

# First School In Jenny Was Located In Old House In The Early Fifties

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 1859 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 1898, 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 . . . Allee, Etta, 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 everybody 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 spent 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 tarried 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 transpired 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 house 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. 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. Chili and Billy Averill gave me my first lesson when I went home to stay all night at the old Jo Newcomb Landing. Chili 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, or if the grubs were elm or ironwood, or if their heads were a perfect root, or if the oarlocks and blades were the proper size and shape, and we were delighted when we were allowed to pull on the tail-oar 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 'Ain't 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 wigwags, ate the maple sugar out of their mococks, although we knew it had been strained through a blanket before sugaring off. It was 'heap nice she shin.'"

Miss Miller taught the next year, 1860, at Jenny also; after two years' absence she returned in 1863, but only 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 537 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: Ackley had two school districts; Scoring, 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 \$797.

By 1892 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 669, the attendance at public schools 581 and at private schools 7. The very next year, 1893, there were 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 \$225,735, 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 the year, 1933-34, showed an enrollment of 2,196 children in all grades including high school out of a total number of children between 4 and 20 of 3,643 in this county, while 131 more lived in districts whose schools were located in this county while they resided outside. There were 88 school buildings, of which 81 were in use. The 78 rural school buildings had a total value of \$251,723.65; 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 were 66 school districts then 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 then the principal, El. W. McCrary, who 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 that 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 a small building, 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 1883, 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 43 of the 47 applicants were passed.

The first high school course was a three-year course, which later was expanded to cover four years. The rapid expansion of the high school in its first years, and the great increase in the number of children of all ages, necessitated the immediate construction of new buildings. Within two years of 1883 three buildings had been put up; a 6-room school where the Lincoln school now stands; another 6-room school in the Sixth ward, and an 8-room school on the site of the present Franklin school. At one time classes in the Sixth Ward school had to be held in private houses for want of space, and although the two 6-room buildings were made into 8-room buildings shortly, space was still scarce for some time.

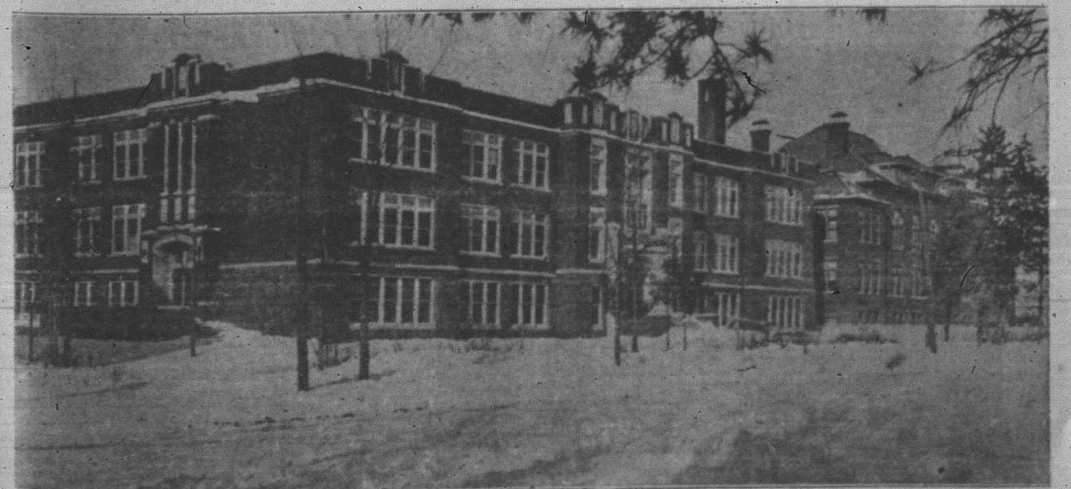
## First Class

There were seven in the first graduating class of Merrill High School: Herman, Khets, William Frazier, Elsie Sturdevant, Myrtle Wiley, Roy La Count, John Arnold and Nora Kiegan. The second class graduated nine, of which some were the children of newcomers.

At first the school board was elected by a town caucus. Later the election of the board was put on the spring election, and still later the posts were made appointive by the mayor subject to confirmation by the council. There were three on the board until the city was organized, then one for each ward. Later three members-at-large were added to bring the total number of members to eleven. Mr. Porter served on the school board for 21 consecutive years, until he was elected county judge.

The city's school plant at present comprises the Sixth Ward school house, erected in 1912; the Franklin school, built in 1895 and later replaced; the Lincoln school, built in 1922-3; and the High School, erected in 1901 and more than doubled in size by a magnificent and modern addition in 1922-23.

Among the early pioneers were Mr. and Mrs. Geo. W. Kollock, who built a hotel in Merrill on the site of the present Kamke & Sons hardware store. Mrs. Kollock was an angel of mercy to thousands of lumberjacks who followed the woods. There were no hospitals along the Wisconsin river at that time, but sick and broken-bodied lumberjacks were cared for by Mrs. Kollock.



MERRILL HIGH SCHOOL