names familiar today: Fuller, Gabriel, Schopper, Shellack, Seiwald, Sommer, Ziesenis, Durr, Everly, Eder, Hadl, Lothholz, Trefz, Wichman, and Wilson.

Records show that in the year 1916, there was a 9-month school year. Charles Kelly was the principal for the high school that year and Ida L. Coffin was the grade school principal. The high school graduates received diplomas accredited by a state university. In 1918, a new building for the high school was completed at 10th and Main Street, thus the brick building on Church Street became a grade school only.

Enrollment held steady around the 200 mark for the next 3 decades. In 1946, the teachers were Mary Richards, Marguerite Miller, Grace Kerr, Mary Weidensaul, Betty Fertig, and Roberta Nottingham. Records up to the late 1940's exist, but can not be located.

Mattie Catlin Kindred started school in 1905 and attended both grade and high school in the red brick schoolhouse. Mattie walked to school from just south of where Pyle's Meat Market (8th and Main) is today up the hill and over to Church Street. In the winters, it was very cold coming around the corner at the top of Main Street. Her first grade teacher was Alvia Reed. She remembered her 5th and 6th grade teacher wore the same dress all winter. Does that say anything for the salary these ladies received?

Although Mattie never got into trouble in school, being such a good girl, she remembered others who did unkind things. She liked having "good times" in the library and said that so many were sick at graduation time that the exercises had to be postponed.

Paul Sommer started school in the fall of 1918. Paul went to all 8 grades in the red brick building. His fourth grade teacher was Madge Hill Rothberger. Howard Deay was his 7th-8th grade teacher and principal, a wonderful teacher and good disciplinarian, said Paul, who also recollected the hot school lunches. Students ate hot lunches paid for with tickets (four lunches for a quarter). Mrs. Fred Moll, the janitor's wife, made soups for the students' lunches in her home. Mr. Moll would go home just before noon, pick up the large kettle of soup and bring it back to the school. Along with the soup, students ate crackers and drank hot chocolate. Mr. Moll not only worked as janitor but was a VIP on the ball field serving as umpire for the games (without pay for this privilege, no less!).

Margaret Colman Wulfkukle taught grades 3rd and 4th (also literature to 7th and 8th graders) at Eudora for 5 years starting in the year 1937. Margaret stated that there were few, if any, disciplinary problems in the school. She was an active teacher who played baseball with the boys in the summer and went on sled rides with them in the winter. Margaret talked of the fun she and the students had organizing plays and parties. She stated that the Parent Teacher Association was an active group and open houses were held. Margaret pointed out that she, similar to all the teachers of that era, had to sign a contract stating that she would not marry while she was teaching. Margaret taught the Bagby twins, Reta and Ruby, and although she can tell them apart, to this day she still mixes their names up.

Reta and Ruby, who also attended the meeting, said when Margaret had to take time off to have her appendix removed they were afraid she would not return. Their brother, Bob Bagby, also a former student of Margaret's, remembered that the principal had 2 paddles – one for those famous spankings that Mr. Nichols so freely dispersed, the other, the "birthday" paddle for birthday celebrations.

Marion "Swede" Everly recalled how he came to attain his nickname. A 3rd grader in 1921, he and Harry Edwards got into a argument over a "good looking, blond-haired girl." This argument resulted in a fight. Harry pulled out a large handful of Swede's hair leaving a rather large bald spot on Swede's head. The older boys started calling Marion "that blond-headed, bald-headed Swede." Swede had numerous fights trying to convince them to stop, before Mr. Moll advised Swede to just let the boys call him that and they would forget it in a few months. Now, some 70 years later, Swede said he still hoped they would forget! Ironically, he said "I am not a 'Swede,' I'm 'a Dutchman.'"

Doris Bohnsock Jamison loved school and remembered few disciplinary problems in those days. One of her teachers was Bessie Erlick, who taught spelling. It was a proud day for Doris when she was able to spell in the Douglas County Spelling Bee. Mr. Nichols, the principal at that time, also taught music and made students listen to classical music on the radio.

Lauretta Gerstenberger remembered the school's huge piano. In the mornings, students lined up and marched into the classrooms while Lauretta played on that gigantic piano and their teacher, Madge Hill, would mark time to the music. Margaret Westerhouse was one of Lauretta's teachers. Janice Coleman recalled the uproar that occurred when a teacher was discovered smoking in the basement and thus was fired. Even teachers had strict rules to follow.

When Violet Gerstenberger Fleming went to school, she loved history the best. She and Kermit Broers both recalled that "country kids" in the 7th and 8th grades had to come into Eudora and pass final exams from the county to graduate and go on to high school. For a student from the country, taking tests in the city of Eudora was a big experience.

Phyllis Baecker Young closed this period of Eudora school history by telling of the "Big Move." By the late 1940's, the school population in Eudora had exploded, because of emigration to the city as a result of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. In 1951, the students left the 1903 red brick school house building on Church. They packed up their books and marched down Seventh Street and up Main Street to the building that now stands across from the City Park.

In 7th grade that final year, Phyllis remembered how one student retrieved a screwdriver and unbolted all the desks that were bolted to the ground (the custom of those days). Phyllis said the desks were moved every which way they could be. When the teacher returned to the room, he just laughed to see all the desks every which way.

Patty Neis Johnston, 9/1994