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The History of the Plymouth School - Copyright Information Included

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The History Of The Plymouth School



By
Loretta (Hirt) Doubrava

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HISTORY OF THE PLYMOUTH SCHOOL*

Loretta (Hirt) Doubrava

At the eastern edge of Russell County, Kansas, the Plymouth limestone, one-room school still stands, a monument to the stalwart pioneers who built it over a century ago. In defiance of the ravages of time--violent wind, rain, hail, blizzard, vandalism, and neglect--this school remains as a reminder of the determined pioneers.

The history of the Plymouth School cannot be told by just copying names and statistics from old record books. It would be an injustice to the pioneers not to include how they braved the unknown and how they by hard work and sacrifice made the school possible. The courage and stamina of these people were to be tested many times.

Any building or organization is only as good as the foundation with which it is made. The Plymouth School is not just limestone blocks that were worked and wrenched from the soil of Kansas. The stones were not just placed together with sand and water, but mixed with the spirit of these pioneer people. This foundation is why it has withstood the assault of time.

The Plymouth School and all the one-room schools like it were the birth-places of our present educational system. Later came high schools and then normal schools and colleges.

✓ On a slight knoll on the northern edge of the gently rolling terrain, where the Smoky Hill River valley is five miles wide and just where the land rises to meet the low chain of hills which separate it from the Saline River Valley, the old Plymouth School stands out sharply on the landscape and can be seen for many miles in three directions.

In this prairie, long before the advent of the white man, large herds of buffalo peacefully grazed. Here, still, can be seen buffalo-wallows in a pasture near the school. Here, also, the Pawnee, Otoe, Kans, Cheyenne and other Plains Indians rode their ponies and fought for turns to hunt the buffalo, which sustained the Indians by providing their food, clothing, shelter and tools.

It was in the open prairie, only a mile south of the site of the Plymouth School, that a much-used frontier trail passed that opened up our country to the west. It did not strictly follow the many curves of the Smokey Hill River, but worked its way in a straight direction, parallel to the river.

The trail was first marked by Bourgmond in 1724 who came from the northeast corner of Kansas to where Ellsworth is now located, then followed the Smoky Hill River on into Colorado. Pike and Wilkinson crossed this trail very near the site of the Plymouth School. They traveled in a northeasterly direction on their way to the Pawnee Indian camp near the Nebraska border. This was where they placed the first flag on Kansas soil in 1806. In 1844, Fremont used the trail and later it became known as the Smoky Hill Trail to Pike's Peak. In 1865, it became known as the Butterfield Trail. It was cut deep into the prairie by wagon trains and stage coaches; thousands of settlers, gamblers and traders used it to reach the far west. It lasted until 1870, after which many of the people started using the railroad as a means of transportation. Few wagon trains were known to have used the trail after that date.

The Union Pacific tracks reached as far west as Wilson Springs in 1867. The Indians fought desperately to keep this iron horse from crossing their lands. They seemed to sense that the coming of the white man and his wanton destruction of the buffalo meant the demise of both the buffalo and themselves.

From the Plymouth School site in the early 1860's could be seen an Indian camp. It stood on the highest point near the Smoky Hill River, just before the rolling prairie drops sharply with rock-faced bluffs fifty feet high to the Smoky Hill River, then continued south on to the smoky-blue hills. Below these bluffs were several never-ceasing springs and a well protected place for an Indian winter-buffalo-hunt camp. Descendants of early day pioneers have recalled that at one time the present day wheat field above the river was once covered with an Indian camp. Several tribes would meet to hold council meetings and the younger men of the tribes played games and held pony races.¹

Another historical location which could be seen from the Plymouth School was the site of the Hick's Supply Station on the Butterfield Dispatch Trail.² As early as 1865, pioneers and stage coach drivers could buy supplies and replace their tired horses with fresh ones at the Hick's Station. Indians thought this station an ideal place for them to add to their string of horses by attacking it periodically. The horses were kept in a sod shed near a rather steep-indentured hill. These indentures were open-faced dug out places in the bank of the hill which were covered over with a sod roof where the horses were kept. The Indians would come storming over the tops of the roofs only to be picked off by the guns of the men who were waiting for them.

Although 100 years old, the trail can still be seen in a pasture northwest of the old Hick's Station site. The trail was worn deep into the prairie by

¹A map made in 1849 shows a Pawnee Indian trail, starting from their home camp on the Platte River in Nebraska, coming down into Kansas and curving slightly to the west, in line with the Waconda Spring Indian camp site, then on to this spring and then curving back to the southeast.

²The Butterfield Trail was recently marked by carving the date and trail name on limestone fence posts at one mile intervals throughout Kansas.

hundreds of pioneer wagons and stage coaches. Even the passage of time cannot erase this mark of history. The Union Pacific Railroad was later built one quarter mile from the Plymouth School and along the route of the Butterfield Trail.

The history of the Plymouth School begins with the migration of a group of Pennsylvania German-Dutch pioneers. In April, 1872, less than twenty families migrated to Bosland, Kansas (later known as Attica, then Wilson). The train ride was a long and miserable one. The train consisted of two passenger coaches and three box-cars. Other families later arrived by covered wagon. For many this was the beginning of a new life.

✓ The dream of homesteads and schools for children was conceived in the minds and hearts of these people long before they arrived in Kansas. For many of them the dream began in Europe, where they were harassed by political strife, religious oppression, constant war, military draft, drought and in many cases, hunger. It was with high hope and expectation that they came to America and later to Kansas. Upon arriving in America most of them had no money. They were allowed to take only a small amount out of Europe with them.

For a short time they remained in the eastern states working at factory jobs for small pay. Some worked in the gold and silver mines in Michigan. One woman worked long hours in a boarding house. She was the cook, making many loaves of bread, roasting twenty pounds of meat each day and making forty lunches a day for the men who worked in the mines. One family had been in America since 1785 but wanted to move to the new frontier that promised so much.

These new settlers brought with them only a few necessities, such as a sodbuster plow, stone-mason tools, and some clothing. Very little furniture was brought; perhaps a chest of drawers, a trunk, a clock and usually a family

rocking chair or stove. Other furniture was homemade or purchased in the new settlement of Bosland. One thoughtful pioneer woman even brought along a sack of peach seeds to be planted on their new homestead (later during the hot winds of summer, this family had to carry water 200 yards from the spring to keep the tender young orchard alive).

The arrival, for some of the families, was saddened by the deaths of several infants and children. The dead were taken from the boxcars and buried in the newly established cemetery a short distance from Bosland.

Many of these first homesteaders had lived in the hilly and forested countries of Europe or in the Black Forest of Germany. It was quite a shock and nearly overwhelming for them to start out from Bosland to their assigned homesteads and be greeted with nothing but waving grass as far as the eye could see. An occasional small cluster of young cottonwood trees would appear in a small draw as they came near to their homestead lands a few miles west of town.

The scene of the Smoky Hill River valley was beautiful to behold. The rolling prairie was about five miles in width. To the north was a low range of hills, which later provided, after much work and effort on the settlers' part, the limestone with which some built their permanent houses, barns, fence posts, and the Plymouth School. To the south lay the beautiful low hills encased in a smoky haze.

The settlers also found that Kansas was a country of many weather moods. On some days the hot summer winds, or the bitter cold winter winds, would whip with fury over the land while on the next day a gentle and tranquil breeze or complete quiet might engulf the prairie.

After seeing their new locations and helping to decide where the houses were to be built, the women returned to Bosland to stay in the boxcars until a shelter had been put up on their claims. There was never much choice as

to where the site would be. It was located near a spring and where a part dugout in a bank could be used as part of the house. In a draw or low part of the land, shallow water could be found and a shallow well was hand dug and lined with rock. Often a small building of stone was built over the spring and it was used to keep the milk and food cool by standing the containers in the slowly moving spring water. The wells were also used for this purpose by placing the food in a bucket and suspending it into the water in the well.

The one-room houses had to be the size specified by the government for homestead claims. The house was to be at least twelve feet by twelve feet with one window and one door. Some of the pioneers with children made them a few feet larger and added another window and door.

A few of the houses were made of sod cut from the prairie, others from flat rock which could be found in a few out-croppings on the prairie. The roofs were first covered with boards and then with sod. One pioneer put up a complete straw house, using cottonwood saplings for forms and filling them with tall grass gathered from the prairie; he nearly froze the first winter and as soon as possible erected a limestone house which is still partly standing.

One typical homestead house (inside measurements) was thirteen feet by thirteen and one-half feet. It had one small window to the west and one to the east, each 27 by 27 inches. The one wooden door was in the southeast corner and the other one close to it on the south wall. The walls were flat field rock, a double layer 15 inches wide put together with clay. The original roof consisted of boards covered with sod and held up by a large hewn log spanning the length of the house. The floor was merely packed dirt. The chimney was just a length of stove pipe stuck up through the sod roof. The wood for the windows and door frames was held in place by drilling holes in

the larger rocks and inserting wooden plugs. Then a square nail was driven through the frame into this plug. The same method was used in constructing the Plymouth Schoolhouse. The iron brackets which held the two homemade bunk beds were fastened to the rock wall on the north side. The parents slept on the lower one, two children slept on the top, and one or two children slept on the floor on a grass-filled tick mattress.

The house did not have a lot of headroom, although the people who lived there were fairly tall. This couple had four larger children and a small baby when they arrived. They lost the baby from croup and it was buried in Bosland. It is difficult to imagine that seven people lived in this small space, with even more children later.

The granddaughter of this family recalls a story told to her many times. While attending to his work in Wilson as a stone-mason, her grandfather left his family alone on the homestead. During his absence men were seen looking over the family horse. It was tied to a stake in the draw east of the house. That night, fearful that the men might return and steal the horse, the mother, with the help of the older children, managed to take the horse through the one-room house into a back, dug-out storage room. They did this for several nights until her grandfather's return. This homestead one-room house built in 1873 is still standing and the clay used between the rocks as mortar can be seen between the now falling rocks.

Although the colony arrived in the spring of 1872, time did not allow the first crops to be put out until 1873. The settlers used sod-buster plows pulled by oxen. It was difficult work to keep the plow in the virgin prairie sod.

After the first crops were established, the settlers' attention could then turn toward establishing a school district and building a school. The first meeting was held informally at one of the homesteads.

Wilson's first school was two and one-half miles to the southeast and was built in 1873. This hastily built school in Wilson was stone, put up without mortar by an inexperienced builder and was almost immediately blown down. It was replaced in 1874 by the same stone-masons who worked on the Plymouth School during that same year. Thus, the Plymouth School District was not the first district to be formed, but it was the first school built on the eastern edge of Russell County, Kansas. It was located near the small settlement of Bosland. The four other schools later to be built within a radius of six miles were started after 1878. Dorrance had the nearest school six miles to the west.

Records show that on January 10, 1874, District Number 10:

Formed a school district to be known as school district No. 10, county of Russell, State of Kansas, and bounded as follows. Beginning at the NE corner of section One, Township No. 14, South of Range No. 11 West of the sixth principle meridan running thence west to the NW corner of Section 3 same township and range thence south to the SW corner of section No. 15 same twp. and range, thence north to the place of beginning. Assured the formation notices.¹

Another entry shows:

"February 2, 1874. Received and filed the endorsement on the formation notice and issued notices for first district meeting to be held February 14, 1874."²

The third entry read:

"February 16, 1874. Received, filed and recorded the acceptances of office of the board elected in accordance with the above mentioned notices."³

The Plymouth School was officially launched. The first board members were John Dillinger, Clerk; Michael Bolan, Director; Wm. S. Miller, Treasurer. They all had Bosland, Ellsworth County addresses.

¹H. Colby Hibbard, County Supt.

²H. Colby Hibbard, County Supt.

³H. Colby Hibbard, County Supt.

Other meetings followed and the plan for a limestone post-rock school building was outlined. It was the first school in the eastern edge of Russell County and the first one in Plymouth township, so the board felt justified in naming the new school Plymouth.

The settlers had discovered that a good layer of various grades of limestone lay just a few feet beneath the soil on the low hills to the north of the chosen school site. The site was located in the center of the German-Dutch colony, on land homesteaded by Micheal Bolan. Twenty-five dollars was paid for one acre of land in the corner of the quarter. This location was close to the trail used by settlers going from Dorrance to Bosland (Wilson).

As soon as the spring plowing and planting were completed, a few men of the colony began hand digging to locate the beds of limestone. The hard work then began: two to three feet of soil had to be removed and hauled away from atop the layer of limestone. The stone had to be marked with lines nine inches apart (which were easy to handle lengths). Holes were drilled in the marks every four to five inches and as deep as the widths. The idea was to finish with a fairly square block. Next came the tedious work of breaking the stone out in a straight line. This was done by filling each hole with two wedges, so shaped that another wedge, the plug, could be driven down through the others (called plug and feathers). By striking each plug with a hammer, over and over again, the force became great enough to break the rock. This had to be done very carefully, applying the same pressure on all of the holes.

After the rock was cracked loose in long blocks, it had to be lifted and removed by several men. These heavy blocks were placed on piles and then a different group of men began to crack the long blocks into the desired lengths. The Plymouth School was built of stone blocks varying from twelve

to eighteen inches in length. The blocks of stone had to be dressed in either a straight dressing, or in one which took more time, called rounded or fancy dressing. The straight type was used on the Plymouth School, as time was growing short and settlers wanted the school to be done in time for the fall term.

The finished rocks were then hauled in wagons pulled by teams consisting of horses and oxen to the school site. The first limestone bed did not prove to have enough of the hard limestone needed, so another bed was located and opened to the east.

Other men of the colony, meanwhile, had staked out and dug the foundation for the school. The three stone-masons, John Dellinger, Michael Shipp and Jacob Sackman, who had been working on three other schools, returned and began their work on the Plymouth School.

It took courage to continue the work on the Plymouth School because the pioneers were experiencing the grasshopper plague that summer of 1874. Nevertheless, the work on the school building continued.

The mortar holding the stones together (over 100 years) was made of a good grade of sand, mixed with water and the correct amount of unslaked lime. ^{best made} The cement had to be transported from Bosland (Wilson). All the wood materials used in the building, the window panes, and the few factory-made bricks that were used in the chimney were brought to the site by team and wagons. The shingles were of good quality because the school was re-shingled just once around 1900. Upon inspection, the wood floor appears to have been replaced at least one time.

The walls were laid with two limestone blocks side by side, making the walls 18 inches thick and able to resist the strong, sometimes tornadic winds of Kansas. The ceiling was 10½ feet high and was finished with narrow strips of wainscoting. This high ceiling made it hard to heat in the cold winter months.

The inside walls were covered with plastering (1½ inches thick) as smooth as glass. The plastic was light grey in color and was left unpainted for a number of years. *Later painted light blue - a color favored by*

The outside dimensions of the school were 26 feet by 28 feet. The eighteen inch thick walls made the inside space slightly smaller. The school had large windows 29 inches by 68 inches, allowing sufficient light for the children to study. These windows had shutters on the outside which could be closed for added warmth during a blizzard and for protection against glass breakage during the summer months while school was closed.

The wood for windows, door frames, and baseboard was held in place by drilling holes in the larger rocks and inserting wooden plugs. Then square nails were driven through the frame into these plugs.

There were three windows each on the north and south sides as well as two on the east on either side of the door. (The door had a small glass transom above.) The door stoop was a three by four feet by ten inch thick slab of hard limestone. Hundreds of feet going over the threshold all the years have worn it down ~~to~~ three inches in the center.

On the inside of the school two four-inch-wide boards were placed horizontally between the door and the window. Each board was 53 inches from the floor and had spaced hooks on it. The smaller children had to jump to reach the hooks.

One window-sill on the east side held the water bucket with a dipper used by all the children. It is not known how many colds and diseases were spread by this practice. The pioneer mothers relied heavily on the old time herbal remedies. The mothers required their children to wear small asafedity bags attached to a string around their necks. The small bags held material gathered from beneficial plants found on the prairie. By inhaling the fumes it was supposed to ward off disease. One little girl detested this and found a hiding place for her bag under a rock along the way to school. She would replace it

on the walk home. She evidently wore it long enough to eliminate any tell-tale sniffles or colds, or just naturally was healthy. Her mother was the Plymouth community's source for information on the use of herbs for curative as well as preventive measures.

In back of the teacher's desk was the blackboard, 16½ feet long and three feet wide. It was not slate, but just a very smooth wall painted black and outlined with a narrow board. A thicker board was on the bottom to hold the chalk and erasers.


The school was sparsely furnished. The large pot-bellied stove was in the middle of the room. The stove pipes led from this central location to the west end of the room to a chimney. These were held by suspended ceiling wires. The stove did not furnish much warmth to the children near the walls and was too hot for those near the stove. Available wood and some buffalo chips were used for fuel that first winter. Coal was the most plentiful fuel after its' discovery south of Wilson.

There was a homemade wooden cupboard painted dark grey that held the few textbooks. During the first term, the teacher's desk was thought to have been a table with an ordinary chair furnished by one of the settlers. Later a masterteacher's desk was used. It was a larger replica of the children's first desks which seated two or three children in each desk. There was a recitation bench. If there were not enough desks a few of the children had to be seated on benches. They all used slates and slate pencils.

This brings to mind a story told by the granddaughter of one of the original colonists from Pennsylvania. Her Uncle Ivan told about a trade he made while attending the Plymouth School. It seems one of the other boys had a couple of slate pencils he wanted very much. Ivan offered to trade a yard of sausage for the pencils. His family had just done the winter butchering and he talked

his mother into frying up a yard of sausage for him. He took it to school and traded it for the pencils. Most of the yard of sausage was then eaten by its' new owner. It is doubtful whether the teacher was able to get any answers from the stuffed boy the rest of the afternoon, or if he was able to stay in school the rest of the day.

A small limestone coal shed was later attached to the southwest corner of the school. In front of the door were three huge flat slabs of thick hard limestone. Two wide iron shoe-scrappers were on each side. A line of limestone post-lengths were joined together and laid on the ground on two sides of the school. The purpose of this was to beautify the school by planting flowers there. However, it proved to be a hazard to the younger children as they raced around the school playing various games. They were forever falling over them and giving the already overworked teacher more problems.

 On opposite corners of the west edge of the school ground, boys' and girls' toilets were built. Each was made of wood and placed over deep holes. There were small wooden cubicals with a seat built across one side. The seats consisted of two or three holes cut in the top with wooden covers. The toilet paper was not colored or flowered or scented. It was any kind of paper available at the time. *The most common used was a mail-order catalog.* No one spent much time in these very necessary places. They were freezing in the winter and hot in the summer. Many of the little girls were afraid to use them alone and had to be accompanied by an older sister. The children were sure there were snakes in the murky darkness below.

Hitching posts were also located in the schoolyard. These were made of limestone. They were left in long lengths and placed upright in spaced intervals fifteen feet from the school on three sides. They were rounded on top and had a hole drilled through the post near the top. These were used to secure the horses that pulled the wagons and later the buggies used for transportation by the children who lived further from the school. They were also used by the larger boys during recess to play leap-frog and for tag stations.

The school well was hand-dug and lined with rocks. Fortunately, it was just a few feet from the school. A bucket was used to pull the water out at first; later a cement slab was placed over the well with a hand pump. The water was clear and good.

Each fall, shortly before the opening of school, an important job of the adult community was to ensure the safety of the well water. This was done by deliberately pumping the colored stale water for a half-hour each day until pure, sweet-smelling, colorless well water appeared.

A fire-guard was plowed around the school-yard. This guard was the only protection the pioneers had if a fire was started on the open prairie from a hot-box on the train. The school was especially vulnerable since the railroad was just a short distance away.

Kansas, in the fall of 1874, was tranquil. The first day of school was beautiful. It was a joyful day for the German-Dutch settlers. Knowing the value of education, it was a dream come true--at last a school for their children. The men were glad the back-breaking work was done. The children were happy to be able to be with their neighbor's friends and to make new acquaintances. To the pioneer children, school was an exciting and welcome adventure. It was the only method they had of learning about the world outside of their small community.

On that first autumn morning, a small handbell was rung by the teacher. It could be heard sharp and clear for some distance on the prairie by children who were on their way to school. Some children had to walk two or more miles. Other parents brought the smaller children in wagons, picking up their neighbor's children along the way.

Upon arriving at school, the children deposited their lunches on benches placed on either side of the door. The lunches were carried in empty syrup pails, paper sacks, grape-baskets or any type of container available. They

consisted of homemade dark bread or waffles; sometimes spread with lard or molasses. (Some of the pioneers tried unsuccessfully to grow a type of sugar cane. Molasses was made by a neighbor east of the school who started a mill for this purpose.) One time a family bought jelly in a wooden bucket at the store and this was a great treat. Another family managed to separate a buffalo calf from a small heard, butchered it and divided the meat. That was an unusual menu in the lunch boxes. Later, as times got better and farmers raised their own meat animals, the children had meat sandwiches and homemade cheese. Wild plums and currants made good jelly for sandwiches. Some children brought homemade cookies and doughnuts. Much swapping was done; one girl always traded her homegrown and home-canned dill pickle for a friend's store-bought marshmallow cookie.

Some of the ethnic children enjoyed the taste of the garlic in their lunches. The overwhelming aroma of garlic announced their arrival and that the winter butchering had just been done. *The strong garlic aroma overpowered the usual stuffy chalk-dust odor and remained the dominant odor for the rest of the day*
 The parents who brought their children that first day inspected the Plymouth School and were pleased. The day was filled with bustling activity. Children found places to sit, became acquainted with the few textbooks and received their first lesson assignments. Excited voices and laughter filled the little schoolhouse. These pioneer children were attending their very first school since arriving in Kansas. The wide-eyed and eager to explore youngsters inspected the school they were to use for eight years.

It was the questioning anticipation that the children looked the teacher over and it was with some apprehension that the teacher returned their gaze. It was soon established that the teacher was boss and was to be obeyed and respected. This was the day that the Plymouth School become the starting point of formal education for the descendants of the men who had built it.

Even before the fall term began the board sent in a report, by John A. Dellinger, for the school year 1874. It stated that there were 25 students between five and twenty-one years of age residing in District 10. There were eleven girls and fourteen boys.

The report was quite long and contained such questions as: Is your school furnished with suitable record books? Is your school furnished with Webster's Unabridged Dictionary? These questions were left unanswered. It showed that there was a 1% mill levy used for the Teacher's Fund and nothing in the Building Fund.

X The first German-Durch families who settled Russell County in the spring of 1872, and were responsible for the existence of Plymouth School were named Dellinger, Miller, Bolan, Shipp, Sellers, Skinner, Myers, Slocum, and Hastings.

↓ They were joined shortly by families of Martinke, Zivonik, Chrudinsky, Novak, Diessroth, Mück, Eslinger, Towle, Thielen, Deges, and Veverka and a few other families who remain unknown. *Phoebe & Bach - 2*

The subjects taught at Plymouth that first year were basic: reading, penmanship, arithmetic, descriptive geography, physical geography, and physiology. Other subjects which were taught were U.S. history, declamation, drawing, algebra, and bookkeeping. Music was taught by singing familiar songs parents taught their children (without accompaniment).

The clerk's report in 1875 listed the same schoolboard members, but having Wilson addresses instead of the original Bosland. The stone school was listed as having a value of \$900.00. The amount of bonds issued was \$1200.00; the amount of present indebtedness was \$1320.00; the teacher's salary paid was male \$30.00 and female \$30.00 (this would indicate there were two teachers); 34 weeks taught; 14 male students, 12 female students. The mills levied for teacher's wages jumped sharply to 10 mills and incidentals to 2½ mills. This report also listed textbooks and authors.

The reports that followed over the next few years were similar. In 1877, there were still two teachers, a few textbooks were added, there were 22 pupils, a book on orthography was added, indebtedness was reduced to \$600.00, \$68.59 was paid for fuel and a wooden box of maps was purchased. The maps were placed on a south wall, so that many of the students carried the illusion that Canada was to the south and Florida was in the northern part of the United States. In 1877 the report had 36 unnamed students and an average daily attendance of 20, exclusive of the two teachers. One of the teachers had a certificate classified as Grade One, the other as Grade Two. There was still no school dictionary.

There were no school census reports to be found for any of the schools in Russell County from 1878 to 1889, but a record book shows a listing of all the teachers and their salaries beginning in 1881. Another record book lists all the board members through the years. From 1872 to 1878, the members remained the same. Then new names appeared and some old ones reappeared. In 1897, Mrs. John Walz was elected and remained on the board for five years.

In 1888-89 the census was sent in by Clerk, W.S. Myers. The teacher, John Howes, had a Third Grade Certificate and taught 32 weeks at a salary of \$40.00 per month. This teacher placed an announcement in the Wilson Echo which read: "Prof. Howes will take private scholars in shorthand, arithmetic, etc." At the annual meeting on July 25, 1889, a vote was unanimous against the uniformity of textbooks and, for the first time, the full names of the children were listed. The family names were Sellers, Dellinger, Miller, Bolan, Myers, Hastings, Deges, Martinke, Brown, Thielen, Veverka, Clark, Briggs, Howes (sisters of the teacher), Vancura, Walz, Smith, Novak, Small, Fisher, and Vance. From 1890 to 1898, census reports show new family names of Eslinger, Pasek, Stopple, Seirer, Holderbaum, Hrabick, Kalmert and Whitmer.

In the book of records a long list of graduates appears. From 1889-1903 it lists: Lewis Brown, Wm. Martinek, Alice Bolan, Wm. Miller, Jr., and Annie Hastings.

The following became teachers: Wm. F. Bolan, Harry Myers (attended State University), Bertha Miller, Anne Dellinger (went to State Normal at Hays), Belle Sellers, Julia Sellers, Mary Sellers, Wm. Dellinger, Ada Sellers, Edna Hastings, Sarah Hastings. Other graduates were: Charlotte Miller, Nettie Shenk, Wm. Vancura, Jenny Brown, Lilah and Lillian Bolan, Bertha Dellinger (became a nurse), Amos Veverka, and Anne Veverka.

Other students graduated, but were missing in the record book. Names that should have been included were: Deges, Thielen, Walz, Vancura, Novak. One outstanding student was Alice Dellinger, who attended Theological Seminary in New York and became an ordained minister and evangelist.

The girl students enjoyed singing about Civil War and the sad songs of Stephen Foster. Some of the titles were: "When You Are In Trouble", "Hear The Engine Puffing", "Fight For Truth And Right", and "Winona". Familiar Christmas songs, hymns and many charming and delightful songs of that era, whose verses tried to impart a lesson were sung by all.

As a general rule all the students liked and respected their teachers. They studied hard and learned much from the few textbooks available. They were grateful to the teachers who saw to it that some of the material was absorbed into their minds. Many of the teachers were fondly remembered by their students.

By some strange quirk of the human mind, former students seem to remember unimportant things. Perhaps it was because they are happy memories or painful ones connected with a certain teacher that made an impression. One such memory of Plymouth School illustrates this point:

If any of the older boys became a little too boisterous the male teacher would go to a draw a few hundred yards from the school where several young cottonwood trees were growing. They provided just the right size switches. When applied with enough pressure to the proper place on the anatomy of the rebellious boy, it would provide just enough persuasion to convince the boy that foolishness was not allowed.

Another rather painful episode which turned out well shows the good understanding of one of the teachers. This teacher had the students write a letter as an assignment. One girl wrote a letter to the teacher, confessing that she was the one who accidentally broke the window in the school, but had not admitted it because she was afraid of being punished at home by her stern father. She got the best grade in penmanship and the highest grade in class. She learned that honesty paid, but she did not reveal if her father ever heard of the broken window. Perhaps the understanding teacher kept her secret.

With as many as fifty-nine pupils, and all subjects in eight grades to teach in one small room, the teachers had to have great stamina and dedication. Just to keep order was a tremendous task. The teacher also had to check all the assigned lessons and the progress that each pupil made. He or she had to bring in the water, keep the school swept and dusted, bring in the fuel, and keep the fire going. Some of the students thought it an honor to help the teacher and would cheerfully get a bucket of coal when asked. As it also afforded an opportunity to escape from lessons for a few minutes. The erasers were often cleaned by a student after school. This meant taking them outside and pounding them against each other until no more chalk dust emerged. This was a disagreeable task and ended up by just transferring the dust from the erasers to the child.

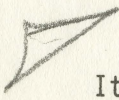
One child attended Plymouth only a short time. Her parents hoped she would learn some Bohemian words from the few Bohemian families who had joined the German-Dutch colony. She did not, but she did remember being slapped hard by another little girl.

There is usually a self-appointed clown in every school, and Plymouth was no exception. There was a game which involved spinning a button on a string between two hands. One day when the teacher was busy at the blackboard, the boy clown decided to provide some entertainment for the students seated near

him. He was seated in back of a little girl with long red hair. He tried to see how close he could come to the girl's hair. This was amusing to the children who were watching, and annoying to the girl. Carried away by the success of his performance he got too close to her hair. Before he could pull the whirling string away, the button got caught in her hair and pulled it hard. Quite a commotion and noise ensued. It was not recalled how he was reprimanded.

At recess the Plymouth school had the usual amount of squabbles and pranks among the children. There was no playground equipment. The outside games were baseball, crack-the-ship, Andy-high-over, follow-the-leader, and marble games. When the weather was too cold, the children stayed inside and played spin-the-bottle, drop-the-handkerchief or upset-the-apple cart. This usually ended in an "upset" teacher and schoolroom. When the games created too much bedlam, the teacher would suggest word games, spelling contests or charades.

During the winter the pioneer parents would keep a wary eye on the sky. If a blizzard seemed imminent, they would go to the school early with teams and wagons and usually bring the children home--in a half-frozen state--before the storm hit the prairie with shocking fury. The teacher would leave early, too. She usually stayed with the family closest to the school. This caused a little jealousy among the children who were not members of the chosen family.



The Plymouth School was used for a variety of events other than academic. It had a religious life and a social life as well. It was used for community meetings of all kinds. In 1879 an announcement in The Wilson Echo stated, "Quarterly meeting: There will be a quarterly meeting of the Free Baptist Church at the Plymouth School November 9."

The Christmas programs were well attended, as were the occasional box suppers. Whenever feasible the Plymouth School held monthly meetings which consisted of recitations, songs and dialogues. The Lyceums were very important and were received with much excitement and anticipation.

The subject of an 1884 Lyceum was: "Resolved that the Indians have been worse treated by the hands of the whites than the Negroes." Another stated the question for debate as: "Resolved that the right to vote should be denied those who cannot read and write the English language." Still another announcement stated: "Resolved that the immigration of southern Negroes to Kansas will prove a benefit to the state." Each family would bring an oil lamp to the school for the evening programs. In this manner the teacher mixed education with pleasure, making it more enjoyable for the student.

A picture taken in 1894 shows fifty pupils with the teacher and three school board members. It appeared that the graduates holding diplomas were quite old. This does not mean that they were "hard-to-learn" or retarded. Many students were unable to attend regularly because they had family obligations, such as herding cattle on the unfenced prairie. Some attended longer to be able to go through the new textbooks that were added from year to year. The taking of this picture was probably preceded by a community last-day dinner with a short program of a few songs, some declamations and the presentation of diplomas to the proud graduates.

Some of the graduates became teachers. Several of the students had become sweethearts because of the friendships formed during the eight years together. Two couples were later married and began farming. The courtship of one couple did not turn out as well because of parental objection and religious differences.

The requirements for teachers improved with the years. The first ones had only to be graduated from grade school and take an oral test by answering questions asked by two learned men or the county superintendent. By 1880 they were required to spend a few days at a normal institute held at the county seat. Most of the teachers in the Plymouth School were from Wilson, Ellsworth County, Kansas.

In 1880 an announcement appeared in The Wilson Echo: "Professor T. Pickett will conduct Normal Institute at Ellsworth." Another stated: "The regular teacher's examinations will be held in Ellsworth April 28, 1894 commencing at 8 o'clock A.M. in the stone school corner of Douglas Ave. and Second St."

In 1895 there were 88 teachers enrolled in the normal institute for teachers in Ellsworth County. The teachers, after passing an examination, received First, Second, and Third Grade Certificates according to how much time they spent at the normal institute. That year The Wilson Echo also stated that the Wilson School welcomed children from out of the district at \$1.00 per child per month, and that all schools were going to close in March.

The Plymouth School, up to 1900, always had a large attendance. There were three years when the school had two teachers--the first two years, 1874 and 1875, then again in 1890 when the number of pupils was at its peak.

About 1890, as more land was broken and put into crops, the prairie began to disappear. Quarters became outlined with limestone rock posts and were fenced with barbed-wire by individual owners. The wagon trail from Dorrance to Wilson, just a short distance south of the school, could no longer be used. The wagons and buggies and early day cars had to use the narrow-graded township road which passed fifty feet north of the school. This road became a quagmire when it rained and completely filled with snow in the winter.

In 1904, school enrollment diminished sharply and Plymouth School was closed until 1912, when it was reopened for one year. During this period of closure, children were transferred to Wilson and Fairmount Schools. Then in 1915 Plymouth School was once again reopened and remained open continuously until 1936.

By this time the walls had been painted a medium grey color. A new golden-oak teacher's desk and a swivel chair had been purchased and new style individual desks for the children were added. The seventeen encyclopedia-type books, The Book of Knowledge, was added. These were the only reference

books the school ever had. The shutters had long been replaced by diamond-shaped, large-type hail screens.

Teachers' salaries from 1915 to 1936 started at \$50.00 per month upward to \$90.00 in 1921. This was the highest pay in the history of the school. Salaries, however, reverted to \$55.00 per month in 1936, the year the school closed.

In the mid 1920's, an organ was acquired and a heavy tin shield three and one half feet wide was placed around the old stove on three sides in a circular fashion. This improved the heat circulation. The only hot lunches the school ever had were made on the large top of this stove. The few children would bring soup or cocoa from home to reheat, or a potato to bake (it was usually half raw, or burnt on one side).

The old grey library cupboard now held a Normal Teacher monthly magazine along with The Book of Knowledge and a flag (raised daily, weather permitting). A telephone to Wilson was installed.

It was about this time that the first transcontinental highway was visible one mile south. It was parallel to the old Smoky Hill Trail and in some places less than a quarter of a mile from it. The highway followed the fenced section lines. It was a sanded, narrow road marked only by mile and turn signs. For a short time it detoured past the Plymouth School. A few years later the corners became curves, it was paved and became known as U.S. Highway 40.

During the 1920's there were not enough pupils to have a Christmas program, however; students exchanged gifts and the teachers would give each student a sack containing candy, nuts and an orange. During one Christmas season the teacher substituted a large coconut for the orange. The children politely thanked her but did not know what to do with it--nor did their mothers! So, many coconuts were put away in cupboards until discovered later in the spring.

One family drilled a hole in one and drained the milk; the shell was pounded open and the white flesh removed and tested. No one was impressed and the coconut never became a popular food in Wilson, Kansas.

About this time the school was repainted a drab tan and scrim curtains were added to the bottom half of the windows. The only playground equipment the school ever had was also purchased. It was a homemade swing hung on a frame of 4 x 4 inch lumber. The few students remaining had to take turns on the swing.

A small shed was built on the south end of the school yard to provide shelter for the horses that pulled buggies used for transporting the children when they did not walk.

Smoking was forbidden anywhere on the school yard. One of the older boys used this rule as an excuse to play a trick on the teacher. The boy started a small feed fire in a corner of the horseshed. He hoped the teacher would see the smoke and think the boys were smoking. The plan was not too successful and he was fortunate that he did not set the barn on fire.

In the late 1920's some second generation students returned to the Plymouth School to teach.

In the Plymouth School the day was always started with the flag salute. Discipline was strictly enforced in the school and silence was required unless a class was reciting lessons. In the fall of each year students knew that silence was to reign in the school, but the cheerful crickets beneath the base boards did not. The room would be very quiet then a cricket would begin singing loud and clear. After a while this would become annoying, so on a signal from the teacher the student nearest the noisy cricket would leave his desk and go and kick the baseboard. The startled cricket would be quiet for a short time, only to resume a few minutes later. This was repeated a few times until either the boy or the cricket tired.

The county superintendent managed to visit the Plymouth School twice a year for an unannounced inspection. In the later years, children who graduated had to go to the county seat to receive their diplomas. The last day of school was celebrated with a picnic lunch on the Smoky Hill River.

Arts and crafts were taught on Friday afternoon in the Plymouth School. The art and crafts curriculum included painting with water colors and making baskets from raffia and reeds.

~~II~~ The history of the Plymouth School would not be complete without mentioning the colorful gypsies who used the school grounds during the summer months. Shortly after school closed in the spring, the gypsy caravan of four or five covered wagons with a string of extra horses would pull into the school yard. The gypsy men would visit the surrounding farms trying to trade horses with the farmers. The women, usually two of them, would visit the farms on another day and ask the housewife if she had a extra cup of lard she would give them, or some extra vegetables, or perhaps an old tough rooster for soup. The smart housewife always kept the second gypsy woman in her line of vision while the first one did the talking and checked to see if anything within reach of the two women was missing after they left. This particular caravan of gypsies was, however, honest. The school was never entered and nothing was ever taken. Perhaps the heavy hail screens on the windows acted as a deterrent, or perhaps the gypsies wanted to return again and use the water and grounds the next summer.

This brings to mind the episode of two little girls who were left alone at the school one noon hour. The male teacher and the few boys walked a half-mile from the school to explore the remains of one of the original homesteads. The little girls grew tired of coloring pictures. They thought it was time for the teacher to be returning and began to panic when they remembered the stories told to them about gypsies taking little children. Thinking the gypsies might return, they decided to go down the road a short distance to a farm house. They did not walk down the road, but cringed low in

the ditch as they hurried away from the school. The nice lady listened to their fears. She gave them milk and cookies and assured them that the teacher would be back at the school and everything would be alright when they returned.

It was ironic that when the ancient stove was replaced in the early 1930's, at a cost of \$45.00, the new one was only used for a short time. The great depression was in progress. The dust storms and drought were also having a devastating effect on farmers in the Plymouth School District. With only three pupils of school age left, it was not feasible to reopen the school. So that spring when the school term was over, the teachers simply locked the door and Plymouth School was never reopened. The school windows were soon broken by vandals and in a short time the furnishings had completely vanished. It was as though a strong Kansas wind had gone through the school and swept it clean. It was used for wheat storage for a short period of time.

The strong building has withstood the forces of nature and neglect for over a century. The dream of a few determined German-Dutch emigrants now stands empty and useless, a tribute to one of the birthplaces of the American educational system on the western frontier.

The school educated and influenced approximately one hundred-fifty children for eight years of their lives. ²³ Thirty-two or more of these became teachers, others took up equally worthy professions.

Plymouth School is remembered with affection by many of its former students. The children who attended this school might now be considered underprivileged, but they did not know this. They learned all they could and were happy for the opportunity.

Plymouth School has always been in the hub of busy activity as its lifespan progressed from wagon-trains to jet planes. Today this century old limestone one-room school stands surrounded by wheat fields, not a vast empty prairie. The fields are worked by large tractors, not with plows pulled by oxen.

The old school seems now to stare out on the land with hollow vacant eyes, like the vary old, patiently waiting for death. It seems oblivious to the busy world that rushes by on the new Interstate 70 Highway, one-half mile north and the old Highway 40 to the south. Neither does it see the long trains of freight cars filled with golden grain from our wheat fields. They rumble past on the same old Union Pacific Railroad that preceded the birth of the school; nor does it hear the jet planes above.

Each spring there are no more proud and happy graduates and no more mysterious gypsies in the summer. Each fall the early autumn sunshine filters through the open windows into a room filled with nothingness. A late summer sparrow flits through the windows, a wasp lazily flies back to its nest in the corner. But if she closes her eyes she can sense the ghostly pioneer children at their desks and their whispers.

The Plymouth School stands as a reminder of the pioneers. Even when every hand-shapped stone that was wrenched from the Kansas soil by the first German-Dutch emigrants tumbels back to the earth, it will not die into the past. Part of the school, its priceless heritage of education, will be passed from generation to generation and will never die. Its spirit remains.

Orvy Welch has letter - said his grandfath^{er} and Grandmother both were baptized at Services in the Plymouth School in which the Methodists held regular meetings until the Wilson Methodist church was built in _____

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