

CHAPTER IV

A HISTORY OF THE PLAINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Organized education reached the Meade County area about 1880. The very first school buildings were made of heavy sod and contained the simplest of furniture. The teachers of these schools were for the most part local men and women who had completed a few years of grade school and had persuaded the county superintendent to give them a certificate. A curriculum offering of reading, writing, and numbers was given in all grades. School terms ran from four to six months on the average. The prevailing salary for teachers was in the vicinity of \$25. Mrs. Rheses Singley describes her experience as a pioneer teacher in this fashion:

By the fall of 1890 there was not feed, money, or work. The last work that my husband was able to get that fall was carpenter work five miles away at one dollar per day. He wanted to go back East and leave me with the two children. I would do almost anything but this, so since I had been a schoolteacher in Missouri, I decided that he could stay home with the children and I would teach school. There were few teachers in the county, so finding a job teaching was not difficult.

The County Superintendent of Schools lived on a farm north of Missler. I got in the wagon and drove up there to take the examination for a temporary certificate.

I began teaching that fall at the Lone Star schoolhouse. It was made of sod with little furniture and was located three miles north of our home, on the

corner south of the late Charley Angell home. This was a five and a half month term and I received \$25 per month. I had sixteen pupils enrolled that winter, one of whom was Charley Angell.

This was a cold snowy winter. When the weather was bad I would ride one of our horses, but in spite of the fact that I would have on my heavy school clothes, leftovers from my teaching in Missouri, with heavy leggings and overshoes and a camp quilt wrapped around me, I would be numb by the time I would reach the schoolhouse.

In the spring I taught a three month term four miles south of us. There I had only three pupils and got \$20 per month. At the beginning of the term I was loaned a pony to ride, but before the end of the term, the party sold the pony so there was nothing left for me to do but walk as our team was needed for farm work.¹

On April 2, 1886, a preliminary notice for a school at West Plains was circulated about the settlement by E. M. Meairs. On April 14th the notices for the first district meeting were posted and on April 24th the first district meeting was held. At this meeting the following officers were elected: Director, E. M. Meairs; Clerk, C. F. St. John; Treasurer, Henry Awling.²

A two room frame school building was started in 1887 and was completed in 1888. Tom Dillinger was the first teacher of the school with a salary of \$30 per month for the

¹ Mrs. Rhees Singley, "My Pioneer Experience," Meade Globe-News, September 23, 1948.

² N. B. Clark, County Superintendent of Meade County, State Report, June, 1886.

1888-89 term. The "new" building was used by various church and Sunday School groups for their services and also served as a meeting place for the Woodman Lodge when it was organized.

The second teacher of the school was Mrs. Rhees Singley who began a nine month school in 1891. Her salary was \$30. The valuation of the school district at this time was \$71,429. A note in the county superintendent's report indicates that \$37,823 of the valuation was railroad property. Due to the general depression of the area at that time the valuation of the district had dropped to \$61,858 in 1897.³

The school was a one teacher pioneer "country" school from 1888-1912. In 1912 the old two room wooden school building was sold and a modern two story seven room brick building was built. The building still stands and is used by the grade school. The picture of the building is in the picture section at the back of this book.

At the time of the erection of the brick building the board of education decided to employ two teachers. These two teachers were F. W. Reuhlen and Ruth Bennett with Mr. Reuhlen acting as principal. Mr. Reuhlen's salary was \$720 and Miss Bennett's was \$490 for the term.

³ Miss Ola Granger, Interviewed at the County Superintendent's Office, May 9, 1953.

In 1913 another teacher was hired and F. W. Calvert was employed as principal with a salary of \$900 for the term. The enrollment at this time was approximately thirty.

One of the highlights in the educational history of Plains was the event of the beginning of high school work in 1915. It was decided to start a two year high school and add courses as the need arose for them. With this plan undertaken the board employed both a superintendent and a principal at the starting of the 1915-16 school year. Paul L. Hensel was employed as the superintendent at a salary of \$970 and Mary Coleman was the principal for \$720. There were no other teachers in the high school. When high school opened on the top story of the school building the enrollment was four boys and six girls. In the grade school department on the lower floor there were approximately thirty-five pupils taught by three teachers.

In a couple of years the high school had grown to a four year school. By 1917 the enrollment in this department had grown to 19. The grade school had experienced an increased enrollment and an extra teacher was employed in that department.

In 1918 Wade C. Fowler came to Plains as the superintendent. It is of interest to note that his salary was \$1080 and represented the highest salary paid any superintendent

in Meade County at the time. The position now pays five times the above stated salary.

At the beginning of the 1919 term the school enrollment had jumped to 37 and it was necessary to hire an extra assistant. The state department formally classified the Plains school as class "D".

In 1920 the Plains school board formulated plans for consolidating a number of rural schools in nearby areas. Before the consolidation action took place the land area of the district was 36 square miles with an evaluation of \$1,400,931; after a number of small rural schools consolidated, the land area raised to 101½ square miles with an evaluation of \$2,120,169.⁴

A number of problems presented themselves when the consolidation program took effect. First, the old building was much too small to take care of the enrollment of the grade school; second, school buses had to be bought to transport the children; and third, several extra teachers had to be employed.

To take care of the items mentioned above the school board called for a bond election to build a new building. The election carried by a large majority and in 1922 the old

⁴ Twenty-Third Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1922 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1923), p. 42.

