



Readin' 'Ritin' N 'Rithmetic

The History of the Plains Schools (Calista Bender wrote the following in 1939)

(It is well written and gives everyone an insight on how things were back then in the Schools as well as in the town of Plains.)

"Because the history of our town has played such an important part in determining the school system of Plains, I believe it fitting for me to take you back to the early days in the history of our little western town.

The year of 1884 found Plains a thriving village of some fifteen hundred people. Plains was undergoing the period so many western villages underwent—the boom days. The town at that time was alive with people who wanted to make big money quick. At this early date, businessmen were thriving off the eastern money men who had come west to make more money. Old settlers relate that Plains had perhaps more business houses in those days than she does now. A large twenty-room hotel called "*The Champion Hotel*," two livery barns, two lumberyards, one saloon, two drugstores, three banks, and several grocery stores made up the main street district of 1884. But the main part of town did not occupy the same position on which it is now located. Rather, the town was situated on a site one-half mile north of its present position. In those boom days of Plains, before the railroad came through, the mail was brought by stage from Dodge City to the Plains Post Office. Pioneer folk recall that the school system in the early days was also much different from what it is at the present time. But the boom days of Plains did not last.

As early as 1884, farmers found that even the good soil on the plains could not combat dry weather conditions, thus causing wheat failures. Great depressions followed. Speculators and real estate men—many of them lost dollar upon dollar. Banks closed, business houses shut down and settlers tore down their temporary homes and moved onward to gamble on other prairies in the west. The twenty-room "*Champion Hotel*," famed for its service in the west, was purchased by a ranch and moved south to the Cimarron River, and in later days, played the role of a ranch house. Homes were also moved to neighboring vicinities and the population dropped rapidly as settlers moved out and in as flocks of sheep.

The true homebuilders—the true pioneers, did not let discouraging conditions blast their hopes and remained to see their dreams become realities. As history marches on, we find school being held in a rented one-room frame building in the year of 1887. The building had previously housed one of the thriving little banks of the community, and a few years later was moved to the **John Neeland** ranch. Even as early as 1887, the man schoolteacher, **Thomas Dillinger**, found that there was musical talent in the community. He organized a band, which played at various celebrations in Dodge City, as well as brightening many get-togethers in the old hometown.

The year of 1888 will not soon be forgotten in the history of West Plains, for 1888 was the date the *Rock Island Railroad* was built and the town was moved to the present site. In 1888 a two-room schoolhouse was built in the block the school now occupies. As the depression grew worse at times, only one room of the two-room schoolhouse was in use. One teacher, receiving a salary of \$30, was employed to instruct fifteen students, and many times the teacher taught everything from first grade reading to bookkeeping. The many conveniences that grade school youngsters have today were not obtainable in the early days of school history. Fifteen youngsters raised their voices in harmony to the tune of an antique organ. No running water aided the enjoyment of teaching in this early school. In 1888 only one windmill was to be seen in Plains, and this windmill was located one-half mile from the school. So many were the times when boys and girls begged to be given the privilege of carrying the water to escape several minutes of class recitation. Sometime later the

water-carrier's trip was shortened when the late **L. F. Parsons** put down a well only half so far away.

Perhaps you are wondering how far the children came in those days to attend the Plains School. One family living eight miles in the country arranged that their children should stay in town during the week and attend school. But every Friday night as soon as the bell told them that another week had passed in the classroom, the children would walk home, and back to school they would come on the following Monday morning.

The story is told of the three Edwards boys and their mode of transportation to and from school; **Everett, Harry, and Ray** rode a donkey three miles each morning and each night for their study of reading, writing, and arithmetic. This donkey was typical of most donkeys, being very stubborn and slow to move. It is said that it took at least an hour after school dismissed to get the donkey started for home. The method used was to put some biscuits on the end of the longest stick they could find, then tie it on a rope and let it dangle in front of the donkey's nose. Four o'clock found the donkey rather hungry, and as the biscuits looked very good, the donkey would start running to catch up with the biscuits the boys held just far enough from the nose to cause the donkey to give chase. So off the donkey went after the biscuits, and in due time, the **Edwards** trio arrived safely at home.

After the railroad came through, the post office was located near the present location of the Phillips 66 Service Station. The wife of the depot agent bought a saddle for \$5.00 and rode her horse one-half mile in every type of weather from depot to the post office to deliver the mail. **Mrs. Carl Singley** has in her possession at the present time the saddle that served so many people.

As there was no community house in Plains, the two-room schoolhouse was a meeting place for various organizations. Church, literary, school, socials, and dances were all held in the little schoolhouse.

A few years later, the Methodists held church in a store building until, in 1892, a Union Church building was erected, which housed all denominations under the guidance of a minister. The Masons and the Odd-Fellows from Meade laid the cornerstone for the first church.

In 1897, a sugar mill was established north of the present site of the cemetery, and the settlers signed bonds amounting to \$15,000 for the maintenance of the mill. But the story goes that no sugar was ever made; but real estate men had erected the mill as a scheme to make money. Soon the citizens realized this and the sugar mill was torn down and the last bank closed. The first brick house in Meade County was made from the old sugar mill, and was located one mile west of **John Hiatt's** present country home.

By the latter part of 1897, the only businesses remaining in Plains were **L. F. Parson's** store and the post office. The homes in town were those of **Mr. Parson**, **Mr. Parson's** mother, the two section bosses, and a sod home in which **Charlie Orner**, a member of the school board resided. So the populous had decreased a great deal since the fifteen hundred boom days—only two businesses and five homes remaining.

In 1898, **Miss Maggie Martin**, now **Mrs. Morris**, wife of a man connected with the Fowler Bank, taught in the Plains School. In 1901, **Mr. A. L. Vaught**, whose home is south of Plains, was the schoolteacher.

Much propaganda has been issued concerning the wide main street of our town. In 1901, West Plains Township, for the first time had enough money to buy a township grader. At this time, **Mrs. Carl Singley's** father, **Mr. Hemple**, and **Don T. Edwards**, pulled the new grader with horses and graded mainstreet. When I was talking with **Mr. Hemple** and gained this bit of information, he said, "We graded it wide; we needed plenty of room to turn our hacks around. We believed the boom days of Plains would return and we would need plenty of room." So, WIDE was the main street in 1901, and the same width it remains today. We are still waiting for the

boom days to return. Because the new grader purchased by the township cost quite a sum of money, it was thought best by township officials to conserve in using it, so mainstreet was the only street that was graded for some time.

In 1902, came the first telephone days. No telephone poles were erected, but the telephone wire was attached beside the barbed wire on the posts. The telephone office was then located where the Phillips 66 Service Station is at the present time, right across the street from where they then had the post office.

Plains had a flood in 1903, and because prospectors thought that perhaps it could rain on the prairies, families moved in and the vicinity gradually grew. The first grain elevator was erected in 1904. Previous to this time grain had been shoveled from the wagon directly into the railroad car and shipped to Dodge City.

From 1904 to 1912 was a period of steady moving in of Eastern people. The two-room schoolhouse became too small to facilitate the growth of attendance, so a third room was added to the little frame schoolhouse. This third room was used for the primary grade.

In 1912, a new brick schoolhouse was built and the old one moved away. The architect was **Rewel A. Curtis** of Dodge City, and the school board at that time consisted of **W. W. Coons**, **D. G. Davis**, and **Dr. G. A. Nickelson**. **F. A. Calvert** was the first superintendent. The building contained five rooms and an assembly hall, which by means of folding doors, could be made into two classrooms. The assembly hall was the south half of the upstairs, which is now occupied by the fourth and fifth grades. Later, a music room was added to the northwest downstairs.

The first graduating class of Plains High School was made up of **Minnie Angell Hogan**, **Neva Dailey Larue**, and **Haskell Holmes**. This was in the year of 1919. Only a two-course high school had been offered before 1917, and those finishing who wished a four-year course attended **Meade High School** the remaining two years.

The social functions of the early high school classes were quite elaborate as could be noted by the Jr.-Sr. Banquet in the year of 1919. That year the banquet consisted of a taffy pull at the **Arthur Vail** farm south of Plains. Among those present were **Mary Hayden**, who is now **Sister Agnatus**, an instructor in St. Mary's of the Plains at Dodge City, **Miss Gladys Vail**, now Dr. Gladys Vail, an instructor in the department of Home Economics at KSC, Manhattan, who has helped write textbooks used by the college, and has revised other textbooks, and **George Broady**, who attended Harvard University. Mr. Broady later became a member of a large law firm in New York City and was sent abroad on business in interest of his firm at various times. He now has a law office of his own in New York City.

The first graduating class of Plains High School graduated under the superintendence of **W. C. Fowler**. The Commencement exercises were held in the Methodist Church, as the high school building was still a dream. One member of the first graduating class attended college. Imagine this person's embarrassment when interviewing with the dean of the college, and having related being salutatorian of the graduating class, and the dean asked the freshman how many were in the class! But the grades of the student in college also vouched for the brilliancy of the student, and the number in the college class was considerably larger.

Before the high school building became a reality, the boys had little trouble in receiving an ample amount of physical education. While the high school boys were busy with football practice, the high school girls were seeking their physical education by sliding down the banisters of what is now the grade school building. The girls seemed to have as much fun in their exercise as the boys, but as to the amount of energy expended, I shall not say.

The basketball games in the early basketball days were played in a large wooden building on the southeast corner of the school block. The interior of the building was very crude in structure, resembling the interior of a barn. The only flooring in the building was the exact size of the

basketball court. Although the building was somewhat inferior to our basketball court of today, and the lights were poor, many good games and rousing good times were had rooting the home teams on to victory. Before this building was erected, the boys and girls had practice on outdoor courts, and had played their games with other towns in the old **Star Theater** and the **Elder Hall**, which, before being razed in recent years, was located across the street south of the **Richardson Service Station**.

A member of the graduating class of 1929 relates the following experiences: "Socials—heavens no. We had no school socials. Whenever we wanted a party we went to some of our homes. I never shall forget the time our class piled into an old wagon and drove out to the **Geisinger** farm. Coming home it started raining, and believe me, we really got wet. Those were the days when it really rained. Another time I also remember quite vividly was the Halloween night of 1920. None of us students like history, so we broke into the schoolhouse and took every history book and hid them in the attic. The next day, the history teacher became quite vexed, but no results. The next day, we had one of those so-called pep talks by the superintendent, and with heads drooping; we one by one, crawled up into the attic and somewhat remorsefully produced our books. Besides, sliding down the banisters, we girls sought our fun crocheting. Can't you just imagine the high school girls doing that for entertainment now?"

In 1920, eight districts consolidated to make the Plains School a bigger and better system. There were eight buses—one bus to a district. **John Hiatt** was the first bus superintendent. The bus garage was the cement block building opposite the home the **Wayne Nelson** family now occupies. The consolidation brought an increase in attendance, so they were crowded for room in the one building. In order to conserve space, the foods and sewing classes were held in the basement of the Methodist Church.

In 1920, the Jr.-Sr. Banquet took place in **Maloney's Café**, and the following year, **White's Café** was the scene of the annual festivity.



West Glendale School 1921-1922

Back row: teacher, Ed Hickey, Harry Howell, Charlie Cardwell, Calvin Pope, Annie (Pope) Hickey, Pearl (Bond) McVey, Irene (Bond) Frederick.

Middle row: Lucille McCreight, Allen Troutman, Delbert Pope, Ivan Gruber, Mack Kinsall, Unknown Nicholls, Unknown.

Front row: Vinton Bond, Kenneth Cardwell, Orvel Bond, Jr.

In 1922, work was begun on the new building, which is now the high school building. The spring of 1923 found the excited high school students moving books and properties into the new building to complete that year.

Many advantages were offered the students in the new building. New courses were added, school plays were presented, and music became mor

important as a high school orchestra produced music of which the patrons were very fond.



Plains Junior High School Students 1928-29

Front: Charles Bisbee, Harry Utz, Lloyd Angell
Boys on knees, Fernando Stegman, Unknown, Merle Knott, Guy Wallace, Unknown, Elroy Wilcox, Kenneth Wilson, Ned Powell
3rd row: Irene Langhofer, Eva Schaffer, Helen Miller, Crisy Baileg, Eloise Stephenson, Helen Henry, Alberta Lawson, Rosalie Reblatte, Tressie Armentrout, Barbara ?, Helen Eakes, next five unknown, Marvin Reiss, Unknown, Opal Krause, Regina Hatzell

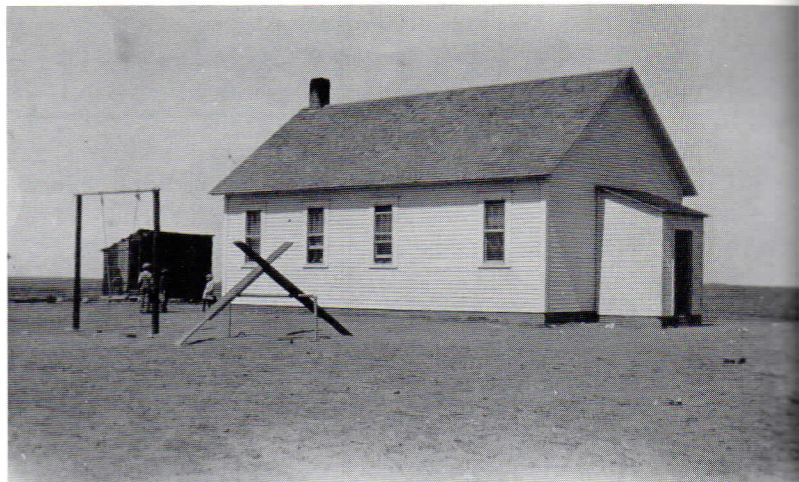
As the years went by, the field of study branched out yet further to give student's still greater opportunities. Dramatics and debate became important activities in the school curricula. In the debate season of 1929-1930 the debate squad, consisting of **Harold Atkinson, Faye Garten, Vincent Broady, and Lois Witter** won the seventh district championship and the plaque which can now be seen on a wall in the lower hall



Bus route students at C. C. Krause farm

In 1930, our present bus garage aided in making our school better, and the campus more attractive.

As most of the Plains people are quite familiar with the recent happenings in the school, and the many honors that have made the trophy case look nice, I shall not eulogize on that point. I might say that in addition to the football, baseball, basketball, debate, track, tennis, dramatics, speech, and music trophies, there have been scholastic honors, which no trophies have recognized that are not to be omitted in recognition.



East Glendale Schoolhouse

Of the 345 graduates of the *Plains High School*, doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, lawyers, college professors, aviators, and many others following professions have sought their place in the world. As an alumni representative, I congratulate those who have graduated from *Plains High School*. Many have sought success far from home, while others have remained at Plains and helped maintain the standard of our community. We graduates look back over all the days we were in school. Some of them were not the happiest days, and others were full of excitement. Many varied experiences were ours, experiences that we would not have missed. *The Boy's Club* and *Girl's Reserves* held our interest because of the parties and programs and the *Senior Sneaks* and school parties were full of fun.

Our school system now has a faculty of seventeen teachers, all of them working in fine spirit to lead on to better days. Five buses convey 150 children to and from school. Our school is known for its high standards and is a cooperative school with other community organizations. We have a *Class A High School and Grade School*, and our schools are members of the North Central Association.

How different it is—this school of ours—from the days one teacher taught fifteen pupils in a two-room frame schoolhouse and received \$30 a month. How many changes have taken place since the whole school was housed in the grade school building? History marched on as consolidation made its mark of change.

Our present-day high school, the present bus garage, all of these have been another epic in the mode of school. As the years go on, new methods will be used, new procedures followed, and whatever these additions may be, may they be forever for the best, for they also will make their mark on the history of our school. To the following superintendents who have rendered their hours of services, we give our thanks on this homecoming day: Superintendents **Calvert; Hesel; Sutcliffe; Moody; Fowler; Nyquist; Van Voorhis; Woodard, and McFarland**. We are thinking today of the graduates as they are scattered from Canada to Mexico, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, in the sixteen states they inhabit. Let us remember, above all, the great sacrifices that the pioneers of the early days made, for it is really them who laid the foundation that was so necessary before such an occasion as this homecoming day for the high school graduates in this year of 1939 was possible.

Now to the citizens of the Plains community who have so loyally served your school, you have done something very worthwhile. Friends, let us boost our school. It is doing a great service to mankind, and, with the cooperation of everyone, the marks that are now being made will make a fine showing as the history of our school continues."

Submitted by Calista Bender in 1939

(Of course, many of the people and places are not with us anymore, but the Spirit of building bigger and better schools is in our pioneer spirit and lives with us today.)