

Education in Martin County: A Look At The Past

Education in Martin County is a very important and frequently discussed topic. Looking back in time at the March 10, 1914, edition of the Martin County Sentinel, A. N. Fancher tells of the history of education in the county prior to that date.

He states that in the early days, there were few if any records kept of the first schools, and the state law governing the formation and maintenance of district schools was vague and uncertain. Before the territory became a state, the old township method of forming and controlling school districts was in force.

In 1858, after the territory became a state, the legislature enacted the county system which was at that time regarded with a great deal of skepticism. The pioneers of Martin County had little use for school laws as they had no township or county organization and no school funds available to them. They were, however, determined not to be deprived in the area of education.

Fancher's article describes Center Chain as a leader of the time. As early as 1856 there were several children in this settlement. The children gathered together at different houses in the settlement with the women settlers acting as teachers. In 1860, a log addition was made to one of the houses, which was then made into a school room. Their intent was to make it a very comfortable and desirable room for this purpose, as well as for religious and public gatherings. At that time, Center Chain was far ahead of other settlements in the county. According to Fancher's article, the entire population of what was then Fairmont consisted of Henry Pratt, his wife and four children, Mr. Budd, and Mr. Hinkle, both bachelors.

A joint district comprising nearly half the town of Verona in Faribault County and all of the town of Center Creek in Martin County was the first district organized in the county, and the only one to be organized under the township system in the county.

Soon after its formation, a school house was built in the district made of native boards and slabs which was covered with sod. It was located on the

county line in Martin County very near Faribault County. A school term was taught there, in Fairmont, and in Center Chain. These schools were supported by private contributions with teachers receiving salaries of \$10.00 to \$12.00 monthly.

In 1861, the state legislature repealed existing school laws and enacted what was known as the sub-district law. This provided for a central school in each township that would be under the control of the township supervisors. They were authorized to form other districts in the township that would be known as sub-districts. This was repealed in the next legislative session and was replaced by the county system.

The Fairmont district was the first in the county to apply for organization under the new law and was thus numbered one. The school house in the joint district would have been number one; however, it was moved across the line into Faribault County and became the Huntley district.

According to Claude Swanson's column in the June 1, 1963 edition of the Sentinel, the first school district in Martin County was organized by the board of county commissioners in 1862. School was held in a Sibley tent, borrowed from the soldiers at Fort Fairmount, in the summer of 1863.

Some of the most enthusiastic workers for the cause of education in the early history of Martin County included Rev. J. C. Strong of Center Chain and L. F. Brainerd and Mrs. Kate Sperry, both of Nashville Township.

As time passed, changes took place and buildings were erected. Some examples of these as reported in newspaper articles of the time are as follows: Fairmont to build a new \$125,000.00 high school in 1914; Granada dedicated a new \$30,000 high school in 1914; in 1916 the Fairmont German Lutherans voted to build a \$5,000.00 school house; East Chain's \$40,000.00 structure includes every modern idea for education as reported in 1919; in 1927 there were 101 rural schools in the county; in 1929 Fairmont planned for a \$181,000.00 junior high school; Truman to open new \$110,000.00 school building in 1936; Welcome to build \$40,000.00 addition in 1938; rural schools in county to install electric cookery in 1941; new Fairmont suburban school bus takes kids to city schools from Oak Beach, Hazelmere, Shoreacres, and Belle Vue in 1942; there were 91 rural teachers in Martin County in 1942; south side school named after William Budd in 1949; and, a cornerstone was laid for the new Lincoln School in 1949.

Since those early days, many changes have occurred, and many more changes will likely continue to take place in education in Martin County.

By
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