

History of the Russell Schools

By Supt. C. H. Cobb

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One hundred years ago last October the first school was established in Iowa. The little log-cabin building was located near the present town of Galland, in Lee County, about half way between Fort Madison and Keokuk. The school was situated in a clearing on the bank of the river at the head of the Des Moines Rapids. The equipment was crude and simple. The benches consisted of long pieces of puncheon and sticks for legs, inserted in slanting auger holes. Books were few as well as other education equipment. About twelve pupils enrolled the first year.

The westward movement since the date of the first school in Iowa brought settlers to Russell community, and as in other early communities, one of the first things the people undertook was the establishing of a school for their children. The first school house in Russell was built in 1872, a two-story frame building of two rooms, located a little north of the present building but on the same lots. This building was soon overcrowded and two rooms were built on to the north side. It was in this building, in 1895, that the first class graduated from high school.

In 1899 a new building was necessary, so the first school building was divided into two parts and moved to the new locations to become dwelling houses. One section is the house occupied by Bert Hancock, and the other is the home of the Oliver Werts family.

A new brick building of two stories and with eight rooms was built on the same site. For the time before this building was erected the primary grades were moved into the Ewald building on Shaw Street, now occupied by the Kells & Wright store. This building proved very satisfactory until a few years later, when it became overcrowded and the present building was built in 1913 and 1914. While the present building was in the process of construction, school was held in a shed west of the building.

In 1926 the new building was outgrown and bonds were voted for an addition which was built during the summer of 1926. This addition brought the Russell schools up-to-date, with a fine gymnasium, auditorium and stage.

Such is a brief account of the very interesting history of education in Russell. Progress has been steady and sure and the education of Russell young folks has always been up to the average, or above, in the state. Many new ideas in education have been added to the schools but the fundamentals are practically the same now as they were in the beginning, only presented in a little different manner. Many advantages are enjoyed by the students which the older generations did not know; physical training, domestic science, manual training, normal training, basketball, tennis band etc.

The maintaining of discipline has undergone great changes, as well as changes in curriculum. According to tales told by former students, discipline was enforced by rod and hickory stick. School was considered a necessary evil. Now school is taken more seriously by students. They realize that competition is growing keener, and that an education is absolutely necessary. Therefore they do not have time for the many pranks that used to take up at least two-thirds of their time, as well as their teacher's time. Capital punishment is out of date; again the old ideas giving way to the new in the course of progress.

At the present time Russell has one of the largest schools in the state for the size of the town. A class of thirty-four is graduating, a number not equaled in the many larger schools. Russell should well be proud of its educational past and continue their efforts in maintaining their school of the future.

None of us like to realize that we are growing old, but reflection is sometimes good for the soul. The first graduating class of 1895 had four graduates. There was no graduating class in 1902, as the three-year high school course was changed to the four-year course that year.

It is the sincere hope of the Editor and Superintendent that this page will bring back some fond memories of your past school life and schoolmates.

*****This article (partial) was copied from The Union-Tribune; Russell, Iowa dated Thursday, May 21, 1931. Bob Parker, class of 1934, gave us the article and typed by Bob Willits, class of 1955. The original newspaper article also included past graduates from 1895 to 1930 and a picture of the RHS 1931 Senior Class.