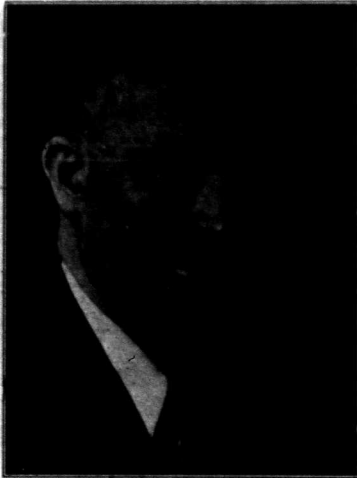


SCHOOL FACILITIES FOREMOST IN MERRILL'S RAPID DEVELOPMENT

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Merrill's present splendid system of schools, which are among the most modern and up-to-date features of the city, indicate correctly that educational development has always been the first thought of the people here.

In the early 1850's, twenty years before there were any regular religious services, there was already a village school in Jenny, located in an old house. Through a fortunate incident we have a fairly detailed picture of that first school that also gives something of an idea of the life of the people here in those days.

Miss Mary Jane Miller was the second teacher ever to come here. She arrived in the spring of 1858 to fill out the term of a friend, Miss Kate Goodrich, earning \$20 per month and her board at the home of the Z. Space family. In 1888, writing as Mrs. M. J. Miller Armstrong, she wrote a letter to Miss Jordan that was published in "The School Bell Echoes" telling of her experiences. After arriving at the Space home, she says:

"I took the examination I had dreaded, but should not had I known that the questions which I could not answer would be promptly answered by the secretary, John Cooper, who was determined that I should pass . . .

"The next day . . . Allen, Elta, and Sarah Strowbridge, now Mrs. Walter Alexander, went over to the old house that was fitted up for a school. Let me describe a room 15 x 18 feet whose walls of rough boards were blackened by the mosquito smudges that every body kept going at that time—three small windows without shades of any kind, three long benches with long desks in front of them, a home-made stool and table for the teacher, the floor of wide boards, showing great cracks, not a blackboard or picture on the wall of any description. I found a dozen bright boys and girls waiting to greet me and spend a very enjoyable forenoon getting acquainted with them even going with them at recess away up to what they called the cold spring, near the mouth of the Prairie river . . . the children were all so kind and volunteered to enlighten me upon all subjects of sport, and one little fellow, Walter Kollock, asked me if I liked to catch frogs, and if I would not go with him after school to catch some, to which I gladly assented. Looking at my borrowed watch I discovered that we had taken nearly an hour's recess, but we had become acquainted and I liked my pupils and did not worry about what the board would think or say . . .

"School" In The Woods
"It would take too long for me to tell you everything that trans-

pired during that eventful summer, but I may say that I was happy and taught the children everything I knew in poetry and prose, in song, dance, and games. We had to teach twenty-two days in a month those days, so on Saturday afternoons every two weeks, the girls would help scrub the floor with water which the boys brought from the river close by. We covered the walls with illustrated papers, the New York Ledger and Harper's Weekly, which were sent from home each week; made window curtains of papers and bedecked the homely places and niches with birch and princess pine and hemlock boughs until the old place looked like a picture gallery.

"Mr. Space made us a blackboard and a low bench for the babies. Mr. Pat Smith brought a dust-pan and a broom and Mr. Strowbridge a brand-new dictionary. Mr. Norway brought a set of maps. Talk about environments. We had the very best if we had not learned the meaning of that word yet. I worked hard in and out of school, rambled in the woods with the children, teaching them the names of birds, flowers, shrubs, trees, rocks, and

animals, they in turn teaching me where to find them, how to catch fish and frogs, how to fasten them securely with string and bush, their names and habits, and which ones when not used for food made good bait when we did not have a good find of angleworms.

"The brave boys taught me how to paddle a canoe, pole a float, ride on a log, and to swim. 'Chilli' and Billy Averil gave me my first lesson when I went home to stay all night at the old Jo Newcomb Landing. 'Chilli' with his hand under my chin to keep my head above water, laughing at my efforts to keep from going to the bottom, while little Billy bravely swam ahead, shouting encouragingly 'Miss Miller, do the way I do; kick and paddle like thunder!' which I did and succeeded in getting several good duckings . . .

"We watched the men raft the logs and knew that only clear stuff would be floated to market and all shabby boards and slabs would go into the flood trash piles. We learned just how many feet it took to raft a crib, how many cribs in a rapids-piece, how many rapids-pieces in a raft, how many rafts in a float; what wood was used to make wedges, if the

grubs were elm or ironwood, or if their heads were a perfect roof, if the carstens and blades were the proper size and shape, and we were delighted when we were allowed to pull on the tail-bar while we rode, making the shoot over the mill-dam; it was such fun to get sopping wet.

Learned Indian Language

"I live it all over again and in my mind's eye see the swings in the high trees, the children jumping rope, playing 'An'y High Over,' 'chase the squirrel,' 'blind man's buff,' 'London Bridge,' 'funeral,' and what not, and I say to myself tonight, 'Play on . . .'

"We learned the Chippewa language and often visited the Indians in their wigwams, ate the maple sugar out of their mococks, although we knew it had been strained through a blanket before sagging off. It was 'heep-nish she shin.'"

Miss Miller taught the next year, 1860, at Jenny also; after two year's absence she returned in 1863, but—

" . . . a few nights after there was a ball at Forest House and the alarm was given that the Indians were now surrounding the village and 'every man to arms.' I received such a terrible fright that I have never entirely recovered from it, and the very next day I departed on the stage for Ripon, where I went to school day-times and had nightmare nights all winter long." This was the fourth Indian scare in Miss Miller's time in Jenny.

After this earliest school, the first report of schools in this region is found in the report filed in 1880 by David Finn, then county superintendent of schools. There were then 527 children aged 4 to 20 years—a range wider than school age—and 339 of these attended school that year, an excellent percentage. There were then five townships in the county: Akeley had two school districts, Corning two, Jenny two, Pine River five, and Rock Falls two, for a total of thirteen. There were fifteen teachers, and three of the schools had three departments each. The school houses owned by the county were valued at \$11,650 and the sites on which they stood at \$707.

By 1882 there were thirty districts, 49 teachers, and the county school plant amounted to \$17,739, despite the fact that two-thirds of the county's 1880 territory had been lopped off. The number of children aged 7 to 14 was 668, the attendance at public schools 581 and at private schools 7. The very next year there were ten more teachers, one more district, and one more school house. There were only 7 more children of school age, but there were 23 more in school.

By 1922 the county report showed that the value of school buildings and sites had reached \$226,765, with \$43,448 charged off to equipment alone. There were 75 teachers in the rural schools; school libraries contained a total of 14,456 volumes.

Reports for last year, 1933-34, showed an enrollment of 2,190 children in 49 grades including high school out of a total number of children between 4 and 20 of 3,643 in this county, while 131 more live in districts whose schools are located in this county while they reside outside. There are 85 school buildings, of which 81 are in use. The 78 rural school buildings have a total value of \$261,723.65; the six state graded school buildings, \$88,500; and the one exclusive high school building, \$6,000; for a total valuation of \$346,223.65 for county school buildings. There are 66 school districts at present in the county.

Open County Normal

In 1907 the county board appropriated \$3,000 for the establishment of a normal school, and on September 2 the training school opened. A. H. Cole was first principal; he left in 1913, was succeeded then by W. A. Clark, and the present principal, E. W. McCrary, came from the city system in 1916.

In the meantime, the city's school system had expanded suddenly to meet the demands of the mushroom growth that accompanied the railroad and the growth of mills here. In 1879 M. C. Porter, who had just been graduated from Lawrence College, applied to W. C. Whitford, state superintendent of education, for advice on getting a job. Mr. Whitford told him of a vacancy at Jenny and urged him to take it, saying that Jenny was sure to grow and grow fast.

Mr. Porter came into the village of 400 inhabitants and began to teach in the Third ward building, used until this summer as an armory. In the spring of 1880 he finished with a group of 29. In the fall of the same year he opened the same class with 98. The Third ward building, then smaller than now, was thought big enough to take care of the county forever.

As the new people flooded into the city, bringing with them children who already had had some high school education, it became necessary to provide a high school here. In 1885, the same year that the city was incorporated, the high school was organized after a special election, with Mr. Porter as its organizer and principal and also the first city superintendent of schools. All children who entered had to pass an entrance examination, and 48 of the 47 applicants were passed.

The first high school course was

MERRILL'S BEAUTIFUL HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

The older portion of the building at the right was built in 1902 and the new addition was constructed in 1923. Immediately behind the high school is extensive Stange park, forming a beautiful setting for the building. The city library, also in the park, is only a few steps away. The building is by far the largest in Merrill. Previous to the construction of the old portion of this building, the Third Ward building, used until this summer as an armory, and now condemned, was the high school. Besides this high school building there are three other city grade schools and three parochial grade schools.

