

LIFE ON THE OHIO

Patriot Schools

HISTORIC PATRIOT

By Dan Back

One of the featured exhibits of the Historic Patriot project, being developed in the Patriot Town Hall, will be the Schools.

The people who settled Patriot were like all early pioneers, in that two things were essential in every community and these were a church and a school. So the first school was taught by a Mr. Fordice in a log cabin with greased paper windows which stood on the South bank of Wade Run. This would have been almost directly West and a few hundred yards from the old Patriot High School. In the school year of 1813 and 1814 this school accommodated eighteen pupils.

The first building erected for school purposes was built in 1816 by James Herrick. The number of pupils averaged between fifteen and twenty-five with a tuition of \$1.50 per pupil per quarter. Thomas Ayres, a Revolutionary veteran, was one of the early teachers of the young settlement. It was his regular custom to take a nap each afternoon and just as regularly the pupils took advantage of the situation to catch flies and toss them into the open mouth of the instructor.

In 1830, Capt. John Hicks opened a school on Front Street, between Second and Third Streets. The brick for this building was burned in a nearby brick yard. This building was used for several years as a school, and later as a carriage paint shop. In 1831 -32 Henry Brown taught in a log house built by Elisha Wade, the founder of Patriot.

In 1834 a one-story brick school house was built on Main Street. In later years it became a carriage painting shop

The basement of the Universalist church was fitted up in 1845 for a school and later Mrs. Vienna Herrick Wood refurnished it and for years taught Young America there. However this private school did not sufficiently relieve the crowded condition of the public school so some of the good citizens, who were very much interested in education, by strenuous exertions built in 1868-69 the three-story brick building on Columbia Street. The first two stories to be used for school purposes and the third floor was used by the Masonic Lodge. This building was erected at the cost of \$10,000 by public subscription and built, without cost to the taxpayers.

An old ledger used by the treasurer of the school corporation indicated that \$200.00 was paid two men in Patriot for the brick used in the construction of the building. These bricks were made in one of the two brick yards then in Patriot. The stone used in the foundation of the building was moved from Split Rock, Ky., by barge to Patriot. A few of the most generous donors for the building were: Dr. W. A. Olcott, John Mottier, John Watts, William North. W. T. Pate, and several of the Howe's and Harris's.

The new school was opened Jan. 25, 1869, with T. J. Charlton (a graduate of West Point and later superintendent of the Indiana Reform School for Boys) as the first principal. By 1876, the enrollment numbered 173 students. In 1880, a high school was

established and the first high school class graduated in 1884. This class consisted of four members which were Rev. W. T. S. Lowe, who became a Baptist minister who preached at Patriot, Spring Branch, Grants Creek, and Rising Sun Baptist churches; Dr. David Mottier, who was head of the botany department of Indiana University for many years; Morton K. Houston who taught for many years and Alma Lucas.

This building was not the only school in Patriot in the 1800's. In 1849 Francis Jackson, with his wife, who was a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College, built a fine three-story seminary on the hill just outside the southern corporation line of town. It was a select boarding and day school to accommodate 100 pupils but not more than half that number attended at one time. This school was in a beautiful location with terraces and wide stone steps leading from the lower road. Local boys and girls attended as day pupils while the boarding pupils were made up of young ladies mostly from the South. The school burned in February, 1860 and was not rebuilt.

In 1919, a movement was started to consolidate the town and township schools and to the credit of the entire community this was the first school in Southern Indiana to accomplish this forward movement. In the fall of 1919, all the one-room schools in Posey Township were closed and all the pupils in the township were transported to Patriot. The grade school at Quercus Grove was also operated as part of the consolidation and the auto busses were required to transport pupils to and from school.

By the bringing together of all the pupils in the township a congestion was caused and a new building became necessary, so in 1924 a high school building was erected at the side of the older structure at the cost of about \$13,000.

The school on Columbia Street from 1869 until 1880 housed the elementary students only, but from 1880 until 1925 it was used for both elementary and high school. From 1925 until the creation of a county school corporation, this building again housed the elementary grades.

In 1932 the new brick building at Quercus Grove was completed to provide for the students in the Northwest part of the township. In 1933, the high school students of York Township were transferred to Patriot, and in a short time the increase in enrollment in both high school and elementary school made it necessary to find more room for some of the pupils, so the main floor of the Universalist Church was turned into two classrooms with some 60 to 65 pupils.

In 1935, the School Board began talking and planning for a new building which would meet the needs for the then large number of pupils, a gym, an auditorium, and several additional classrooms. The PWA program was in full swing throughout the nation, and they began investigating the possibilities of getting financial aid and construction workers from this program.

In 1937, with the employment of an attorney and an architect, and the sale of bonds, they were ready to build. Building moved along at a rather slow pace until January when the Great Flood hit. Luckily, while the sub flooring was down the hardwood flooring was not yet started. Flood waters reached a depth of six feet in the gym, but no damage was done.

When the flood receded work was resumed and the first High school commencement to be held in the new building was held in May of 1937. In the fall of 1937 the new gym was dedicated with the first basketball game played between Switzerland County's two schools, Vevay and Patriot. Vevay won by a close score, but

from the viewpoint of all Posey Township the opening game was a success, as the gym was finally filled to the rafters and the amount of money taken in exceeded all expectations.

When Guy Harris assumed the administration of the school in 1932, the high school was classified as an accredited high school by state. They were operating the school for an eight month term. The next year, 1933, Vocational Home Economics and international Agriculture were added to the curriculum and the school term extended to eight and one-half months, and the school was granted a second class commission.

By the 1940's, the school was offering four curriculum General, College Preparatory, Business, and Vocational. A full time music teacher was added to the teaching staff. The high school chorus was invited to participate with several other schools in choral contests each year. For several years several members of the chorus were sent to join in the all state chorus that put on a program at the annual meeting of State Teachers Association in Indianapolis.

In the early 1950's, they were informed that if the school term was extended to nine months, a licensed librarian was to be employed, and additional science equipment was added, they would qualify for a first class commission. All these requirements were met, and the Patriot High School was given a first class commission, placing it among the best schools of Indiana.

With the consolidation of all of the Switzerland County schools, the Patriot High School students were transferred to a building near Vevay in 1969. All the elementary students were then moved into the former high school building. The elementary building was torn down after a century of use as a building for the education of Posey Township's youth. When the building was demolished it was found that the walls were still straight, and the timbers were as sound as they were 100 years ago. In January 13, 1978, the single remaining school building in Patriot was destroyed by fire of unknown origin. At one time there were 11 schools in Posey Township including Patriot, Quercus Grove and the one-room schools in each community.

So after 165 years Patriot and Posey Township had no school. During those many years many boys and girls received a very fine education plus moral attitudes that can be commended. Many students have gone out into the world into all professions and vocations. Many have moved to the top in those positions and the community has been and still is proud of their achievements.

If you have year books, class pictures, photos of activities such as plays or sporting events or items from Patriot schools such as programs please contact me (Dan Back 594-2628) or Pam Hutchinson at the Patriot Town Hall.

Material for this article came from:

“HISTORY OF PATRIOT SCHOOLS” By: Guy S. Harris, Former Superintendent of Patriot Schools (April 5, 1979).

“HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE TOWN OF PATRIOT” by H.F. EMERSON (JANUARY 29, 1931)