

## **ANCHORAGE SCHOOL CENTENNIAL**

**By Mildred Long Ewen**

Since the days of horse-drawn buggies and unpaved roads, the red-roofed Anchorage Public School has been a landmark in the center of town and the center of the community interest and activity. It has been a magnet for families and a model for educational excellence. It will celebrate its centennial in 2011.

In 1911, the Anchorage Town Board requested the Board of the Anchorage Graded and Common School to create a “good common school for grades one through twelve” for the term beginning in the fall of that year. The members of the board were moving to take advantage of the 1908 act of the Kentucky legislature to fund a public high school in every county. These astute citizens met at the Hausgen and Fulton General Store where the Anchorage United States Post Office is today, since the town hall did not come into use until 1933. Their names are recorded in the meeting minutes on file in the Anchorage archives at Town Hall.

The school acquired a centrally located site for the construction of a new school building and retained the firm of Ward and Glossop for design. They contracted with the construction company of Henry Frank of Middletown who had built the impressive new office building across the railroad tracks for the Citizens National Life Insurance Company. The board arranged to collect taxes from “local corporations” specifically the Citizens National, later to become the Kentucky Central. The office building was the first such to be built outside of downtown Louisville. Rather than a local style of architecture, its red clay-tile roof and stucco exterior were a “Spanish Mission” style.

The Frank Company built several houses of the same materials in Anchorage in the 1920's, probably more for safety from fire than for fashion. With only a hand-drawn fire wagon and a water supply limited to wells and cistern, many residences and barns had burned, including an early house on the site of the new school at the intersection of Bellewood Road and the railroad tracks.

Interest grew in laying pipes for a town water system. As early as 1909, the town board appointed a wealthy resident Isaac W. Bernheim to a committee to investigate the possibility of getting water by way of the “Central Asylum” at Lakeland”.

A more adequate water system was established by 1914 just before the opening of the first section of the new schoolhouse. The problems remained of a floor in the basement that was muddy after each rain, equally muddy roads and plank sidewalks and bridges.

Historians date the beginning of a “free” school system with school funding budgeted from the state of Kentucky to 1850 – coincidentally with the establishment of a railroad system that made access possible. By the time of the War Between the States, Kentucky had tuition-free public grade schools in all of the one-hundred and twenty counties. The “free” school in Anchorage was created for District #67 at the instruction of the Jefferson County judge in 1888, just ten years after the growing railroad community known as Hobbs Station was incorporated as the Town of Anchorage.

Known locally as the “Sleepy Hollow” School, the small frame structure was located in the valley between the early wagon roads of Old Harrods Creek and Evergreen on land owned by Edward Dorsey Hobbs, the single most influential citizen in establishing the town and the railroad. It probably was typical of the so-called “field” schools built during the 1830’s and 40’s by the settlers, almost as soon as their frontier homes were secure. They hired the teachers and provided “room and board” when necessary.

The little schoolhouse was moved in 1890 at the request of the Hobbs heirs to the top of the hill at Evergreen Road and finally, in 2011, is an outbuilding on the Drummond-Ramsey property. Its historic past is hidden under shiny new siding. A better image of a “field” school is on Garr Avenue where a small house still has its school bell perched on the roof. This was the “Lakeland” School and even earlier the “Hite” School, for the first landowner there.

In Middletown, school classes were conducted at several different locations including the Masonic Lodge and the historic, stone “Head House”. Education beyond the eighth grade was considered by many in those days to be a parental choice rather than a public responsibility. Those who could afford the tuition could have their children educated at academies

supported by religious denominations: Catholics at Bardstown, Methodists at Middletown, Presbyterians in Anchorage etc. Their sons could be taught the “classics” of Latin and Greek at military schools such as Kentucky Military Institute, and young women could be “finished” as ladies at schools such as Science Hill in Shelbyville, Jefferson Female Seminary in Middletown and Bellewood Female Seminary in Anchorage.

The founding of Sayre Female Institute in Lexington, Kentucky in 1854 predated the start of Vassar College in New York State by seven years. Young women came from all over the south to attend Bellewood Seminary. With the Forest Military School on the rail line to the east of Anchorage, Kentucky Military Academy to the west toward Lyndon and Pine Hill Academy and Bellewood in the center of town, Anchorage became such an educational destination that consideration was given to locating a “central university” here.

Even at these private schools, conditions were primitive – not privileged. Classes usually ended at dark. Boys attending the Forest Academy had been advised to bring their own kerosene lamps and “basins for baths”. Without running water, outbuildings called “necessaries” were necessary. Discipline was harsh by modern standards.

When public funds for higher education became available in 1911, Bellewood and Sleepy Hollow Schools closed. The owner and headmaster of Bellewood Seminary, W. G. Lord, became available for the position of superintendent of the new Anchorage Public School. The board of the Graded and Common School employed Lord to “conduct instruction of eight grades of public school at \$10 a quarter tuition for non-residents”. Classes would be held in the former seminary building until the new school was complete. He also was to “teach vocal music and four years of high school course”.

After the construction of the first section of the school in 1914, additions kept up with the needs of the district. The minutes of the school board meetings record changes and improvements. As the only public high school in East Jefferson County, Anchorage attracted students from outside of the district for which Jefferson County paid tuition. In the 1930’s tuition students outnumbered resident pupils by almost three to one.

Former students – now “senior citizens” – recall riding the “car” of the electric interurban line from Pewee Valley and Lyndon to attend school. The Chadoin Bus Line served those from Middletown and others walked. Rides were shared with the few owners of automobiles. They recall fondly the coaches and teachers who had lasting influence. In 1931, the gymnasium was built behind the auditorium and the athletic program was expanded. The many trophies on display in the front corridor of the school are evidence of the success of the ball teams.

When Eastern High School was built in Middletown in 1950, the Jefferson County Board of Education no longer needed to pay tuition to Anchorage for those students not residents. The loss of revenue was a severe blow, as when in years earlier, the Southern Railway had moved its corporate headquarters from the Insurance Company building, taking away its tax dollars. One of many “crisis” meetings was held in the auditorium. It was decided to maintain grades kindergarten through nine, paying tuition for Anchorage district students to attend grades ten, eleven and twelve in Jefferson County High Schools.

The loss of its independent school status was threatened in 1966 when a bill was introduced in the Kentucky House of Representatives to consolidate the City of Louisville and Jefferson County public school systems. An amendment proposed to include Anchorage. A “March on Frankfort” was organized by the Anchorage Parent-Teacher organization to lobby in opposition. The bill was defeated in the senate and Anchorage remained in independent district – one of the few in the state. In 1976 the Louisville City schools by court order were merged with the county to facilitate racial integration, but Anchorage was judged to be in compliance and exempted from merger.

Anchorage residents, even those with no children, have been willing to approve bond issues and property tax raises to support this independent school because of its value to the whole community. As the old farms and open land were subdivided, the school population grew. In 1976, a proposal to develop a large local farm into high density building sites was successfully opposed. Enrollment was maintained at an acceptable level of around five hundred or less.

As young families moved into the district there was a significant impact on the school and reenergizing of the civic organizations. My husband, an

attorney, and I, a journalist, were part of just such a group that chose to locate in the town after the end of World War 11. I held offices in the Parent-Teachers organization and he volunteered his time in a capacity planning committee – as well as other civic activities. Our four children graduated from kindergarten in the little mortar-board caps, and then from eighth grade or ninth grades as was current at the times between 1958 and 1974. Two of our grandchildren were more recent graduates, making two generations from one family – probably not that usual!

Planning and zoning and historic preservation became issues for public discussion as outside pressure made it necessary to defend the identity of the school and the town. There was almost as much drama off-stage as there was on-stage in the theatre-style auditorium. The school building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and in 1992 was included in the Anchorage Historic District. The beautiful arched wood ceiling of the front corridor and the light-filled window wells are as distinctive and functional in 2011 as they were when new.

Since 1984, when such comparisons were possible, Anchorage Public School has ranked first in academic performance among the 176 public school districts in Kentucky. Students and faculty have received recognition and awards for achievement. Curriculum offerings exceed state standards and extra curricular opportunities are exceptional. Anchorage Children's Theatre, for example, is exceptional!

There was just one graduate in the first graduation ceremony held at the Presbyterian Church chapel, once part of the old seminary, in 1914. There were forty-six graduates from the well-maintained school auditorium in 2011.

For a hundred years, the public School in Anchorage, Kentucky has enriched lives of countless numbers of families and been an essential element in the quality of life in the town that supports it! A fact worthy of celebration!!!!!!

References: For this article, I have used information from Dr. Thomas D. Clark's History of Kentucky; Historic pamphlets and books about neighboring communities; interviews with former students; Minutes of board meetings on file in the Anchorage Archives. Mr. Don Cravens superintendent of Anchorage school was kind enough to make suggestions. Ms. Tish Knoeller, Middletown, had not additional material about the work of her grandfather, Henry Frank. A note of trivia – he owned the first automobile in Middletown in 1908.

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