

A History of
Schools and Education in Kentucky,
Gallatin County and Warsaw
1775 - 1960

Being a paper read before the Alum-
ni Banquet held at the Gallatin County
High School on Wednesday, May 27,
1959.

By

Carl R. Bogardus, M.D., a graduate
of Warsaw High School, 1924, and
now a resident of Austin, Indiana.

1959

Schools and Education in Gallatin County

In spite of the fact that the Kentucky pioneers were slow in bringing to the country beyond the mountains the institutions of the eastern colonies, they did bring with them the idea that to allow a man to reach maturity without being able to read and write was practically an abomination in the sight of God. So far this reason, almost from the very beginning, all the forts had crude schools taught by some more or less literate members of the community.

The first school taught in Kentucky was almost as old as the first permanent settlement itself. It was taught at Fort Harrod in 1775 by Mrs. William Boones in her cabin in the fort. Here the pioneer children were taught to read and write from wooden paddles with alphabet inscribed upon them, and from the Bible texts.

Probably the second school in Kentucky, as far as known, was taught in the fort at Boonesborough in 1779, by Joseph Doniphan, then 22 years old. His school averaged seventeen scholars that first summer. He had come to Kentucky in 1778, and returned to his home in Stafford County, Virginia, in 1780. Also in 1779 John May at McAfee's fort.

taught a school using no books, but dispensed the rudiments of learning from memory, and did a pretty fair job of it.

The fourth school was in the fort at Lexington. It was taught by "Wildcat" John McKinney. His curious nickname was earned on the field of battle. Early one morning he was seated at his desk in the log school house, when a large wild cat wandered in through the open door. John tried to shoo the uncivilized pussy back out the door but instead of leaving it attacked him. After a furious fight and considerable bloodshed on the part of poor John, he slew the beast with his bare hands, and earned himself a name.

Sometime before 1784 the second teacher in Lexington was John Wilson, who established a private academy there. He was an adventurer, surveyor, fanciful writer of the autobiography of Daniel Boone, and author of the first printed book about Kentucky, published in 1784 in Wilmington, Delaware. He conducted a respected school there until a few days before his tragic death near Cincinnati in 1788.

The fort schools were the immediate forerunners of Kentucky's famous and notorious "old field" and "hedgerow" schools, which represented no particular educational philosophy beyond

the crude teaching of the simplest principles of reading, writing and ciphering.

These pioneer schools were indeed primitive - rude - mudchinked log cabins with clay or puncheon floors, and either no windows, or possibly one small one consisting of a hole cut in a wall and covered with paper soaked in bear grease to render it translucent. The rough backless benches were hewed fairly smooth with an adze. There usually was no chimney as school was taught only during the warm summer months and a fireplace was not required. The teacher owned the only books used - the pupils recited aloud and usually in unison and learned by repetition. Paper was rare, or nonexistent. But in spite of all the handicaps the pioneer children did acquire a rudimentary education.

The legislative history of education in Kentucky is as old as Gallatin County itself and dates back to 1798.

On February 10th of that year an act was approved by Governor James Garrard, which donated and set apart of the public lands of the Commonwealth of Kentucky 6,000 acres each, for the benefit and support of Franklin, Salem and Kentucky Academies, and for Lexington and Jefferson Seminaries. Similar acts in 1805 and 1808 extended

the same provisions to all the existing counties of the state. Within twenty years from the passage of the first act forty-six additional academies and seminaries including one in Gallatin County, were endowed with grants of 6,000 acres each.

The law provided "that all the lands lying within the bounds of this Commonwealth on the South side of Cumberland River and below Obed's River now vacant, etc., shall be reserved for the endowment and use of seminaries of learning throughout the Commonwealth." The County Courts were authorized to have located, surveyed and patented within the above reserve 6,000 acres each for educational purposes. These grants were noble in purpose and liberal in plan, but by subsequent ill-considered and unwise acts the lands were prodigially expended and squandered - and the establishment of public schools was rendered an abortive failure.

The first attempt at a public school in Gallatin County was not here in Warsaw, but in Carrollton. In order to classify this strange statement it will be necessary to review a little history. When Gallatin was made a county in 1798 it included all of the present Gallatin and Carroll counties, most of Owen County, and a good part of Trimble.

Port William (now Carrollton) was made the county seat because it was actually the only town in the county at that time.

It was on January 13, 1813, that an act of the Legislature to establish an academy in the County of Gallatin was approved by Governor Isaac Shelby (then the sixth governor of Kentucky). The Trustees of Gallatin Academy were Carter Tarent, William Winslow, John Barner, Garland Bullock and Robert Plummer. They were given the power to select all books and equipment necessary for the use of the academy and also received their grant of 6,000 acres of land in Christian County (Hopkinsville is now county seat) for the establishment and support of the school.

They met on May 13th and selected a site donated by Benjamin Craig (which is the site of the present Carrollton High School). The school was erected the following year, 1814, in Port William. So we can say that public education in Gallatin County dates back to 1813, which, incidentally, was the same year that Fredericksburg (now Warsaw) was established by that old pioneer, Robert Johnson, on the site of an earlier settlement dating from 1805, known as Great Landing, or Johnson's Landing.

He had owned this land where Warsaw stands since 1784 when he received it as a Virginia grant before Kentucky became a state. No doubts pupils from Fredericksburg attended Gallatin Academy at Fort William as boarding students, but we have no proof of it.

We have not been able to determine how successful Gallatin Academy was, nor how long it operated. Nor do we know for certain if there were any public or private schools in Fredericksburg during those very early days, but we can safely assume that there were. Those old pioneers were firm believers in their children being well-acquainted with the "Three Rs", and were sure to provide the means for their education. The Paynes, Bealls, Yateses, Browns, Gibsons, Robinsons, Hawkineses, Craigs, Campbells, Savages, Joneses, Blantons, Greggs, Whitesideses, Peaks and many others who settled here in this fertile and well-situated expanse of bottom-land, were mostly Virginians who had received good educations in the Old Dominion, and other easterners and southerners.

Richard Yates, who was Warsaw's most illustrious son, was born here in 1818, son of Henry Yates, one of the original settlers of Fredericksburg. He received his early schooling here, and moved to Illinois

to become that state's Civil War Governor (1861-1865).

It is a matter of recorded history that in 1819 Owen County was cut off from Gallatin. Then in 1831 the people of Fredericksburg desiring the establishment of a post office in their town were told by Uncle Samuel that there was already a Fredericksburg in Kentucky (in Mason County). So by a legislative enactment the name of the town was changed to Warsaw. This name was suggested by Benjamin Franklin Beall, who had lately read the book "Thaddeus of Warsaw," published in 1803 by Jane Porter (1776-1850), a romance which had great vogue for half a century.

Then in 1836 Trimble County was amputated from the west end of the county, and in 1838 the long, narrow remainder stretching along the Ohio was cut in half. The west end half was named Carroll County after Charles Carroll, of Maryland, one of the signers of the Declaration, and the name of Port William was changed to Carrollton, which became its county seat. Then Warsaw was designated the county seat of what was left of Gallatin County. The south portion (now the main entrance) of our beautiful Courthouse was built in 1838, and the north end, with an imposing

belfry, was added thirty years later. Then in 1938 the belfry was removed and the building remodeled to what it is today.

We have all heard and read much about the old District Schools, but how many of us know how far back they date? It was on January 29, 1831, that an act was approved by Governor Thomas Metcalfe allowing County Courts to divide their counties into School districts and provided for "three Commissioners to be elected in each district, who may call meetings of the people of the district to designate a site for a school house and levy and collect a school tax of not over six and a fourth cents on the \$100, and a poll tax of not over fifty cents."

It was in 1838 that the first law was enacted for the establishment of a general system of common schools in Kentucky, but for ten years the system languished and struggled with feeble life and doubtful success under the ruthless hands of unsympathizing and crude legislation. Kentucky's first Superintendent of Public Instruction was Rev. Joseph Bullock, a Presbyterian minister, who served from 1838 until 1839.

As to the early schools here in Warsaw our information is very meagre. However, the census of 1840 stated that the town,

with a population of 600, had a court house, two churches, twelve stores and groceries, two taverns, five lawyers, four doctors, three schools, two pork houses, a tobacco factory, a flouring mill, a distillery and twenty mechanic shops. In addition the town had a wharf boat on the river, and a newspaper, The Warsaw Patriot, published by two gentlemen by the names of Child and Kent. What categories the three schools were in we do not know, but we can suppose they were both public and private.

In 1848, through the efforts of Rev. Robert Breckinridge, then Superintendent of Public Instruction, an act was passed and approved by Gov. John J. Crittenden, providing for a levy of two cents on the \$100 to provide revenues for Common School purposes. And in 1855 this ad valorem tax was increased to five cents. But little change was made in the school system until after the close of the Civil War.

A school known as the Gallatin County Academy stood in the south east corner of the Court house yard. Sometime before the Civil War it was purchased by the county for \$600 and was used for many years for a clerk's office.

One of the first elementary schools taught in the county was conducted by Miss Susan Orr, who taught in Warsaw from the 1840s to the 1860s. She usually devoted the final period of each day to spelling. Her teaching career in some instances covered two generations. For instance Mrs. Belle Summons Brown, born in 1858, went to school to Miss Susan, as did her mother, Mrs. Nannie Beall Summons, who was born in 1836.

In 1860 Prof. William Ellis established a school in Warsaw known as the Warsaw Academy. It was located on East High Street, over the present colored church. At that time the Methodist Church occupied the first floor. The tuition for this private school was \$3.00 a month.

Then on May 31, 1865, this school was incorporated as the Warsaw Male and Female Academy. Classes were held in the old two-story brick house on the Sparta Pike now owned by Miss Clara Sisson. We find an interesting advertisement in the Warsaw News (established in 1869 by Joseph Rucker) of December 12, 1871:

Warsaw
Male And Female
College

The Scholastic year of this Institution
Begins September 4th, 1871,
and is divided into two terms of
twenty weeks each

A full course of studies
will be taught, embracing the
ornamental branches, Music, Etc.

The corps of Instructors will al-
ways be equal to the demand of
the students.

Young ladies can obtain board-
ing in the family of the President.
Young gentlemen in approved
families.

For further information address,
D. Herndon Lindsay,
President.

In September, 1867, the building of the Christian Church on East Main Street, was sold to the town of Warsaw to use as a public school, and it served this purpose well for a good many years. The present Christian Church, on West High Street was built by William Winters, and completed in 1868. Then in 1885, when the old school at Third and Market Streets was built, the old Christian Church was sold by the town to the Methodists for use again as a house of worship. Their present-day church still occupies the same site.

The population of Warsaw in 1870 was only 715, a very slight increase over that of 1840. By then it had the same old court house, four physicians, nine lawyers, one Male and Female Academy, one public school, four churches, fourteen stores, ten mechanic shops, a distillery, a grist mill, a tobacco warehouse, a newspaper, a wharfboat and two hotels.

In 1870 Zach F. Smith, then Superintendent of Public Instruction, prepared a bill providing for a wise, efficient and liberal school law. He suggested an increase

in taxes, lengthening of the school term from three months to five months, increased wages for teachers - from \$12 to \$30 per month to \$30 to \$45 per month, better school houses accommodations, normal training of teachers, uniformity of textbooks and encouragement of graded schools in all districts towns and cities. These recommendations all sound perfectly sensible to us today, but due to the opposition of many unfriendly legislators he did not get all he asked for. However, under the new law conditions were infinitely better than they had been. The tax was increased to twenty cents, and additional funds were provided by a tax on the capital stock of certain banks; fines and forfeitures for gambling, including a tax on billiard tables; and a tax of one dollar on each dog over six months old, in excess of two kept by a householder. a strange part of this act was the stipulation that the tax was to be collected from white persons only, and expended exclusively for the education of white children. In the four years from 1868 to 1872 the funds collected

for education increased from over \$300,000 to over \$900,000.

Apparently those old timers were at times hard pressed for school funds, as shown by an Act approved by Governor Preston H. Leslie on March 9, 1872, "for the protection of sheep in the counties of Nicholas, Gallatin and Folemying, all dogs therein taxed one dollar for the first on each place, and five dollars for each additional one - the proceeds to be applied to build school houses or pay teachers." Suppose we had to obtain money to run a school that way today!

In 1881 the Ohio Valley Normal College was organized in Warsaw, and classes were held in a building "under the hill." The faculty was composed of Miss Mattie Vanice, R. B. Brown and Prof. H. Blay Smith. This school was in existence for eight years.

At one time Miss Belle Summons, later Mrs. R. B. Brown, taught a private school in a brick kitchen located just a few feet from the rear door of Craig and Gutting's grocery.

During the nineties a school for advanced pupils was conducted by a

retired Methodist minister, a Mr. Currents.

His class room was a small one-room building in the yard of his home which is the house owned by Mrs. Filora Brown. Across the street in the home now occupied by Mrs. Lilly Whitehead, Miss Ruth Martien taught school. She was a little maiden lady and had been educated in a French convent. With all her qualifications she was wholly inadequate to dealing with the bad boys of Warsaw who made life hard for her. Public school terms then were five months and anything more was by private pay schools. Miss Fanny Lindsay usually taught a private school after the end of the term.

Then in 1885 the County established a new public school at Warsaw. The three-room brick building was constructed by George W. Winters at a cost of \$3,000. This old building where many a boy and girl of Warsaw first attended school still stands. To aid the County in financing the project the town of Warsaw sold bonds, the proceeds of which were donated to the building fund. The late Sam Clore once stated that he first attended this school, at the age of six, on the first day it opened, and his teacher was Miss

Fanny Lindsay. Did she teach in this school from the time it opened in 1885 until it closed in 1913? If so, then this was some kind of a record!

Warsaw was organized as a graded school district in 1904, and the old building was used until 1913, when a new two-story building was erected on the east side of town at a cost of \$12,000, which was financed by private subscription. My father, the late O. A. Bogardus, further contributed to the building by ably assisting in the erection.

In 1902 Mr. J. J. Gaines (who married Miss Mariam Orr) taught a private school in the office rooms of the Landrum house on High Street and started young Warsawians on High School subjects for the first time. But 1903 was a red letter day for Warsaw, for it was then that Prof. C. S. Joseph came to Warsaw and organized a High School. The curriculum called for four years of Math., four of Latin and two of German. This first High School was taught in the upstairs of the old Hugh Montgomery buggy house reached by a rickety outside stairway.

The Matt Roberts house now stands on this site. The first class under Prof. Joseph was graduated in 1905 and were awarded large diplomas.

Schools in Gallatin County were consolidated in 1935-1936, and old Warsaw High School became Gallatin County High School and is now the only high school in the county. A new building was erected in 1939 adjacent to the older building which had been built in 1913. This building was constructed largely with Federal Aid. Now, in 1959, a new addition is ready for the 1959-1960 school year, replacing the one built forty-six years ago. We have come a long way since that first school law was passed in 1798!

The End.

Credits

In the preparation of this brief historical sketch of Schools and Education in Kentucky, Gallatin County and Warsaw the following authorities were consulted:

Bogardus, Carl R., M.D., The Early History of Gallatin County, printed as a serial by the Gallatin County News in commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the county, and reprinted as a booklet, Warsaw, 1948.

Clark, Thomas D., A History of Kentucky, Lexington, 1950

Collins, Lewis, Historical Sketches of Kentucky, Cincinnati, 1847.

Collins, Richard H., History of Kentucky, Covington, 1874.

Gray, Miss Gypsy M., The History of Gallatin County, a paper read before the Christopher Gist Historical Society, Covington, October 22, 1956.

Personal communications from:

Adams, Mary Bogardus, Warsaw

Brown, Sally Mountjoy "

Counely, Nannie Brown "

Mountjoy, Emma "