**Early History of Whitewater School District #95**

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**Introduction**

Just past the midpoint of the 19th Century, in 1857, the land that is currently Butler County, Kansas, welcomed its first settlements. The county’s name, which honored Andrew P. Butler, a United States Senator of twelve years, had previously been given to another area of land, now present day Chase County, during the years 1855-59. When Chase County was created in 1859, the plot next called “Butler” was shifted south; then later, in 1864, it was extended to the southern border of the state. The current and lasting boundaries of Butler County were formed in 1867.1

It was the 1860’s when the first school districts were established in Butler County, as people continued to settle in the area. The first of these to spring up in what is now Remington USD 206, was Morgan, District 11, organized in 1868, with its building located just to the northeast of Brainerd on the northwest quarter of Section 14.2

By 1870 - 71, homesteaders had occupied much of Milton Township, and there they worked the ground to survive – creating fertile fields from the prairie soil and building homes and communities from scratch.3

**The Holden School – 1870-1888**

As the number of residents increased, you can imagine that there came a need for schools. District 95, which became the district for western Milton Township in 1873, was pre-dated by an elementary school located east of where the town of Whitewater would later spring up. Mrs. E.T. Eaton taught the first term in 1870 within a small house located on the southwest quarter of Section 20. A schoolhouse named the Holden School, was built in 1871. It was set along the north side of the same section, not far west of the half-mile point. Mrs. Eaton continued to teach there for several years, and the school held classes at that location for approximately 18 years.4

Building a school at this time would have been quite an undertaking. The nearest railroad was a two-day trip away at Emporia, and this is where most lumber and supplies were obtained. The saw mill was nearly equal distance away at Florence.5

One boy who is thought to have attended some of the first terms offered at the Holden School, Bernhard Harder – grandfather to Melvin Epp – lived less than a mile northeast of the schoolhouse on Section 17. His family immigrated in 1876, when he was eleven. Epp shares a story of this young Kansan’s experience in his book, *The Petals of a Kansas Sunflower: A Mennonite Diaspora*. “Oral history relates that Grandfather was the only boy enrolled in the school and was mercilessly teased by the girls. One day he connived to retaliate and set a bucket of water on top of the door. When the girls would come, he would tip the bucket. He released the bucket when someone came, but it was the teacher who got wet. Whoops.”6

The schoolhouse was also home to a literary society which produced *The Holden Times*, a paper that reported on farm, home, and literary news. A local column read from *The Holden Times* at the society’s meetings “kept the boys guessing who would be mentioned next.”7 Do you suppose they were mentioned for their mischief?

The Holden Post Office was established in 1870. Prior to that the nearest post office was located at Towanda. Mr. E.T. Eaton was appointed as the third postmaster of the Holden Post Office, which was relocated to his house on Section 20 until he moved it to Brainerd in 1886, where it remained until it was discontinued in 1907. The area was then serviced by Whitewater Post Office with daily rural delivery from Whitewater beginning in 1902.8

In 1886, the Brainerd School District was established. The school was located on the northwest quarter of Section 22, just off of Meadowlark Road.The first school session was held in 1886-1887. 9

**Schools in Milton Township – 1873**

It is noteworthy that there were schools before there was a township! Milton Township, named after the first settler Milton Snorf, was formed in the spring of 1873. That same year, school districts were laid out in blocks of two miles by three miles, and schoolhouses were erected. Teachers were paid about twenty dollars per month. At this time, the Holden School became Whitewater District 95 and subsequently relocated to the city of Whitewater in 1889.10

School districts in Milton Township at that time included: Grant, District 75 (1872-1948), to the southeast of present day Whitewater; Morgan, District 11 (1868-1948), already mentioned; Pleasant Hill, or Ayrs, District 65 (1872-1955), northeast of Whitewater; Stone Chapel, District 84 (1872-1957), southeast of Brainerd; Brainerd, District 33 (1871-1964), already mentioned; and Whitewater, District 95 (1873-1963), already mentioned. Emmaus German School would also later operate in this township (1887-?).11

**School Moved to Whitewater – 1888-1889**

The Missouri Pacific Railroad’s subsidiary, the Ellsworth, McPherson, Newton and Southeastern Railroad, was built through the area in the summer of 1885. The first train went through on July 1, 1885, connecting Newton and El Dorado with depots in McLains, Annelly, Brainerd, and Potwin. The Rock Island Railroad laid track north and south through the area in July 1887, connecting Peabody and Wichita, with depots in Elbing, Whitewater, and Furley. Immediately after the Rock Island came through, the town site for Whitewater was laid out by the Golden Belt Town Company on land owned by G.P. Neiman. The original 80 acres was expanded on the north and east, and here, at the juncture of two railroads and a river, the town of Whitewater sprang up! A few years later, on February 20, 1890, Whitewater was incorporated as a town, boasting five general stores, a livery stable, a bank, a drug store, a newspaper (The *Whitewater Tribune*, formerly the *Brainerd Sun*), the Whitewater Flour Mills, and much more. It was off to a grand start.12

Starting in November, 1887, the first buildings came to Whitewater from Annelly and from Brainerd.13 Then, in the summer of 1888 it was agreed that a schoolhouse was needed for the new town. The nearest schoolhouse at the time was the Holden School, situated a half mile south and one and a half miles east of town.14

Around this same time in September 1888, a request was made by Austin Brumback and J. C. Corfman to the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Butler County to change the boundaries of District 95. The total evaluations of the old District were determined and alteration of school boundaries was made. Parts of sections 16, 17, 20 and 21 were attached to Brainerd District 33 and the remaining land west to the county line and parts of Harvey County were added to the Whitewater District 95. The district was then six square miles.15

District 95 was organized at a meeting called on October 5, 1888. The following officers were elected: Charles Miller, Director; Chester Smith, Treasurer; and A. G. Laughlin, Clerk. At this meeting it was decided that the Holden schoolhouse would be relocated to Lots 23 and 24, Block 9, in Whitewater.16 The building was moved to town, located on B Street, near the Third Street corner. The school was so crowded that during the first term the classes were held in “relays,” and later other homes and buildings were also utilized for classes. That schoolhouse later became part of the Spencer Hotel. The first teacher was Miss Mary M. Neiman.17 So, the schoolhouse of District 95 came to town and immediately the district found itself in need of a larger schoolhouse!18

**Building of the First School - 1889-1890**

The following summer (1889) steps were taken to buy the present school grounds and to put up a new building. In 1889, the school grounds were bounded in the north by Fourth Street, in the east by E Street, in the south by Third Street, and in the west by D Street. This area is currently bounded in the north by East Central Street, in the east by South Locust Street, in the south by East Topeka Street, and in the west by South Oak Street.

Bonds were issued and voted on for the erection of a $3,000 schoolhouse.19 Wert and Froese began the building that fall. The building was to be 36 x 60 feet and 24 feet in height and have four rooms; everything was to be done in first class style.20 The *Whitewater Tribune* reported the arrival of lumber for the new school house in October (24th) and the enclosure of the school building in December (5th). Meanwhile, school commenced for the winter in November using the O.K. Hall.

That fall, the members of the first District 95 school board were elected: John Eilerts, Director; Chester Smith, Treasurer; and Joseph Weatherby, Clerk.21

Ms. Mary Neiman continued teaching until she married James D. Joseph, a farmer and cashier at the Bank of Whitewater, in March 1892. Once wed, she was no longer a “school ma’am” and, thus, no longer allowed to teach! Mr. Joseph became an important contributor to the progress of the town. He organized a telephone system in 1901, which became the Whitewater Telephone Company in 1903. In 1912, he was elected to the State Senate, where he served four years “greatly impacting bank regulations in Kansas.”

In 1890, the new four-room, two-story frame building facing west opened on the present school block. As the city and district grew, children crowded into this 1890 schoolhouse until a new and larger building subsequently opened in 1909.22

**Early Years in the Whitewater School - 1890-1907**

As the Whitewater community continued to grow, the school district, with its new building, became an integral part of it. The newspaper reported that new students were added daily, causing the rooms over time to fill to capacity.23

The school district also brought new opportunities to town. At one point, a summer school session of sorts was offered for pupils of all grades – 3 hours of school each day for the price of only $1.25 per month. A bookkeeping class was also offered in the evenings for those who wished to improve their skills. Both opportunities were led by Miss Clara Gephart and Miss Hattie Horner, two well-known and respected women in the area.24

School picnics at the end of each term provided the community with a chance to celebrate the hard work of the students and to applaud the efforts of the teachers.25

Early school leaders came and went, each bringing their own style of leadership. Mr. P.E. Ashenfelter, who served as principal from 1890-91, “although he received a great deal of opposition” in selection, was quite competent and “able to conduct affairs” to harmonious ends.26 Even the mischievous children could not break his standards of order; the newspaper quoted him saying “I need thee every hour” when he reached for his switch in the school room!27 So, only when he missed school for the birth of his new baby girl, did the students have “things their own way all day.”28

Life in the schools carried on, and in 1900, high school classes were first offered.29 You might have guessed that in time there came need for another, even bigger school building!

**The Need for Another School - 1907-1908**

The decision to build a new school, with issued bonds of $3,000, came up for a vote in the Spring of 1907.30 In a statement, the Board of Education reported that the 338 total voters on election day made 170 votes in favor and 28 against the school. At that time, the “value of all property in the district” was $170,000.31

On July 18, 1907, many school district residents attended the Whitewater School District’s annual meeting. At that time, “a twenty mil tax was levied” for the school. Details for the following school term were also decided—it would be 8 months long and starting on September 2. Those in attendance expressed their wish for the district to establish a full-term high school with courses offered through the twelfth grade. It was agreed that the eleventh grade would be added for the upcoming 1907-1908 term.32

By the start of the fall term in 1908, the following year, total enrollment had grown to 145 pupils, with 39 enrolled in the high school and 20 beginners in the primary school. The teachers at that time were Professor C.E. Ames, who was educated at Baker University, Miss Grace Howell, Miss Maude Robertson, who just moved to the area from Emporia, Miss Bessie Bartlet, and Miss Edith Hopkins. School started on September 7. The newspaper reported that school books arrived on time for once. What a novel convenience! In past years they apparently had a way of arriving late, leaving the teachers with the responsibility of creatively keeping the children engaged!33

A boys football team was also organized in 1908.34

By the end of spring 1909 term, according to an April newspaper, the total enrollment had reached 209 pupils. The need for a new schoolhouse was becoming dire! Good thing it was decided that the new schoolhouse was to be constructed later that year.35

**Full** **High School Coursework Offered, New School Building Opened - 1909-1910**

In 1909, “the district voted to extend the high school course to a full four-year course.” It became a momentous year for the district.36

The 1909-1910 school year started on September 6 with an enrollment of 160 students, with up to 20 more expected to join. Around 40 were in the high school program. Teachers reported “the pupils taking to their lessons with their usual after vacation vim,” and the school yard was said to be “in a great deal of confusion” from all the lumber and brick materials scattered around for the construction of the new schoolhouse. Although the students paid some attention to the construction, it did “not make a great deal of disturbance” to their studies or their participation in athletics.37

The new school building was located on the same block as the first schoolhouses, but in the center of the west half of the block facing west.

In October, 1909, the basement was finished, along with the first story.38 In November, much progress on the second story was made before bad weather contributed six inches of water to the basement, delaying the work, and basketball practices.39 By February of 1910, progress had gotten as far as the “roof and rough inside work.” The roof, windows and fire escapes were completed in March, and woodwork in April.40

When the High School examiner from University of Kansas attended at the end of term, he reported the school to be in “tip-top shape.” Commencement was celebrated in May 1910, with a Baccalaureate sermon preached by Reverend T. F. Rudisill on Sunday, May 16, at the Methodist Episcopal Church, followed by a miscellaneous program on Monday evening where diplomas were presented to the graduates, and a lively play, “H’gbee of Harvard,” was put on by the Seniors on Tuesday evening. The play was advertised to carry “the audience from the jollities of college life to the seriousness of camp life.”41

The first Whitewater High School graduating class had nine members. R.L. Hazzard was the superintendent at that time.42

**A Maturing District - 1910**

School commenced for the 1910-1911 term in the new building in Whitewater in early September. The old school building was put up for sale. Interested folks could send sealed bids; the school board reserved the right to accept or reject the bids.43

The Whitewater School District began showing signs of maturation. Offering a full high school course, the school now boasted its “efficiency,” having three high school teachers: “Miss Ruth Neiman…History, Mathematics (Algebra), and Biology; Miss Grace Miller…Ancient and Modern Languages; Mr. R.L. Hazzard…Physics, Geometry, Cicero and…Elementary Psychology.” It also boasted of the convenience of the building being equipped with electric bells.44

The High School, under Barnes Law, was also by then accredited, so graduates could “enter any University in the state.” The Whitewater High School advertised free tuition and reiterated the concept to persuade “every pupil in the surrounding vicinity” to attend; they had “no reason” not to! 45 Parents were reminded that “all children under fifteen years of age” were “compelled by law to go to school,” but even those over age 15 were encouraged to attend and not lose this opportunity, one that many of their parents might not have had.46

Total enrollment for the Whitewater School in September 1910 was 165, but it gradually increased. One teacher corrected the newspaper’s statement that her class had only 26 students; she said, in fact, it had 54! Activities at the school that fall and winter included boys basketball (they were expected to be a quick team), debate, chorus, and literary programs.47

A nice article in *The* *Independent* (Whitewater, KS) the following year on June 22, 1911, summarized how the district had grown and highlighted some of the recent achievements:

. . . When the district was started it was small in area, but from time to time there were additions from the surrounding districts until now the appraised valuation is almost $1,400,000. The school census has been growing in a like manner until it was found that the building that at the time seemed too large, was found to be too small to accommodate the pupils. So another building was ordered built and today the district has a building that it is proud of and that compares favorably with buildings in some of our larger cities. The cost of the new building is $25,000. The district graduated at the last commencement nine pupils from the Fourth year of High School. Its graduates are entitled to enter the Freshman class in the State University at Lawrence or at any college in the state.

Its work compares favorably with the schools in our larger towns and affords the pupils who desire a high school education the chance to get it without going from home, and is within reach of most of the pupils in north west Butler and south west Harvey counties. Seven teachers will be needed in the school for the coming term. The school is now under the Barns High School Law and the coming winter under that law the tuition will be free to pupils coming from outside districts to the High School.48

Both high school and elementary school courses were offered out of the 1910 building until it was outgrown in 1923, when a new separate high school building was added on the northeast corner of the block.49

**A New High School - 1923**

The events leading up to the construction of the new Whitewater High School in 1923 are well described in a 2007 article written by Frederic Remington Area Historical Society members, Nick and Pauline Toews:

The old high school was built in 1923. The school board with members - A.S. Finch, Director; Paul Ross, Clerk; J.B. Hazlett, Treasurer - had been discussing the matter of a new school for young people to encourage them to further their opportunities in the work world. It was during these many discussions that it was decided that the board should allow community involvement in the planning process. A school meeting was held Friday, April 13, 1923, for the purpose of discussion on a proposal for a new brick building for high school age students. After the meeting the board circulated a petition which would allocate a bond election to raise $65,000 for a new building, fully furnished and equipped. After the successful petition drive, the board called for the bond election to be held on May 9, 1923. *The Independent* (Whitewater, KS) newspaper encouraged the citizenry to vote for the “interest of the children still in school and yet to come.

“Grades put on a most picturesque and entertaining demonstration and parade in favor of an enlarged and more modern school building. The calico pony rode by Versal Waterfall carrying the U.S. flag headed the procession, the band followed, faculty and part of the pupils in decorated automobiles and noisy horns and after them a long procession of pupils on foot and Joe Lambert as clown. The end of the humorous procession was a tractor pulling a wagon with a hay rack, and basketball players illustrating the “out-of-door court” and auditorium. It was a long march for all the youngsters, but they enjoyed it, as well as the many spectators. Such an ingenious demonstration well deserves a new, handsome, commodious high school we must have” (May 10, 1923, *The* *Independent,* Whitewater, KS).

The bond election was held May 9, 1923 with the result of 224 in favor, and 149 against . . . The school board then proceeded with the issuing of the bonds. The next day, the board met at the Whitewater Flour Mill Office to accept sealed bids to finance the construction of the new school building. Five bonding companies from Wichita, one company from Kansas City, and the local People’s State Bank were bidders at the sale. The People’s Bank of Whitewater was the successful bidder and the community was proud that such a small town bank could finance such a big project.

The August 30, *The Independent* (Whitewater, KS) stated that the construction of the new high school building was going right up and would be ready for occupancy by the second semester. The paper also mentioned that the purpose of the board and the teachers was to keep the standards high and the morals clean so it would be a safe place for the children.

The new high school was declared completed and ready for use as of December 6, 1923. Dedication exercises were held on Tuesday, December 11 at noon. A basket noon meal was provided by everyone with a menu of roast chicken, sandwiches, baked beans served. The board provided the desserts and drinks. Following the bountiful lunch, the patrons examined the new building and equipment. At 2:30 p.m. Dr. W. Kurtz, President of McPherson College, gave the dedicatory address. He was widely known as an excellent speaker. Approximately 500 people attended the service.

The auditorium was officially opened on Wednesday, December 12 when the Junior Class presented the play, “The Fascinating Fanny Brown.” Admission was 25 and 35 cents! The 1924 graduating class purchased the stage curtain for $159.

In the evening the basketball floor was properly initiated when four teams composed of businessmen, the high school, and the American Legion played several rousing games. The board made it clear that the building should be used by the community.

The board of directors sacrificed much of the time and effort in supervising and completing the construction of the excellent building. The new school was the product of the latest designs in school architecture. It was noted that the workmanship that inspired and built the very substantial building should last for a hundred years (December 20, 1923, *The* *Independent,* Whitewater, KS).50

**Greater Opportunities - 1938 and Beyond**

By 1938, Whitewater High School’s enrollment had reached 165; the total number of units taught had increased from 15 ½ to 35 since 1910 when the four year course was first offered. Course offerings had expanded to include subjects like manual training and home economics. The school now also offered many opportunities for inter-class and inter-school leagues, extracurricular activities, and “every kind of competition that brings out in the student the very best qualities.”51 The school had come a long way!

District 95’s Whitewater High School continued to operate as such until United School District (USD) 206 - Remington - was formed in 1961. The Whitewater High School building was used as part of the Remington district, as the high school until 1963 when it was replaced by the new rural Frederic Remington High School located north of Brainerd and then as the middle school until 2007.

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