

# Historically Speaking

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## Education 101

By Julie Spilinek

Last quarter I featured the county schools of Howard County; this issue will focus on the schools that were located in the towns, especially the years beyond 8th grade.

Grades one through eight basically followed a similar schedule and curriculum as the county schools. The earliest high schools offered only 9th, sometimes 10th, grade. Gradually as enrollment increased, grades 11 and 12 were added. Since bus service was not available until the mid to late 1940's, the students who wished to attend high school had to board with friends or relatives who lived in the town. These additional grades offered more advanced math, science, and social studies classes; also typing, book-keeping and a normal training course for those wishing to become elementary teachers. Latin was also a standard course in many high schools.

Most of the early town school buildings were two story wood frame buildings. Later brick structures replaced these. The elementary classes occupied the lower level while grades 7 through 12 were on the upper floor. A furnace, rest rooms, and an area for eating lunch were often located in a basement. Some schools were lucky enough to have a gym within the school itself; others used other locations that were available. As enrollment increased during the late 50's and 60's, additions were frequently necessary to adequately accommodate the extra students.

As the need for more professional training increased, so did the need for more education and educators. In the earliest years the administrator, whether a superintendent or principal or both, were responsible for teaching some of

the classes. As the years went by, more and more requirements were necessary to become accredited and allowing students to attend a college.

In addition to the academics, sports was a part of the high school curriculum, as well as drama, speech, band and chorus. Boys basketball dominated the sports scene for many years, although a few had girls basketball. Football and track were soon added, also volleyball for girls. Today students have quite a variety of sports activities in which to participate, including golf, cross country, trap shooting, even tennis.

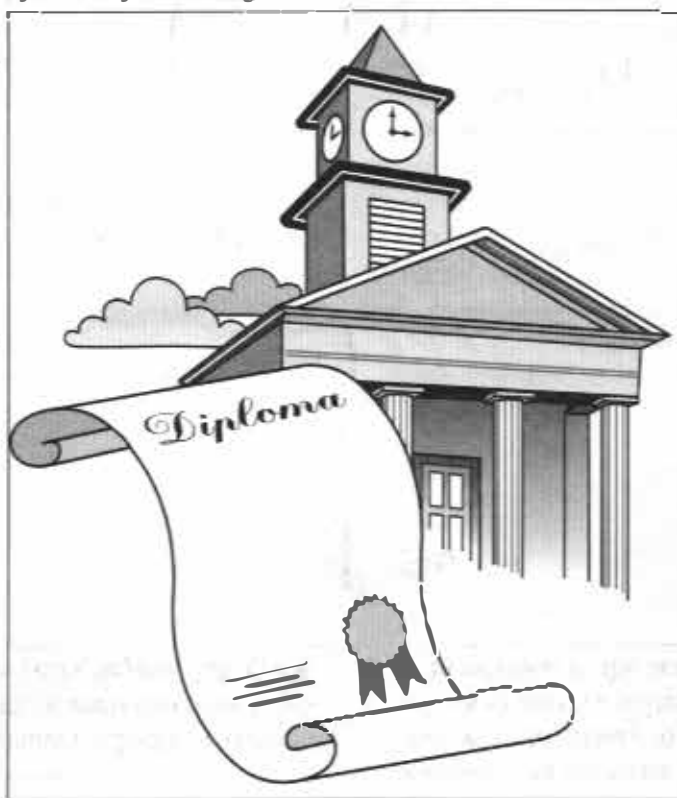
Now, some of these institutions of learning are also disappearing as enrollment decreases and the requirements for accreditation increases. At one time there were seven high schools in Howard County; now there are only three.

The following pictures and some of the information

were taken from PAGES OF HISTORY—NEBRASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY by NEBRASKA HIGH SCHOOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY. Archie Lind of Grand Island, a former principal of Elba, provided the research for Howard County.

### THE FAIRDALE SCHOOL

About eight and a half miles north of St. Paul, on a site north of the North Loup River, there was once situated a rural school which provided farm children with a short high school experience, through the 9th and 10th grades. During school year 1938-39 the head teacher was Ila Faye Snyder. There were just two teachers for all grades K-10. At the time George A. Jacobson and John Panowisz were members of the Fairdale Board of Education. The high



## A Message From the President *Gary Peterson*

*I hope everyone has a good Holiday Season*

*We had a nice number of visitors at the Historical Village in 2010.*

*Last fall contractors started painting the church and school house and completed it this spring A contractor repaired the roof of the coal shed, by the Depot, this fall*

*I hope everyone has a happy 2011.*

*I want to thank all the board members and the Society members that volunteered to help this past summer.*

school was dropped about the time of World War II about two decades of operation

### **HARMONY SCHOOL**

Also within the ambit of the city of St. Paul, county seat of Howard County, was the farm community of Harmony and a school district of that name which conducted classes through the 10th grade for a time between World

Wars I and II. During the late 1930's, the faculty consisted of Mary E. Callahan plus one other teacher. Carl M. Jensen and Einer Rasmussen were members of the Harmony School Board at the time Eight high school students were enrolled there during the school year 1938-39. The high school and the grade school are both now long gone and forgotten. Even the location of the old Harmony School is known by only a few present residents of this area.

### **THE NYSTED SCHOOL**

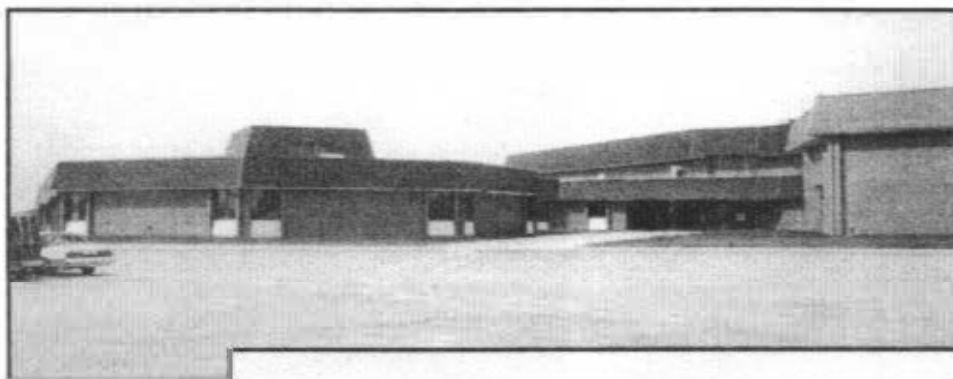
Many early emigrants from Denmark settled and homesteaded in Nebraska. That is also true of the Nysted community situated one mile north and three miles west of the town of Dannebrog. On April 12, 1883, a U.S. post office was opened there named Nysted after a city of that same name back in Denmark, the country of origin of many settlers. A school district was formed and a rural grade school existed for some time before a short high school was conducted. A 9th and 10th grade were available at the Nysted School for a few years during the 1920's and 1930's. U.S. mail service direct to the village of Nysted was stopped in 1918. As with many rural communities, with the onset of World War II along with the increased educational requirements to maintain state accreditation, the era of the rural high school became a luxury too difficult to maintain and the Nysted School faded into history.

### **BOELUS**

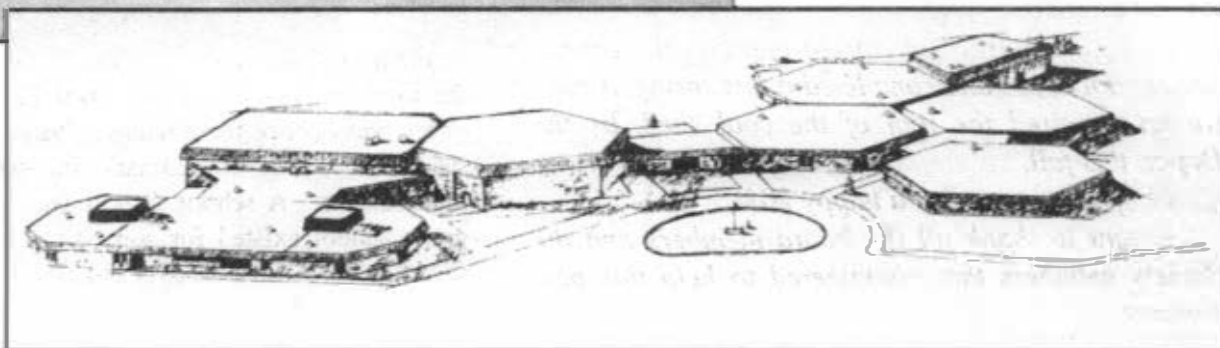
Boelus was the hub of District 30, which housed its



*Boelus High School (1894-1967) still stood, somewhat weathered, in the early 1990s.*



*CENTURA (1967-Present)  
Main entrance (left) of Centura High School leads to classroom area (below in the drawing; elementary unit at extreme lower left).*

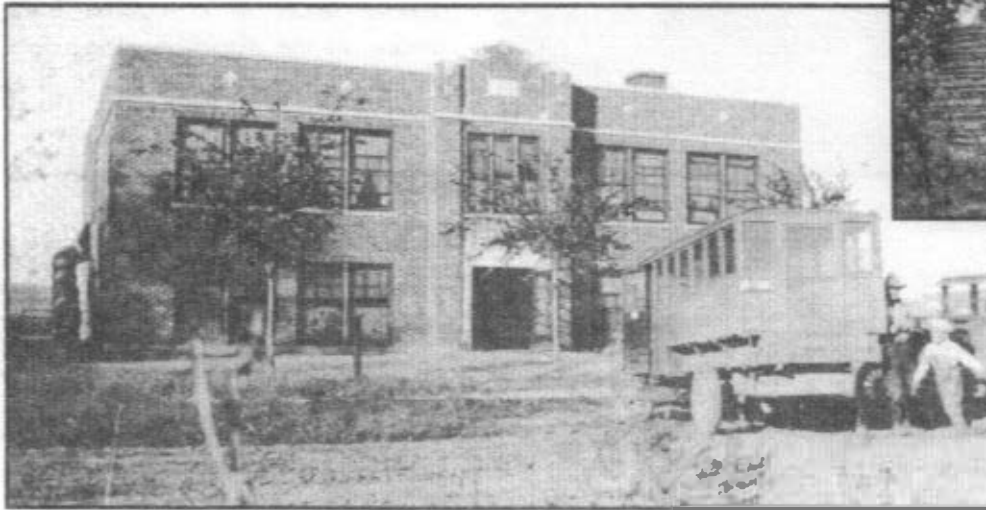


first elementary school in a sod house. In the early 1890's secondary education, grades 9 and 10, were added. In 1896 these students graduated from the 10th grade.—Adelbert Savage, Minnie Avres, B. R. Hedglin, Lucy Kenyon, and C.A. Robinson. A two story brick building was completed

in 1911 and in 1917 the 11th and 12th grades were added. The school mascot was the Bears and their colors were blue and gold. The boys basketball team won the state championships in Class G in 1918 and in Class M in 1923 and 1924. Due to decreased enrollment and increased



*COTESFIELD HIGH SCHOOL (1913-1945)—Cotesfield's school building was constructed in 1905.*



**CUSHING HIGH SCHOOL**  
(1904-1954)  
*Cushing High School of the mid-1920's had remnants remaining in the 1990's.*

requirements the high school closed and became part of the present Centura system.

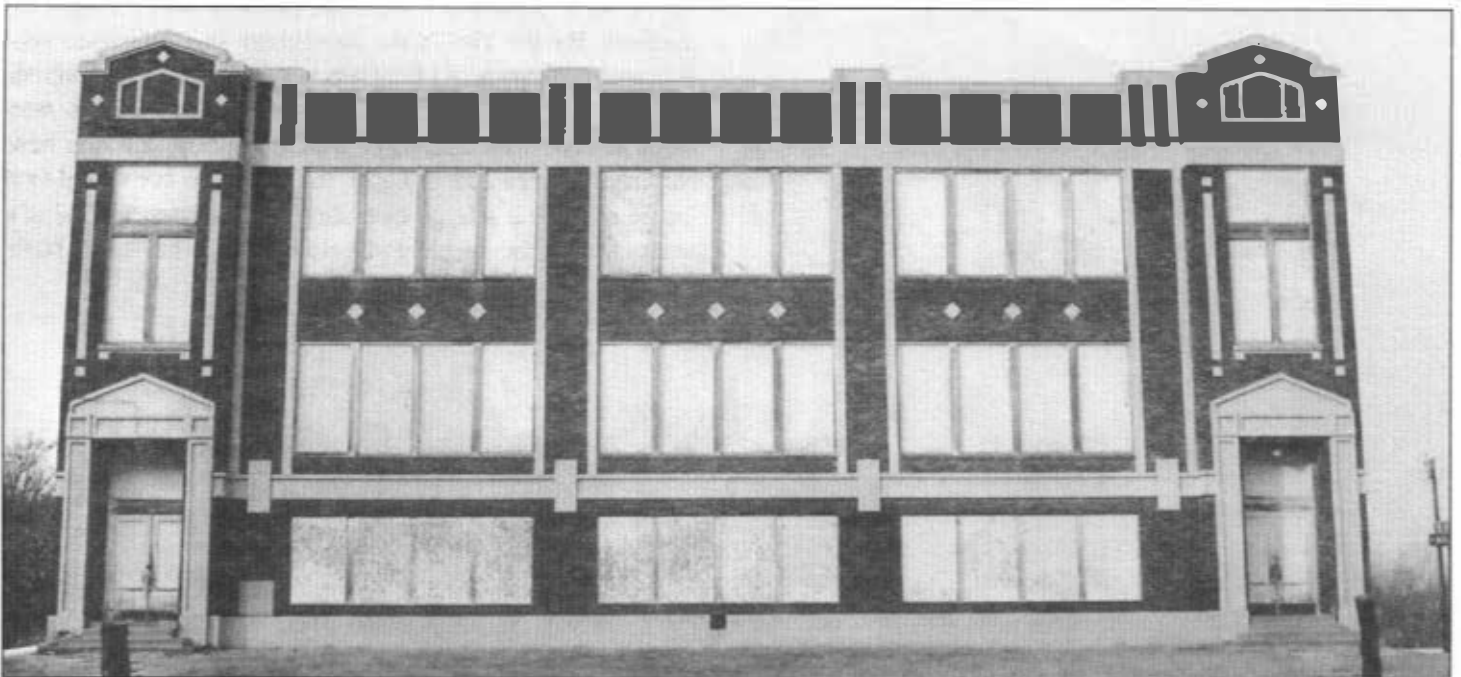
**CENTURA**

Centura is the youngest school system in all of Howard County. A great deal of planning went into the architect and administration of this school, which encompasses Dannebrog and Boelus in Howard County and Cairo in Hall County. In reality it is a 'county' school as it is located in an area five miles from each of these communities. Thus, the name Centura. In 1968, 51 seniors comprised the first graduating class from the new school. The name,

Centurions, was chosen as the mascot with the colors burgundy and white. In 1982, an elementary wing, kindergarten through sixth, was added.

**COTESFIELD**

Cotesfield was named after a Miss Cotes, who was visiting military officers located in the area. The school, District 14, was originally elementary only, but in 1913 a high school was established with one 9th grade student. By the early 1920's the remaining three grades were added with the first class to graduate as seniors in 1924. At one time there were as many as 40 students in the high school.



**DANNEBROG HIGH SCHOOL (1887-1967)**—The final Dannebrog school building was constructed in 1921 and used through 1967.





*The art deco motif draws attention to the Elba High School building.*

However, it too, succumbed to changing times and 1945 marked the last graduating class. A total of 118 students graduated from this institution.

#### **CUSHING**

A new grade school, District 122, was part of the Cushing town site by 1902 with the 9th and 10th grades being added soon after. Superintendent Nelle Folson reported an enrollment of 51 students in 1911. By 1922 a two story building allowed a four year high school to be added Catherine Jacobsen, George Gallup, Amos Peterson and Bertha Wilson were members of the first graduating class in 1924. A familiar name from the Class of 1931 was Dorothy Petersen, who later married Art Lynch and together they operated the St. Paul Legion Club for several years. She later developed the now well-known Dorothy Lynch salad dressing.

#### **DANNEBROG**

According to local historians the very first school setting was a dugout, then moved to the lower level of a three story building which was also used as a church and the pastor's residence. In 1885 a ten grade two story building was built. Walter H. Hart and Charles F. Hart were among the first 10th grade graduates. In 1921 a three-story modern building allowed for a four year high school. Mabel J. Nielsen, Mabel Hansen, Olga Peterson and Edward Doll were members of the first senior class. In 1920, the blue and white Dannebrog Eagles participated in the state boys basketball tournament. They were runner-up in Class F in 1927 and Class D champs in 1929. This school experi-

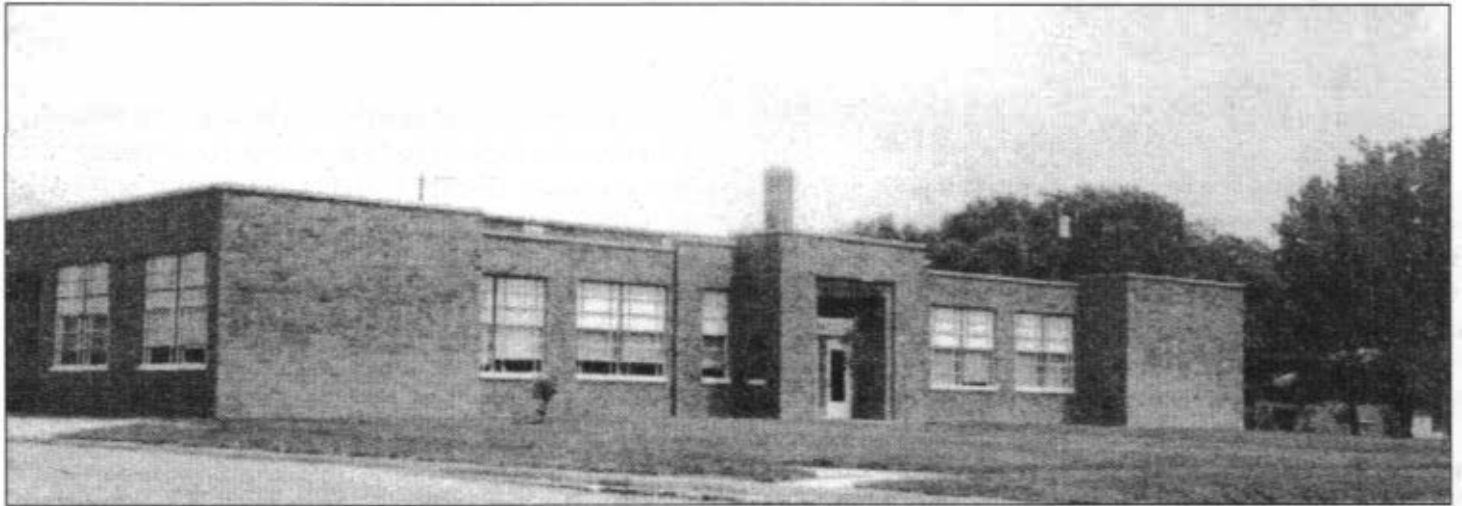
enced the same fate as numerous others and grades 7 through 12 became part of Centura in 1967 with the elementary continuing until 1982 when it, too, became part of Centura.

#### **ELBA**

Elba had a well established school by 1911-12 with ten grades. By 1924-25 Superintendent Ralph Brown reported 32 students with Jean Kellenbarger and Mary Nagle as teachers. By the 1960's the enrollment had increased significantly so two new classrooms were added--an English room and a home ec room. Another major addition was made in 1969 with a new gymnasium, a shop, and four new classrooms were added. Later, the shop was converted to a music room and a large new shop was constructed. Elba's sports teams, the purple and gold Bluejays, have also been present at various state tournaments. Home ec is no longer part of the curriculum but a well established computer program is, beginning in kindergarten.

#### **FARWELL**

By 1911-12 a one through nine grade school existed in Farwell with 122 pupils. By the mid 1920's it also gained grades 10, 11 and 12. Superintendent Fred B. Appelget and one teacher, Mabel Utter, were in charge of 29 students in grades 9 through 12. Like most high schools of this era, Latin and Civics were among the usual classes of math, science, geography, history and English. During those early years the only sport available to students was boys' basketball. The red and white Farwell Panthers participated in the state basketball tournament in 1926 and 1927.



*Farwell High School's 1950 building served as a community anchor.*

Their best team was in 1956 as they finished the season with 23 wins and one loss and earned the status of runner up for Class E. The one loss was that final game. In 1950 a new building was constructed. However, the high school was closed in 1968. In 1992 the 7th and 8th grades were discontinued. The Farwell school closed at the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

**ST. PAUL**

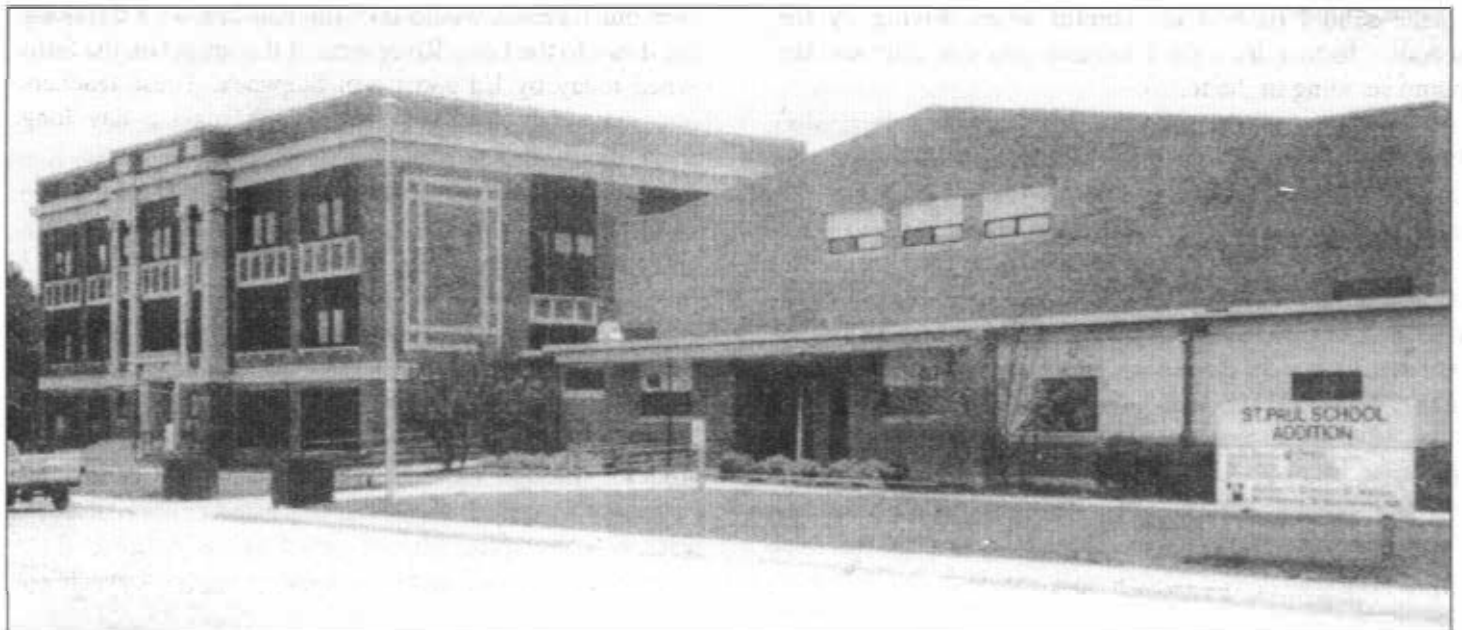
District No. 1 was organized April 29, 1872. Although the district was much larger there were only 8 or 10 children of school age. The first school was taught in the summer and fall of 1872 in what was known as the Old Buckeye House. The average attendance was about 5. The first teacher was Miss Lizzie Cooper, who later perished on the prairie during the severe snowstorm of 1876.

The first school house was built in 1873, costing about \$2,000. Another school house was built in 1883-84 at a cost of about \$12,000. In 1902 the problem of heating the

building led to the installation of a heating plant. The first commencement was held in 1889 with four students receiving their diplomas after completing three years of high school. The 12th grade was added in 1907 which included the Normal Training Course allowing graduates to teach in the elementary grades.

The total expense of the district in 1872 was about \$100; in 1909 it was over \$9,000. Today the amount would be staggering.

The old part of the present school was constructed in 1923. In 1950 an extensive addition added several new elementary rooms. Twenty one years ago a new gym and several classrooms were added. This year saw the completion of yet another large investment as 12 new classrooms were added as well additional office space. With the addition of computer classes there was a need for extra space. I can testify first hand that the space is being utilized every day.



*St. Paul High School has seen many expansions over the years.*

### Letter from Bob Spilger

*This letter from Bob Spilger arrived too late for the last issue, but since he went to the trouble of sending it, I wrote to him that I'd include it in this issue.*

Dear Julie,

I apologize for not writing sooner than this. I received your contact information some time ago from my mother Bettie Spilger of St. Paul. She told me you were looking for some memories of students who attended country schools in Howard County. What I plan to share with you in this letter are a few of those experiences as I attended two country schools in Howard County.

**Growing up in Howard County, Nebraska:** I had the unique privilege of growing up in rural Howard County, Nebraska where I also received my elementary education at a rural country school. In fact, I had the unique privilege of attending two different schools.

I began my education at District 53 of Howard County. District 53 was located south of St. Paul and east of Highway 281. It was one of the few one room schools left in the county. I began my education as a kindergartner in 1956. There were six students attending the school at that time. Our teacher was Mamie Schott who lived in the Dannebrog area and commuted each day from her farm home.

**My School Days at District 53.** The school house was heated in the winter time by a big pot belly stove that was located in the middle of the classroom. When the weather turned cold we were allowed to wear our coats and mittens in order to stay warm (until the stove warmed the building up). Some days when the temps outside were below zero we spent most of our day gathered around the stove.

The school had no running water so all our drinking water was carried in from an outdoor pump located in front of the school (if you are careful when driving by the school's former location I believe you can still see the pump standing in the trees).

Almost all of the students lived within walking distance to the school. When the weather permitted the students walked to and from school cutting across fields and pastures taking short cuts to their homes.

One special memory I have took place on a spring day, during our noon recess. Mrs. Schott took us to a hill north of the school house where we all took turns rolling down the hill. Even Mrs. Schott took her turn, rolling down the hill in a dress. I think she had as much fun as we did.

Christmas time was also a special time for students attending rural schools. At this time they would put together (with the help of their teacher) a program that was presented shortly before Christmas break began.

The school house was filled with parents, grandparents, as well as others who were part of the community. It

really was a community event, and the highlight was Santa Claus making an appearance handing out bags of nuts and candy to the kids in attendance.

**My School Days at District 15 (Bunker Hill School).** As I mentioned earlier I had the privilege of attending two country schools. District 15, otherwise known as Bunker Hill School, was the second school I attended. I attended District 53 kindergarten through second grade. The school closed at the end of that year and we merged with District 15, which was located south of St. Paul, and west of Highway 281, less than a quarter of a mile. The school house is still located there, however I believe it has become a private home. I believe Marilyn Beyersdorf is the current owner of the property.

When the two schools merged we went from an extremely small school to a much larger student body, from a one room school house to a two room school house with two teachers instead of one. At one point there were as many as 50 students attending the Bunker Hill School.

A special memory was the Christmas programs at Bunker Hill school for they turned out to be rather large productions for a school our size. Shortly after Thanksgiving the school board would assemble a large stage in the middle of the lower classroom. After returning from Thanksgiving break, which was only a two day break, the practice began in earnest. The night of the program was a large community event, parents and grandparents as well as people from the immediate community would attend. Our mothers would provide the lunch served following the program, and of course Santa would make his appearance passing out candy and nuts to the children.

Another special memory was our annual field trips. Sometimes we would take a road trip to Minden, Nebraska, and spend the day at Pioneer Village; other times our teachers would take the children on a day long hike down to the Loup River west of the school on the farm owned today by Ed and Carol Stepanek. These teachers were brave taking all of those children on a day long adventure.

These are a few of my memories. I have more but this is part of what the experience was like for me. I feel very privileged to have had the educational experience I had. I know that my teachers all played an important role in preparing me for life and for my continued education of both high school and college.

If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with me. I can be reached either by e-mail or phone. My e-mail address is: [bspilger@gmail.com](mailto:bspilger@gmail.com) or you may reach me by calling 319-256-5471. Thanks so much for allowing me to share these memories.

Sincerely,

Bob Spilger, Wayland, Iowa



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