



THE JENNINGS SCHOOL with elementary and high school students is shown in September 1923. Early-day busses are lined up behind the group. The school closed in 2006 and is now owned by Bus and Coach International.

People remember Saturdays

Town of Jennings one of three stops on history tour April 27

The Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission will offer its annual history tour on Sunday, April 27, visiting Dresden, Clayton and Jennings. This is the second of a series of stories about the three communities. For details, call Ella Betts, (785) 475-3557 or Mary Henzel, (785) 470-0218.

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In Jennings, which once boasted more than 400 residents, a lot of people remember Saturday nights, when everyone came to town and enjoyed treats at the Hardesty Drug Store.

Mildred (Allen) Tacha, 96, said she moved to Jennings in 1920 with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Allen, and has many happy memories of growing up there. When her family moved there, she said, Jennings was a thriving town.

"My dad bought the creamery and continued in that business until he died in 1958," she said. "Farmers brought their cream and eggs to town to sell, and then bought groceries. Saturday night was especially busy, with the town full of people."

"We had movies on Saturday night and occasionally live groups entertained. These were all held in the opera house, the building which later became the Masonic Hall.

"We had active, successful sports teams, both girls and boys, clubs, class parties, music and many activities, which the community supported. Jennings also had active clubs, including the Tuesday Study Club, Fine Arts Club, lodges and church activities.

"After I married Julius 'Punch' Tacha, I belonged to the Golden Rule Club, which met in members' homes for potlucks, fancy work and quilting for members.

"Jennings was a fine place to grow up, gain a good education, raise a family and form lifelong friendships.

"I have many fond memories of the elaborate programs, luncheons and dinners hosted by Mrs. C. E. (Ura) Feely. Holidays were always special because of her work.

"Moritz Nauer organized and played in a city band that entertained in the bandstand on the corner of the city square. Dances were held many Saturday nights in the opera house. My mother would go with me as a chaperone so I could dance."

When Czech families came to the silent movies, she said, their kids would read the subtitles to the parents, since most had not learned English.

"When I was growing up," said Mrs. Tacha's daughter, Kay Brown, "Jennings was full. Houses were occupied, Main Street was busy. I

loved to go to my Granddad Allen's creamery and watch him candle eggs, test cream and dress turkeys.

"We had Noone Hardware, where a dusty stuffed eagle sat on the shelf. There was Feely's Dry Goods, with piles of overalls and blue shirts. We were privileged to have grocery stores, a locker plant, restaurants and a pool hall, where we high school girls once played pool after choir practice, much to the chagrin of our parents, and the wonderful drug store.

"I feel so fortunate to have spent my growing-up years on a farm near Jennings. We had good, caring teachers, solid citizens and a strong sense of community. We played cards, danced and had a strong Youth Fellowship at the church."

Marjorie (Shimmick) Hartzog said, "I remember how eager my sisters and I were to go to Jennings with our parents on Saturday nights during the summer. We would deliver the cream and eggs to the creamery and then go to the grocery store to do our week's grocery shopping, or trading, as our mother called it.

"The town would be full of people and cars, so often it was difficult to find a place on the Main Street to park. Each of us Shimmick girls were given a dime to spend, which usually bought us Chum gum, licorice Nibs, candied watermelon slices, other penny candy, or ice cream cones.

"Occasionally our parents were willing to stay in town long enough for us to attend the movie in the Jennings Community Building."

Regina (Wennihan) Henrickson, who was reared at Kanona, said, "I remember well when I went to Jennings with Mama. Her parents, John and Laura Guy, operated a cafe on the east side of Main Street, and she would leave me there while she did her trading.

"I loved to cross the street and push my nose on the screen door at the pool hall. The fellows sitting outside would always tell the owner, 'The Pill is here,' then he would come out and tell me, 'Nice girls don't go in here.' He would give me a nickel and I would go to Hardesty's Drug Store, climb up on the tall stool and get a big ice cream cone."

She said she also remembers going to quilting bees in Jennings. She said she loved lying below the quilting frame and watching the needles come through, and she often fell asleep while the women were talking in the rhythmic Czech language.

A lifetime resident, William Carter said, "Our older brother, 'Carney,' had the Home Oil bulk business. When he died, my twin brother Willard and I bought out his

share from his widow Hazel. Jess Tacha was also in the partnership, and when we went to the service (during World War II), he took over the business.

"We were fortunate to stay together the whole time we were in the army. Before we went overseas in 1943, we married sisters Rachel and Naomi Carlton. When we returned home from Europe, we bought back into the business.

"When Jess retired in 1951, we bought his share, then added propane and changed the name to Home Oil and Gas Co. Later, we purchased a service station in Jennings and added that to the business.

"I was born in this community and had a business interest, as well as family to come home to, so it just seemed the right thing to do."

Galen Carper, who returned to Jennings to retire, said, "I grew up north of town — no electricity, running water or indoor plumbing. We did have warm bricks at the foot of the bed at Grandma's.

"School days were the best; graduating in 1945 and missing very few alumni banquets. Four of the class of '45 live here in Jennings: Eugene and Dona (Wiley) Mrstik, Larry Mizer and myself.

"Granddad John Tacha had a nine-hole golf course in his pasture. Being left-handed, I played the course with a putter. Didn't count strokes.

"What do I miss the most now? Family get-togethers."

"Losing our school was bad, but after touring BCI's new plant, I think the future of Jennings is really bright."

JENNINGS HISTORY

Jennings is on K-383 highway on the southeast corner of Decatur County. As early as 1870, settlers began to locate along the Prairie Dog Creek, according to information from Neoma Tacha at the Czech Museum.

According to Harwood Kolsky of Saratoga, Calif., "hard times in Europe, the hope for a good life in America, including the possibility of owning land, and the desire for religious freedom brought the early Bohemian settlers to the Big Timber (Creek) area."

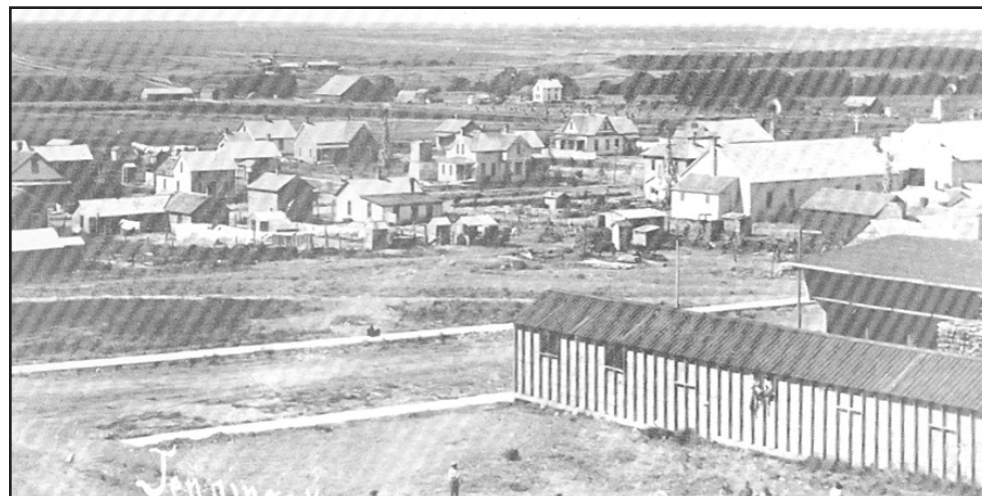
The threat of being drafted into the Austrian army at age 18 prompted many younger men to come to this country.

In 1862, the Homestead Act provided that for a \$10 filing fee, a citizen, or anyone who was 18 or head of a household and took out citizenship papers, could receive 160 acres of land by living on it for five years.

Warren Jennings and his family arrived from Iowa and homesteaded



THE JENNINGS METHODIST ORCHESTRA in the early days included (front row from left) Edward and Ernest Tacha, Mrs. Ace Durham, Ura Feely and Ace Durham, (standing). Back row: Mertie and John Speakman, Charles Danley and S. Porter.



THIS SCENE SHOWING JENNINGS (above) around 1900 includes the lumber yard on Kansas Avenue, with the Blue Ribbon Barn, Opera House and hotel among the buildings in the background. A number of homes also are shown.

— Collection of Jennings Czech Museum

on the Prairie Dog about a mile east and half a mile north of what is now Jennings. They built a two-story house with the lumber brought from Fort Kearney, Neb., by team and wagon.

In 1874, he established a small trading post at the farm. On Oct. 22, 1874, a post office was established there under the name Slab City with Walter Hopkins as the first postmaster.

In 1888, though, the main line of the Rock Island Railroad cut across the southeast corner of the county, and the present city of Jennings was laid out. Slab City was relocated and the town named after Mr. Jennings.

The same day, the post office closed in Slab City and opened in Jennings. The city was incorporated

on Oct. 4, 1906, with a population of 265. At its peak, the town boasted some 450 residents, but the present population is only about 100.

Dr. H.O. Hardesty and Dr. A. Jeffries both served the town for over 50 years. Dentists were Dr. Litton and Dr. Ligget. Churches have included Baptist and Methodist.

George W. Shook came from Almena and started the first newspaper, the *Jennings Echo*, in 1888. The last paper, the *Journal-Advocate*, was operated by Norine Bailey and Alice Wagoner, who later sold it to Richard Rippe in the middle 1970s. It ceased publishing shortly thereafter.

The Jennings City Hall was built in 1936 and 1937 by the federal Works Progress Administration. (See JENNINGS on Page 6B)