

THE BIG SPRING SCHOOL DISTRICT

It is difficult to write the history of the Big Spring School District for the school records were carelessly burned many years ago.

For many years there was lettered on the gable end of the Phillips barn near by, these words: "Entered by C. H. Phillips in the year 1849," but it wasn't many years after that the Village of Big Spring sprung up. Our Sheppard Pierce moved in and built a store and had the place surveyed out in lots.

Soon after that a dam was built and a combination flour and feed mill was put up. About the same time a family by the name of Wilber built a home on the corner of Mill Street and Wilber. After the Wilbers moved, Mr. John Russell put up a store and run the Post Office on that corner and was there for years, but finally moved it to the west end of the dam near our shop. Edwin Pierce also had a store here. I am told that a man by the name of Irons was the first one to operate the mill; I can remember when Evelyn Ward run it and made what was called stone flour. This was done by laying a large flat flint rock horizontally which was stationary, and another large flint rock that revolved on top of it: and the flour was better and more nourishing than what we get now a days.

As to the original school house, that was built before Big Spring was platted, and was located outside the area and was on what would be the continuation of Sneak Street, before the dam was built. The marks can be seen just north of the Town Hall where the Pinery Road crossed the creek and went by the site of the old school house and on through the Winchell Place. The School house was of course built of logs.

About the year 1866 my folks moved here from New Jersey, cleared away the hazel brush and built a home on Wilber Street. For some time they had to carry water across the dam, about 40 rods. Little did they know then that all they had to do was to bore down about 60 feet and get good water.

The School House? Well, we'll get to that later.

In those days there were several families of indians that lived on what we call the indian hill. They were the Prettymans, the Dixons and the DeCorahhs; and when they would come down to the Village they would have bright colored blankets and sell them from door to door, while the men would do the hunting with bows and arrows, and were good at it too. Old Mr Prettyman was very old and when he told about anything in the distant past he would say "When I was on earth the first time".

He had two fine sons, Hank and Jake, they were grown men at the time but great athletes. Jake would come down to the Village and take part in boxing contests and foot racing. They used to race the length of the mill dam.

Jake suddenly died of pneumonia, and I went up to the indian hill to the funeral. I was about the only white boy there. There was more real honest grief shown at that indian funeral than some white funerals. The ceremony was weird and fascinating. I just didn't get the run of the sermon for it was preached in the Winnebago indian language. I remember I seemed to feel as badly, and cried as much as the rest of them.

To the south of Big Spring our school district took in the Steve Sweet farm, the Martin Hanson farm, the Lava Armson farm and the George Bowen farm.

When I was a small boy I walked away to the Martin Hanson farm and they were picking hops that day, during my stay there I walked into a Yellow Jackets' nest and one of them stung me, but Mrs. Martin Hanson took me in her arms and carried me to the house, and gave me a piece of pumpkin pie. Between the kind hugs of Mrs. Hanson and the big piece of pumpkin pie I lost my sense of pain; and I soon started for home as happy as a lark.

The Big Spring school house stands on the same ground for at least 90 years, and I believe it is the same building. Of course it has been tinkered up now and then.

When I first went to school the floor had a depression about 12 feet long and 8 feet wide and 6 inches deep just inside the door. A long box like stove stood in the center of the depression, and it would take wood about 4 feet long. The stove had some raised letters on top, and at recess we would burn the letters on our slate frames. We had nothing but home made wooden desks and seats, and a great variety of things was carved on them.

In those days we went to school when we were real young, and my first teacher was Mrs. Harrison Churchill and I believe she was the best.

We lived about 40 rods from the school house but one day a great blizzard come up and I couldnt face the storm to get home and Mrs. Churchill was very kind and divided her lunch with me.

Yes indeed! There is a difference in teachers.

We afterward had a teacher that was as Satanified as Mrs. Churchill was kind hearted. When we recited, each one stood up to answer the questions; one day at the geography class she asked me a real hard question, and I couldn't just get the answer gunned out of my thick head and I said; "I am quite sure I know the answer but I can't tell it."

And she said; "If you can't tell it you don't know it, sit DOWN". Being a timid soul I didn't do anything about the incident and besides, there was no open season on the likes of her anyhow.

Our School District runs as far north as Robert Ramseys, from that place Clint and George Ramsey had gone to school, and from Wallace Ramsey's there were Cora, Iba, Josey and Chub Ramsey, and later Robert and Marion Ramsey. From the Lyman Morse Place came Clara, Leslie, Arthur and Horace Morse. From the Thrasher place came Lela, Hettie, Tessie, Reny, Jenie and Roy Thrasher. From the Phillips place, Gerty, Bertha, Nellie, Herbert, Wendel and Edward. Inside the Village limits were Lana and Archie Ward; Lottie, Libbie Mert, Bub and Guy Sweet; Zella, Terressa, Willie and myself, Luke Vleit: Outside the area were Beulah, Cynthia, Marion, Peter, Ernest, Victor, Hubert and Agnes Powers: Beulah, Ella and Sarah Wheeler.

South of the Village were Sarah, Anna, Tena, Andrew, Ole, John and Hans Hanson; Henry, Lava and Caroline (and later) Pearl, Ruby, Merle, Clarence, Elmer and Alfred Armson; Edith, Ethel, Gertie, Bert and Jabe Bowen:

East of the Village were Lizzie, Vina, Carrie, Lily, Belle, Marrietta, Marcia, Jasper, Jesse, Raymond and Verdelle Stowell; Maggie, Lizzie, Anna, Neal and Will Brown.

Up West were Hattie, Emma, Arb and Bert Campbell; Ora, Will and John French; Bernie and Homer Landt.

There were more on the east road that went to school here they were; Andrew, Lyman and Chauncy Morse. I believe this list is about complete according to the information I have got.

This Big Spring one room school house has given many people as good an education as some more so called hifolutin' institutions of learning.

None of them ever become president of the United States, but we might be proud of that.

Those that went to school here in recent years are not mentioned on this list for this is ancient history, and they will be in that catalog soon enough.

By: Luke M. Vliet

NOTE--This was written by Mr. Vliet in about 1954 or 1955 and copied later from Mr. Vliet's hand written copy as near as possible to the exact way he wrote it, using his spelling, punctuation etc.