

Early day Grand Valley school resisted consolidation



Appleton school was the first consolidated school in Colorado. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1955. Early Young photo collection

By Kathy Jordan

One hundred years ago this year the first consolidated school in Colorado was built. The school was built in 1911 but the first classes were not held until 1912.

Although the current building is not the original, the site retains historical significance because it is the site of the first Appleton School.

At first there was bitter opposition to the consolidation of the one-room Corcoran School which was predominately Catholic, the two-room Loback School which was Protestant, and the two-room Columbine School south of River Road and east of 22 Road.

According to the 1912 Colorado Biennial Report, the school basement had four large well-lighted rooms because the walls extended only 26 inches below the surface. A wide hallway ran through the center of the first floor, with two large classrooms on each side. A broad stairway went up to a landing from the rear of the hallway. There, the stairway was divided and went up

each side of the hallway to the second floor. The principal's office and library were at one end of the hall with two high school classrooms and auditorium at the other. The auditorium had opera chairs, making it an excellent place for lectures and other entertainment as well as a great social center for the community.

The school was furnished with electricity from the Interurban rail line, which ran in front of the school. Students who lived over two miles from the school were given free transportation by the district, either by wagon or on the Interurban. The wagon team and driver cost \$35 a month to maintain. The Interurban cost one cent a mile, the average being five or six cents a day per pupil.

The first year the school employed five teachers and the principal. Of the 200 eligible children in the district, 165 were enrolled in the school.

In 1939 a new auditorium was built by the WPA (Work Projects Administration, a depression-era public works program). This was great for the basketball teams because they would no longer have to go into town to play at the Y.M.C.A., located on the northwest corner of Fifth and Rood Avenue.

In 1939 the P.T.A. paid for remodeling the basement to start the school's first hot lunch program. Families in the district grew and preserved fruits and vegetables used for the lunches. Anton Widegren, an Appleton resident, was the main carpenter for the construction of the gym.

Early on the morning of Oct. 22, 1955, the 44-year-old building was destroyed by fire.

In a letter written Oct. 25, 1955, to Walter Walker, publisher of The Daily Sentinel, Dorothy Bryant Hart, a 1916 graduate of the school, wrote that when she read about the school burning it was almost as personal as if had been her own home. She, along with her brother, noted Western Artist Harold Bryant, and two sisters were among the first students to attend school in the new building.

The students had a full high school curriculum: English, Latin, algebra, geometry, chemistry, physics, history, science and music, along with manners. The first grade classroom and living quarters for the custodian were in the basement along with the manual training room and two furnaces.

Twice a month, on Friday afternoons, they were taught debating and parliamentary drill.

Mrs. Hart wrote that twice a year students entertained the community with shows such as Dickens' "Christmas Carol", "Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works," and other such programs. The school, the Brethren and Methodist Churches, were the life centers of the community.

Before becoming known as Appleton the close-knit agricultural community was known as Hollandville because the T.R. Holland family owned the four corners where two main roads cross, one of which was the Coast to Coast Highway. Now the corner is 24 and H Roads. Mr. Holland had a mercantile store on the southeast corner which later destroyed by fire. A new

mercantile store and gas station was built on the northwest corner by Mr. Burnett. J.A. Lapp had a blacksmith on the southwest corner.

These businesses and others were supported by the extensive agricultural interests in the area. The farmers grew apples, pears, strawberries, raspberries, sugar beets, alfalfa, grapes, bees and honey, flowers, rabbits, poultry, oats and barley and raised cattle.

Appleton also had a cannery that processed tomatoes and pumpkins. Earl Young said that most of the workers were local and the cannery was a community effort and gossip center.

The Interurban ran through the Four Corners area and hauled not only passengers but took beets and other produce to the markets in Grand Junction.

Happy 100th Birthday Appleton School!