

Fairmont Public Schools History – Its Early History Up To 1931

The Fairmont School District has certainly evolved over the years. The following is a brief historical account of the district from its inception in 1860 up to 1931 based in part on documentation from the first yearbook created by the Fairmont Public Schools. This publication was named *"The 1931 FAIR – HI – AN."* Other resources in the Pioneer Museum also contributed to this account. Incidentally, in 1931 there were 1,275 students attending the Fairmont Public Schools.

In 1860 this area was a sparsely populated region that was soon to experience rather significant population growth. On May 21, 1860, Lorain Swearingen signed a contract to teach school in Fairmont for the term of twelve weeks with compensation totaling \$1.00 per week. Her salary came from a voluntary school tax paid by those having children attending school, with the exception of Mr. Hinkle who had no children. However, Hinkle was very much interested in promoting the affairs of the then "new" community. The following individuals agreed to pay the salary of Mrs. Swearingen, the wife of I. B. Swearingen: Benson C. Hinkle, \$2.50; A. H. Wooster, \$4.00; J. B. Swearingen, \$4.00; Wm. Johnson, \$1.00; and Isaac Johnson, \$1.00. Based on the contracted salary and the donor contributions, it appears that she received a fifty-cent bonus.

The contract she signed had stipulations and stated the following: "I, Lorain Swearingen, agree to teach a school of the common English branches at the town of Fairmont. School to commence on the 21st day of May, 1861, and I further agree to keep good order in said school and use only reasonable means for correcting the children in cases of necessity only."

The first school was held in a house owned by Mr. Hinkle and was thought to be located in the woods along Lake Sisseton, perhaps near the present site of the Martin County courthouse. Although Mr. Hinkle was a fervent promoter of schools and was actively engaged in public affairs, he became discouraged following the Indian outbreak of 1862 and left the area.

News of the Sioux Indian outbreak reached Fairmont on August 22, 1862, and caused the school year to be abruptly terminated until the following summer. In the summer of 1863, Mrs. Swearingen was forced to hold school in a borrowed tent. Shortly thereafter, the men of the settlement built the first school house donating materials and labor. This was a fairly crude structure built of logs, brush, and dirt. It was located in the vicinity of Main Street and 8th Street. This school was used only during the summer and Mrs. Swearingen was paid \$10.00 for that term.

In 1864 and 1865, school was held in the north part of William Budd's home located in the 700 block of Albion Avenue. The teacher, Laura H. Smith, was paid \$16.00 per month. Up to this time, no school taxes were levied. However, with the rapid growth taking place in the mid -1860s, it was apparent that more adequate school facilities and other changes were needed.

In 1866, R. M. Ward, James Swearingen, and William Budd were appointed to select a site for a school. The site selected was the present site of Presentation College, formerly Central School. The first property obtained by the district for a school site was purchased in 1867 from O. P. Chubb for \$1.00. It was located in the southwest corner of the former Central School site, the current location of Presentation College. The east half of that lot was purchased in 1885 for \$1,000.00.

The current Presentation College location has evolved significantly over the years and was at one time the home to three school buildings; an elementary school; a junior high school; and a high school. The first building constructed on that site was a one room building used until 1874, the first teacher being John P. Bird. A two room building was constructed in 1875 at a cost of \$2,500.00. Teachers in this facility included D. P. Sackett, Miss Emma Snow, R. M. Tyler, W. A. McDonald, and Dr. F. N. Hunt. The two room building was replaced by a brick structure in 1886. A four room building was constructed on the north east corner of the Central School location in 1895 at a cost of \$5,745.00. The high school building was built in 1900 at a cost of \$13,741.00 and was located on the southwest corner of the Central School lot. Additionally, in 1910 a normal training department was added to the school system and was located in the elementary school on the Central School/Presentation College site.

The first Lincoln School site was purchased in 1905 for \$1.00 with four lots added later to that for \$900.00. The first Lincoln School that eventually became known as the Lincoln Annex was built in 1907.

The former high school/junior high school site, presently Veteran's Park, was acquired through condemnation proceedings in 1915.

Since those early years, Fairmont's schools have changed significantly in terms of their geographic location, structure, methods of delivery, and student demographics. As time passes, there will undoubtedly be more changes in many ways. Perhaps reflecting on the past will prove beneficial to enhancing the quality and direction of the future of education.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.



*We sincerely dedicate this, our first annual,
to Superintendent R. H. Towne, who has
kindly given us his best wishes for our success.*

The old Lincoln Grade School was opened to classes in 1906 The building lots were donated to the school district by Harry Sinclair, C. N. Peterson and Fred Betz. The contractor for the old building was Mr. Petrie. The members of the board were Edgar Shanks, Malcolm Aldrich, H. P. Edwards, J. T. Swearingen, Harry Sinclair and W. G. Tull.

The cornerstone for the present building was laid at 12:30 P.M., December 8, 1949 during one of the cold spells of the winter. Superintendent John J. Skinner gave the dedicatory address. President of the School Board, George A. Barden, and Mrs. Carl Gudal, P. T. A. president, troweled the mortar for the cornerstone Special recognition was given to Mrs. L. B. Jahn as the only living charter member of the Lincoln P. T. A. C. Reed Persinger was in charge of the dedication.

Articles placed in the cornerstone included the signatures of all pupils of the Lincoln School, a new Bible, the late Major Arthur M. Nelson's "Know Your Martin County," a Centennial booklet, Judge Julius E. Haycraft's booklet on Martin County postoffices, a list of all the present teachers of the Fairmont schools, a souvenir program containing the names of all present P. T. A. members and officers, past presidents, names of the members of the Board of Education, and a copy of the December 8, 1949 Sentinel.

The new building was opened for class work on September 5, 1950, and the lunchroom was opened on September 11, 1950.

Dedication Exercises

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Lincoln Grade School

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Tuesday, September 26, 1950

Eight o'clock in the evening

Twelveth Street & North Park

Fairmont, Minnesota

Dedication Program

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“Sing We and Chaunt It”	Morley
High School Chorus, directed by Gordon Tjernlund	
Invocation	Rev. E. E. Manes
Presentation of Colors.....	Troop 256, Cub Pack No. 5
	Mrs. Leonard Milbrandt, Den Mother
Gift of Flags: Auditorium	Mrs. Dale Lutz
	Patriotic Instructor, W. R. C.
Outside	Mrs. Otto Sheely
	Treasurer, V. F. W. Auxiliary
Introduction of Guests.....	Superintendent Geo. A. Eddie
Presentation of Building to the Architect.....	Mr. Dean Lundholm
	Standard Construction Co.
Presentation of Building to Board of Education.....	Mr. George Pass
	Pass & Rockey, Architects
Acceptance.....	Mr. Geo. A. Barden
	President, Board of Education
Presentation of Key to Building to Principal Vernon DeZiel.....	Mr. Geo. A. Barden
Recognition of John J. Skinner.....	Mrs Allen Van Eps
Response.....	John J. Skinner
“Onward, Ye Peoples”.....	Sibelius
High School Chorus, directed by Gordon Tjernlund	
Dedicatory Address.....	Dr. Bernhard Christensen
	President, Augsburg College
Benediction.....	Rev. Victor Quello
America, first and last stanza.....	Audience
	Mrs. Enos Wrede, accompanist
Inspection of Building	

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Public Schools, Fairmont, Minn.

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