

# School served town in many ways

By Vera Sloan

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The largest building in Menlo in 1890 was a one-room school house in the southwest corner of town. It also served for church services and other community functions. Builders were Sam and Dick Cheney, local carpenters.

The building housed grades one through eight. A minister, David Spritzer, was the first teacher, handling all eight grades. Pupils ranged in age from 5 to 18.

After 14 years, increasing enrollment meant the one-room school was no longer adequate. The building was sold to the Methodist Church and used for services for another 32 years.

That first school building was then made into a house and Edna McKinney, who taught at the Menlo school 23 years, lived in the house until her death in 2002 at the age of 93. She was inducted into the Kansas Teachers' Hall of Fame in 1992.

A petition was carried in 1920 to build a senior high school and consolidate the school system. The effort was successful, and six elementary districts were merged with the Menlo district in 1921.

Some of the schoolhouses were moved into the town near the building to be used for the lower grades.

Bonds were voted for the construction of a

new brick school in April of 1922, and a the building was completed a year later.

One hundred twelve elementary and 30 high school students moved into their new school on March 1, 1923. It was featured on the front page of the April 19 edition of the *Colby Tribune*.

There were three seniors in the first graduating class of 1923, Glenn Klaurens, Ellen Rains, and Roy Houston. Jean Ann Klaurens, daughter of Glenn, was in the last graduating class at Menlo in 1963.

A bus system was put into effect after the schools were consolidated, and a bus barn was eventually built.

Some of the high school boys drove school buses through the years, after getting written permission from parents of students who would be riding with them. They were paid \$35 to \$45 a month, and were always successful in transporting the students safely.

The Ray Duffey family sold milk to the school at that time for a dime a quart. It was delivered fresh each day to the school, via the busses.

Menlo schools participated in the federal hot lunch program. The cost of the meals never exceeded 25 cents for any student. Many adults today have fond memories of the wonderful food cooked by Myrtle Swanson who served the school for many many years.

All of the school sports combined couldn't compare to the joy of the famed Menlo basketball teams. Menlo athletes were known for



Students at the Menlo School took time off from their studies one day to dance around a May Pole. This school building was built in the early 1900s after the old one-room schoolhouse became too small to hold the increased number of students. It made way for a new brick building in 1923. — Prairie Museum of Art and History

their exceptional abilities and sportsmanship. It delighted the citizens to remember when Colby invited Menlo to compete in a game of basketball. They played behind closed doors with no spectators allowed, and Menlo won.

The school was the glue that held the rural Menlo community, on the Sheridan County line about 29 miles east of Colby, together. Each year on the last day of school, farmers would quit in the fields and businesses would close to gather at the school for an all-community potluck dinner. After the huge dinner, the school provided ice cream for everyone.

At one time during the 40 years the consolidated school was open, enrollment reached

nearly 100 high school students, and 300 grade school students.

As with many rural schools, enrollment faded with the farm population, and the district was dissolved by a vote of 87 to 46 in May 1963. The last year, only 17 students enrolled at the high school and 41 in grades one to eight.

An auction was held in July 1963 to dispose of the equipment and furnishings. The school's collection of trophies in their cases was put on display in the Rexford school, which absorbed many of the district's students.

The building fell into a state of disrepair, was sold and eventually demolished. The ground where it stood is a farm field today.

# Classes started in one-room school house

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Only a year after the Levant town site was staked out in western Thomas County, residents responded to the need for a school, putting up a one-room building, with Clara Dowdy as teacher.

Salaries for teachers in those early days of the "three R's" were from \$25 to \$40 a month.

One teacher taught all the grades up to and including the eighth grade, along with doing the janitor work, building a fire in a stove in the middle of the room, and carrying water to the school house from a nearby well.

Nine-month terms of school didn't begin until 1919. Schools were on a three-month term until 1892. Kansas increased the term to five months until 1897, when it went to a six month term from 1897 to 1902. They held school for eight months until 1919, when they settled on a nine-month school term.

In Levant, a larger building was built in 1919, with two large rooms and one small room. There were no restrooms, but there were two outdoor toilets.

A brick school building was built in 1924.

The high school was upstairs, and the lower grades occupied the first floor. Seven teachers were hired, four for the grade school and three for the high school.

Levant was a great school, with smart kids and good basketball teams. The girls won the county girls basketball championship in 1925-26. Sixty-four years later, eight of the eleven girls on the team were still living and six were still in Thomas County, all of them over 80 years old. It was thought that one reason the girls' team was so good was that they practiced against the boys.

A loss to Bird City was the only loss the team had in its championship year.

Colby resident Lyle Gillispie said he has some great memories of being in the Levant school. He said there was a flag pole outside one of the second story study-hall windows, and the last period of the day was spent in the study hall. He said he would slip out the window, shinny down the flag pole and go downtown to the hardware store, and hang around down there.

"Mr. Brown ran the store," Gillispie said, "and if anyone came into the store who had any reason I shouldn't be there during school time, Mr Brown would tell me so I could hurry

and hide among the nail kegs. He saved my rear many times, and you know, I still decorate his grave to this day."

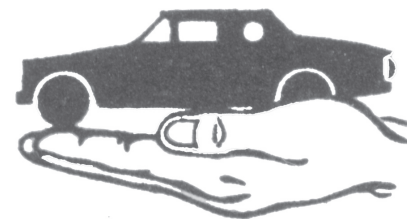
As the population of younger families dwindled, school census dropped to where it was no longer feasible to keep the school open. The last graduation was in 1958, well before the last round of forced school consolidations in Kansas.

Jack Reed of Colby bought the vacant school house in 1960, and remodeled it into a nursing

home. He raised all the floors to the same level and divided the classrooms into several units. The nursing home operated for only a few years before it too, was forced to close.

The old school — once the heartbeat of the Levant community — now stands in a state of disrepair, the roof and walls caving in. There's only enough remaining to show that it once housed a school full of loyal and proud students, and was a center of activity for the entire community.

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Hundreds of new and returning Colby Community College students turned out for the Campus Block Party in August. Area businesses and student organizations set up tables and gave out freebies and information. The event was organized by

the college, the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

— Photo by Kevin Bottrell/Colby Free Press

## Colby's college enrollment could increase

By Andy Heintz

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Colby Community College President Lynn Kreider says he thinks enrollment will increase this year, but declined to give a specific estimate. He said the official numbers should be released 18 days into the school year.

On Aug. 31, the last day for students to add or drop classes, Alan Waites, chief financial officer, estimated that enrollment will be up about 8 percent from 2008, an increase of about 60 full-time students. Skip Sharp, vice president of student affairs, said there are 254 students living in campus housing for the fall semester, an increase of 5 percent from last year. He said the dorms are still not completely filled, because some rooms on the northeast side of campus are not occupied.

Debbie Schwanke, public information director at the college, said the school constantly tries increase enrollment by meeting industry demands in America. She said this has led to the creation of a nursing program this year. This two-year program will allow licensed practical nurses to attend a class once a week for two school years. Once the women have completed the course they will be able to take an exam to be a registered nurse, said Schwanke.

Two new courses the college started last year were the feedlot certificate program and entrepreneurship program. The entrepreneurship program teaches students to own a new business, said Schwanke.

Kreider said studies show that when the economy is struggling, college enrollment increases, especially at community colleges, which are far less expensive than most four-year institutions.

He said the only factor that has led to greater enrollment increases than when the economy is doing badly is when the nation is at war.

The inverse relationship between college enrollment and the economy occurs because people who have lost their jobs head back to school to retrain for new jobs in different fields, Dr. Kreider said. Technical programs like veterinary assistant, nursing and dental hygiene are some of the more popular for people returning to school.

"A lot of our students coming out of our technical programs are making more money than people who went to four-year colleges," the president added.

Kreider said he thinks the college will pick up some students who would have chosen to go to a four-year college during better economic times. While enrollment increases at both four-year and junior colleges, he said the economic

climate is especially advantageous for community colleges.

Kreider said the college will have 24 new presidential scholars attending the school this year.

"This is the largest number of students that have been accepted in my four years as president," said Kreider. "We had never accepted more than 20 people."

Thirty-six students applied this year. Kreider and the existing presidential scholars interviewed the applicants to determine which students would be accepted. Applicants have to have at least a 3.0 grade average and must be involved in extracurricular activities at school and in the community. He said this year's presidential scholars included high school class presidents and graduates with perfect 4.0 grade averages in high school.



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