



Brown County Journal

December. 15, 2015

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Dinner Meeting
January 4

Brown County
Genealogical Society
Meeting
January 14

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The One-Room Schools of Brown County

When the early pioneers came here there were no schools and many people could not read, and some could barely sign their name. One can find many instances in the county records where individuals could only sign a document with an "X" and they would have to have a witness to verify this was the person that was signing that document.

At an early time in our county many community forces set to work to build schools, train teachers, and even to teach their children if a school was nowhere near. When the federal government surveyed land to move in new settlers it set aside certain areas that could be used to build schools. If the block of land was not used to build a school on then the land could be sold and the monies from this sale would go into a school fund to build schools in other areas. The local county administration assigned the task of building schools and hiring teachers to Township Trustees at that time.

The Rural School

Rural schools were usually built in areas which couldn't be used for anything else, such as hillsides or other land that was unfit for farming. Oftentimes there wasn't even a place for a playground or any other outside activities. The buildings could also be used for other gatherings such as church meetings, community gatherings, or political meetings.

The first school buildings were built of logs with no windows and with a fireplace to keep children warm in the winter. The students had long stools to sit on that were made of split logs with holes drilled in to hold the legs. They had no desks in which to work at.



Typical One-Room School, New Bellsville School

Paper was rare and most learned their lessons on slates or from charts. Books were scarce and about the only book that was found in the classroom was a dictionary for all to use.

As more one-room schools were established books became more readily available. In the early 1900s the state government offered to send 30 books for all aged children to each school. The parents thought the best way to raise the money for the books was to have box suppers. These were auctioned off and whoever bought the box supper ate

it with the person who made it. (from Brown County Remembers, Sophia Lucas Vossmeier's story)

The first school in Washington Township was built near the village of Hedgesville which was east of present day Nashville. In the western part of Washington Township another school was established by the Old Jackson Salt Works near present day Yellowwood Lake. The first school in Nashville was built around 1837 of logs and about 12 feet by 16 feet. There was a huge fireplace, split-log benches, and no windows, but at least they had desks made of slabs. David Reddick was the first teacher there. Subsequent teachers were John V. Marshall, Charles Sipes, and John C. Gould. After the demise of the first Nashville schoolhouse school was taught in other places such as the Followell Grocery, local churches, and the courthouse at one time. After which Nashville built three more schools.

It was a custom back then to turn the teacher out of the schoolhouse at Christmas and not allow him to come back in until he agreed to treat the students. Mr. Gould refused to go with tradition and he was put out of the school on a cold winter's day. There was a stalemate for a while - no one wanted to give in. The older boys then went out and captured the teacher and took him down to Greasy Creek and threw him in the cold water. Some of the parents were there witnessing the event and urged the teacher to honor their tradition. After a while Mr. Gould finally gave in and went into town to get their treats. (from Brown County Schools - Half A Century by Warren Ogle)

The first school in Jackson Township was taught in Georgetown (now Bean Blossom) about 1838 by John C. Marshall. It also was a log building that served multiple purposes such as church meetings and community gatherings. The second school was said to have been taught in the Anderson/Three Story

Hill neighborhood and the third was near the Richards farm/Bear Creek area. As far as it has been determined Hamblen Township's first school was taught near Taggart. It was an old log cabin that had been abandoned. The local citizens took it over and established it as a school. After this the old log United Brethren Church was used as a school.

The first term of school that was taught in Van Buren Township was somewhere in the southwestern part. The second school was started near Christiansburg. At one time the old log Shiloh Methodist Episcopal Church was used as a church and a school there. In Johnson Township it is believed their school was established very early near Elkinsville. This was the only area in Johnson Township that had enough people to establish a school.

Growth of the School System

About the time 1860 rolled around Brown County's population started to explode. Large families were commonplace with the average being from ten to fifteen children. The growth in population created a need for more and better schools. The greatest increase was from 1860 to 1900. The largest number of schools during this time were as follows: Jackson with 19, Hamblen with 16, Johnson with 8,



School No. 8, Story School, Van Buren Township 1932



School No. 5, Browning School, Johnson Township - Raleigh Deckard, teacher

Washington had 19, and Van Buren had 16 schools. (from Brown County Schools - Half A Century by Warren Ogle)

The Township Trustee was in charge of getting these schools built, hiring teachers, and keeping up maintenance. The Trustee first had to figure out where all their children lived and then figure out the best location so that each student wouldn't have to walk any more than two miles. They also had to take into account geographic features such as hills, creeks, and roads (if any) that each child would travel to school. Each school that needed to be built was put in a district in each township, thus at the beginning each school had a number. Naming of schools didn't happen until much later. For the most part we have been able to figure out which number applied to each school, such as School No. 10 in Jackson Township became the Owl Creek School. At this time construction of the school was mostly wood frame with weatherboard siding and a wood shingle roof. There usually was a belfry with a school bell, a wood stove for heating, desks & chairs, and a chalkboard or a slate. If no slates were

available the walls would be painted black to be used as a chalkboard. Shelves would have been built in the back to store the children's lunch pails and coat hooks were provided to hang their coats. A table with a water pail would have been in the back also. On warm sunny days all would go outside to eat their lunch and then have recess. In cold weather with the teacher's request children would bring in vegetables to throw in a pot on the stove that the teacher would start in the morning. By lunch they would all have a hot meal.

The teacher's pay was about \$1.40 - \$1.70 per day. They had to prepare a daily report and turn it in to get paid for that day. The first day of school the teacher had to inventory everything in the building and report on the condition of every item. They also had to do this the last day of school. The Trustee saw to it that items were replaced that needed to be and also made sure that firewood, etc. was supplied.

School usually began at 9:00 o'clock in the morning with the youngest sitting in the front and the older kids in the back. The most common schedule of lessons would be the Rotary Program. The teacher taught each grade from the first to the eighth taking turns with their lesson. The older children would



Hamblen Normal School for Teachers 1897

Taken at Sprunica school, seated from L to R: Claude Urick (or Quick), Maude Teague, Grace Walker, Lula Wayman, Clarence Brickey, Bramble Moser and Ern Urick (or Quick). Standing: Leonard Hutchison, ? Stockwell, Gertie Abbett, unknown, Ida Parmerlee, unknown, unknown, Maggie Oliver, Rhoda Petro, Johnnie Stockwell, Bertha Heskett, unknown, Theodore McDaniel, unknown, George Jewell, and Cornelius Campbell, superintendent and teacher. The sign in the photo also names as students: Moser, Admire, Young, Sleighter, and Swift.



School No. 6 also known as Georgetown School 1911

chip in and help the younger children with their lessons too. Toward the end of their schooling the older children that showed an interest were encouraged to go on and become a teacher. Their last two years were geared toward this. Grades 1st to 8th were known as Common School. Those that showed promise were then encouraged to go on to teacher's training school which was called Normal School. If they graduated with good marks they were then encouraged to go to the Indiana State Normal School. This was not necessary though to stay in Brown County and teach. Many young people stayed in Brown County and went directly from Normal School to teaching. There was known to have been several Normal Schools in Brown County. Nashville, Hamblen, Beck's Grove, and Pikes Peak were a few of those known to have had a Normal School.

The school system governed by the Township Trustee was getting harder to manage. The school population and the number of schools made it harder. By this time, about 1917-1920, the local officials decided they needed a better system. They asked what would be a better system? The best solution was to convert the Trustee system to a School Board. This was the beginning of the demise of the rural one-room school.

(If you have ever gone to one of Brown County's One-Room Schools and would like to help us identify children in our photos, we would love to have you come by the Archives sometime to see if we have one of your school.)

