

NEW LIBERTY SCHOOL

Consolidation was a trend of the future in 1919 and those charged with building a new education building at New Liberty were able to look far enough ahead and see what the future held. They designed their new grade school facility with far more room than was needed at the time.

Thirteen years later the New Liberty independent school district and the Wheatley independent school district merged. Grades 1-6 attended classes at Wheatley and the high school was operated at New Liberty.

Further consolidation was effected in 1932 when the lower six grades were merged with the Owen County school system. The following year, New Liberty High School was established to serve the entire northern Owen County section. The building once again was used for elementary classes when New Liberty was merged into the Owen County High School in the fall of 1951.

The school's days were numbered. When the new elementary facility was completed in 1970, New Liberty Elementary closed its doors forever.

Area residents were justly proud of their school and expressed the hope that somehow the old neighborhood school could be saved. Every prospect was explored but there was no way in which the school could be preserved. The school was doomed.

Two schools existed at New Liberty in 1904-05. A one-room public school and a private subscription school taught by Professor E. G. Stoute met the needs of New Liberty's boys and girls. The Stoute's school was operated in the old college building. When the professor and his wife moved away, New Liberty residents felt it was time to form an independent school district.

Five trustees were chosen. Two were from the Baptist church and two were members of the Disciples Church. The fifth, according to the original agreement, was not to be chosen from among the membership of either church.

H. D. Baker, Dr. George Purdy, B. E. Garvey, E. F. Wright, and Anderson Brock were the first to serve as trustees. The original agreement stated that the old college building was to be used without payment of rent and that the district would be enlarged to reasonable boundaries.

When the new grade school opened September 10, 1906, there were 109 boys and girls eager to acquire knowledge of a fast-changing world. Every effort was made to supply the school with the best teachers obtainable and high standards of study and conduct were enforced. Garvey Kemper was the first graduate of New Liberty School in 1908.

Mr. Barker died in 1916 leaving \$25,000 to the school. This was used to retire bonds and make improvements to the building. Over the years of change, the school maintained a very fine program. Vocational agriculture was added in 1927. The gym was built at a cost of \$15,000 when the high school was established in 1935.

Prior to the closing of the school there were six classrooms in use. Mrs. Harry Greene, head teacher, was a believer in basics. Her efforts were directed toward laying the foundations of education. Her concept of school was that it is a place of learning and she endeavored to keep the frills at a minimum.

Mrs. William R. True taught 5th grade. Mrs. Forcee Lee Jackson taught 4th grade in a room still heated with a pot-bellied stove. Third grade students were taught by Mrs.

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Richard Chappell. Mrs. Curtis Rice was the 2nd grade teacher and Mrs. Fletcher Lusby taught the 1st graders.

At the close of the school loyalty was strong among both students and former students. Many parents, remembering their happy days in New Liberty Elementary, gave good support to the PTA. The annual Halloween party always was a success due to fine cooperation of the parents.

The once-handsome school building in its later years was in a sad condition. The annual Board of Education budget always seemed to need cutting at the end of the school year. Funds designated for maintenance were the first to be eliminated from the Board's budget and needed repairs were left undone.

Heating was a major problem. Boys and girls wore extra clothing on damp cool days and sometimes had to keep overshoes on in order to prevent cold feet. The once proud gym often couldn't be used because of the cold. In one end of the gym stood an old pot-bellied stove. And the condition of the stage had become a discouraging factor when it became time for school plays.

Outdoor toilet facilities were still in use and playground facilities were far below standard. Remodeling of the building would be out of the question, even if funds were available.

New Liberty didn't seem quite the same when the old building was abandoned. Residents of this northern Owen County community will always cherish memories of their school for many years to come.

We sometimes find that the price of progress is high when computed in precious recollections. But progress must come.

With consolidation Owen County now has a primary (1992), elementary (1970), middle school (1985) and high school (the first one in 1951 and the new one in 2002). So ended the era of the community school. These schools offer something no old school can match – modern facilities to meet a modern age. But, those who attended the smaller schools scattered throughout the county still have memories. It is important that we share those memories with our children and grandchildren. For they will never experience what was ours in the community school.