Prairie Consolidated School

Note: Having been asked for any information I might be able to contribute for a historical sketch on Prairie School, I submit the following random notes from memory. Olin B. Looney - May 28, 1987

Prairie Consolidated School was created by the consolidation of several small one-teacher schools. Four of these schools were "Watson School, "Bent Oak School, "Billups School," and "Bethel (or Love) School".

"Watson School" was originally located on the James A. Watson, Sr. farm, a short distance south or southwest of the "Watson Home". About 1917 it was moved over on the Gilmer Road then State Highway 12. While the permanent school building was under construction, school was held in a house located on the McIntyre Road on what was then known as the Charlie Wood's place. The house still stands a short distance from the home of Mr. and Mrs. "Bob" Rhett. The permanent "Watson School Building" was located in the northeast corner of what is now the intersection of U.S. Highway 45 and the Gilmer Road which used to be State Highway 12. The building's gone now and ---- is owned by Mr. Robert (Bob) Rhett. Some of the teachers at "Watson School" after it was moved to the last location were: Miss Carrie Evans, Mrs. Green, Miss Katherine Hudson, and Miss Mary Barber.

"Bent Oak School" was located a short distance east of what was then the "Moody Home" and now is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Eide.

"Billups School" was located at "Billups Station" on what was then the M&O Railroad a few miles east of Artesia, Miss. I am told that "Bethel School", perhaps later called The Love School" was last located in what was once the "Love Home" which stood across the road from "Jennings Cemetery" and just east of what is now U.S. Highway 45.

There was at one time a school located on the "Old West Point Road", probably called "Plymouth School" at one time and may have been known later as "Kilgore School" when it was located across the "Kilgore Chapel Road" in front of the Kilgore Methodist Church. This school may or may not have been in existence when the others were consolidated to form "Prairie Consolidated School". (Note – This school was located in the Plymouth School District which was not consolidated into the Prairie School District. The children from Plymouth were bused into Columbus.)

"Prairie Consolidated School" was located on a ten or twelve acre tract of land purchased from Mr. Carey Cocke, Sr. on State Highway 12 (Gilmer Road) and intersection of the Bent Oak Road. Additional land between the school and State Highway 12 was purchased later from off what was then known as "The Richards Place" owned at that time by either Mr. William Richards or Mr. Walter Lawrence.

During WWI there was a tall flagpole from which the U.S. flag was flown erected on the hill at the intersection of the roads. This was the origin of the nickname "Flagpole School" by which it was so often called. The name "Prairie Consolidated School" was later changed to "Prairie Separate School District".

There was only one school building ever erected and it was completed in the fall of 1924. The opening date of school that fall had to be delayed in order to complete the building which had four classrooms, an auditorium and two rest rooms.

There was an Artesian well (overflowing well) drilled at the foot of the hill and a water-powered hydraulic ram installed to pump the water to a tank on the hill to the rear of the school building that provided the water supply for the school. There was also a coal house and a garage with space for the four teachers erected to the rear of the school building. This building is still standing at this date.

This writer started to school at "Watson School" in the fall of 1921 and when "Prairie Consolidated School" opened in 1924, we were all transferred there. I attended this school until graduation from the eleventh grade April 15, 1932. This was the only year this school had an eleventh grade.

Those graduating from the eleventh grade on this date were Sarah Looney, Helen Gilliam, Van Sandifer, and Olin Looney. Those graduating from the tenth grade on this same date were Saunders Wilburn, Jr., and Hugh Townsend, Jr.

The custom was started at this time also for each graduating class to set out a Crape Myrtle tree. This year, the tenth grade graduates and the eleventh grade graduates each put out a tree and the entire school put out a third tree in honor of all previous graduates. The three Crape Myrtles put out in 1932 were placed in a row running back east from the northeast corner of the building ----.

The first year, 1924-1925, "Prairie" had only three teachers who were Miss Rebecca Hardy (Principal), Mrs. T. Bailey Hardy, and Mrs. John W. Watson, Sr. Mrs. Watson resigned at the end of the first semester to teach at Barrow School in Columbus, Miss. Miss Dixie Hardy (later Mrs. T.J. Evans) was elected to take her place. The following year Mrs. Gano Johnson was added, making it a four teacher school.

In 1926, Miss Rebecca Hardy resigned and Mr. Thomas S. Evans was elected principal. When Mr. Evans resigned in 1929, Mrs. Arrington Johnson became principal for the 1929-1930 school term. In 1930 Mr. W.R.S. Wilburn, Sr. was elected principal and served as such for a number of years, probably until about 1950 or maybe later. I understand Mrs. T. Bailey Hardy followed Mr. Wilburn as principal. When Mrs. Hardy resigned to accept a position with M.S.C.W. in Columbus Mr. A.B. Perry was elected and served until the closing of the school about 1955 or 1956. Mrs. A.B. Perry was also one of the teachers during this same period. I understand Mrs. Jennings Hardy and Miss Moina Evans also taught at Prairie. There may have been others who taught there also.

According to information received from Supt. of Education's office the first school year for West Lowndes School was 1955-1956. It was at this time that Prairie Separate School District. Artesia Mayhew Consolidated School and Crawford School were consolidated to make up West Lowndes School.

After Mr. W.R.S. Wilburn, Sr. resigned or perhaps after his death, there was a water fountain with a Bronze Plaque placed in the school auditorium at Prairie as a memorial to him.

The following is a partial list of students who attended Prairie School which is given by memory. It is not a complete list and is not intended to be construed as such. I am sure that others can remember many more names that can be added. Without records to go by it is impossible to list the students in order by the years in which they attended. I will just list the names as they come to memory.

Charles Bragg, Carey Cocke, Jr., May Cocke, Eugenia Hardy, Vardaman Andrews, Ira Andrews, Max Andrews, Lucille Andrews, James Andrews, James Andrews, Edwin Andrews, Sarah Chappell Andrews, Alice Clark, Edith Clark, Francis

Stevens, Marion Stevens, Leon Stevens, Randolph Loftis, James Loftis, Mary Frances Loftis, John Sandifer, Ellen Sandifer, Margaret Sandifer, Sarah Looney, Olin Looney, Van Sandifer, Charles Wilburn, Saunders Wilburn, Mary Ann Wilburn, Leroy Gilliam, Hazel Gilliam, Helen Gilliam, Clive Gilliam, Ethel Gilliam, Jesse Gerhart, Hattie Mae Gerhart, Tom Hardy, Emmaline Hardy, Margaret Hardy, Jack Hardy, Sanford Hardy, Gennie Steele Hardy, Carlton Billups, Virginia Townsend, Hugh Townsend, Jr., Lucy Townsend, Guy Townsend, Roger Shulte, David Bush, Mary Keys Bush, Gladys Shenault, Edward Shenault, Shenault, Richard Watson, Gunter Watson, Lester Geer, Odie Geer, Mary Lou Geer, Hinton Geer, Howard Geer, Lucy Geer, Tilman Geer, Mary Geer, Gladys Geer, Ova Blalock, Garth Blalock, Nolan Blalock, Aileen Blalock, Howell Blalock, Curry Freeman, Louise Freeman, Casey Freeman, Fannie Belk Freeman, Viola Freeman, Jewell Freeman, Earl Freeman, Heard Freeman, Glover Freeman, Carey Freeman, Dora Fromme, Johnny Fromme, Edward Lueke, William Lueke, Dovie Holland, Vernon Holland, Hazel Holland, Elizabeth Atkins, Claude Atkins, Louise Atkins, J.B. Shelton, Beulah Merle Shelton, Ruth Sherrill, Ernest Ward Sherrill, James Fenton Sherrill, John Pipers, Raymond Helmes, Berden Helmers, Lillian Helers, Betty Jean Halbert, Marion Halbert, Rachel Halbert, Irene Price, Mary Price, Inez Price, Norma Draper, Ozzie Draper, Clinton Draper, Lenny Draper, Elva Draper, Clyde Draper, Cora Draper, Maxine Smith, David Gene Smith, [List of names in original manuscript was not finished]

When Prairie Separate School District, Artesia-Mayhew Consolidated School and Crawford School were consolidated in the mid 1950s (about 1956), the Prairie School property was sold by sealed bids to the highest bid. It was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Tom Lamar. They took the school building down and used the material to build a home on the same spot. As of this date they are still living in this home.

May 25, 1987

Mr. and Mrs. Lamar later sold the property to Dan Gerhart and I suppose he still owns it.