

Getting to school an adventure in 1937

By MARY LOU OLSON
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The country was in the midst of the Great Depression when members of the 1937 class graduated from Decatur Community High School.

They attended classes in the old high school building and commencement was held in the Oberlin Grade School gym. Ethel Cathcart was valedictorian and Bernice Larson, salutatorian. Honor students were Wesley Benda, John Laidig and Marjorie McGee.

Eldon Smith said that when he was a freshman, he drove an old 1928 Chevy to high school from the farm south of Oberlin and hauled his sister, Gladys, to Victoria Country School, near the Joe Vavroch farm, where she was teaching. They also picked up one of his classmates, Clyde Vernon, on the way.

"It was not unusual to get caught in a dust storm on the way home," he said. "There was so much static electricity in the air that often the car wouldn't run. We just had to sit there until it

blew over. One time when Gladys was teaching, my dad and I started out to get her. The dust got so bad, we had to walk the fence to the Verman Fringer place."

He said he especially enjoyed manual training and woodworking in high school. After graduating, he worked three years for Fay Smith, then was offered a defense job building airplanes for Cessna in Wichita after the war broke out. He enlisted in the Air Corps in 1943 and served two years as a pilot.

"I had Ruth Elvin for American history and took typing under Elizabeth Webber and we often referred to them as 'Mutt and Jeff,' due to the difference in their height."

"Often many were asked why people stayed here during the dust storm days and I remember Wesley Benda, a classmate, answering, 'Because we didn't have enough money to move away.'"

Arlene Carlson Glad said, "I lived south of Herndon on a farm and we were in the old building. I was in the

normal training class and taught one year at the Logan Country School, then I married Albert Glad.

"I loved playing the piano. One time someone asked me to play for the Girl Reserves in the auditorium. I was very nervous the first time, but I soon got over that. I am still playing in Atwood where I live at church, at the senior center, music club and Good Samaritan Home for my own enjoyment. I made many friends in high school whom I still love. I had kind and loving teachers who helped me as I lost my mother my freshman year. I was the oldest of four children.

"Among special friends were Eulaine Erikson, Laura Resch, Inez Lorenson, Eunice Anderson, Maurine Bogart, Meta Brown and Evelyn Lorenson."

Opal Castle Bryan attended Liberty Grade School and said she remembers well during the dust storm years seeing her mother put wet towels over the windows to keep the dust out. When she started to high school, she rode to school with her sister, Grace, in their

old Dodge car. She also took normal training and taught in a rural school near her home and usually rode to school on a horse.

Amy Anderson Rehm and her sisters, Alyce and Marylu, and their brother, Jimmy, lived on a farm and attended country school south of McCook. They moved to Oberlin when she was a sophomore.

"I just loved school," she said, "and just wanted to learn. I had perfect attendance all four years of high school until I came down with the mumps my senior year."

During high school, she said they "batched" and if they ever had 25 cents left, they liked to go to the movies when they had giveaways on Thursday night.

Another classmate, Eulaine Erikson Benda, also took normal training, then taught in country schools before marrying a classmate, Wesley Benda.

She and her sisters, Fern and Eula, attended country school and she said, "Sometimes our dad would take us to school in his Model T pickup when

he was hauling wheat and we thought we'd never get there."

The girls "batched" in high school and she said she enjoyed Girl Reserves, intramural sports and music. She later taught at Achilles in Rawlins County and Linda, just west of the Herndon Covenant Church.

Violet Henningson Schissler was born on Valentine's Day in 1919 at the home of her parents, Charley and Mary (Hokenson) Henningson, in Rawlins County and started first grade when she was 5 at Fairview School. Regina Brown was one of her teachers and she graduated from eighth grade on May 27, 1932.

She said that when she attended high school, she stayed with her mother in Oberlin. She recalled Elizabeth Webber as a favorite teacher, music as her favorite class and Viola Paschke Roper as her best friend. She later married Carl Schissler.

Among other highlights classmates remember are the Halloween clean-up, sports activities, music events and prom night.

Largest senior class ever graduated in 1942

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The Class of 1942, with 113 members, was the largest class to graduate from Decatur Community High School, but also in their minds were the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and the loss of two classmates, Duane Harold and Leon Railsback in the tornado which struck east of Oberlin on April 30, 1942.

Classmates Evelyn (Reith) May and Alyce (Anderson) Avery attended country schools, so enrolling in high school meant many new changes.

Mrs. May said, "When we started high school in the fall of 1938, we felt lost, with many coming from one-teacher country schools. There were no buses, so some worked for their room and board in homes, while others "batched," some rode a horse to school or car-pooled rides. Those in town walked or rode bicycles and gas was 10 cents a gallon.

"My husband, Martin May, who was a classmate, drove to school and he said he averaged at least one flat tire a week. One morning, he had two flats and was late and the superintendent's only comment was, 'You didn't start in time.'"

Both recalled carrying books and chairs when they moved from the old high school (where Decatur County Good Samaritan Center is now) to the new building on East Commercial.

"We had a large band, glee club, Hi-Y, Girl Reserves, GAA and FFA. A highlight was when we took part in the

promenade down Penn Avenue with juniors and seniors, then went to the Masonic Temple dining room for our banquet," Mrs. May added.

At commencement, those who died in the tornado, were presented diplomas, posthumously. Myron Johnson played a trombone solo and Anita Duvall sang a vocal solo.

The senior play, "Grandma and the American Way," had as cast members: Flora Boutz, Harold Adams, Bonnie Lunkenheimer, Alyce Anderson, Sidney Morrish, Elynor Walker, Maxine Anderson, Rex Berry, Kathleen Pollnow, Rod Avery, Bonnie Dodson and Harold Walton,

The high school had one of the best shop departments in the state. The boys butchered eight or nine hogs in shop their senior year, according to the *Decatur Dictator*.

Oberlin wrestlers captured first in both the Northwest Kansas League and state wrestling tournaments. State champs were Melvin Simpson, Archie Vernon and Dennis Fraker.

Normal training exams were taken by Eileen Hayward, Mary Rogers, Meredith Rhodes, Frances Spannegel, Helen Ridpath, Betty Hurst, Betty Huntley, Elsie Smith, Avis Willcox, Carolee Relph, Arlene Lawver, Nadine Welsh, Margie Smalberger, Mary Kennedy, Maxine Wolkenstorfer, Pauline Pauls, Roxie Heller, Evelyn Reith, Alberta Sandlian, Wilma Mockry, Bertina Johnson, Nadine Emery and Evalynn Cullison.

Valedictorian was Rex Diehl; salu-

tatorian, Alyce Anderson, and honor students were Donald Anderson, Elda Johnson, Dixie Patton, Pauline Pauls, Elsie Smith, Creta Sproul, and Avis Willcox.

Class officers were Rex Diehl, president; Fern Wymore, vice president; Alyce Anderson, secretary; John Benda, treasurer; and Melvin Simpson, marshal. Elynor Walker was editor of the *Decatur Dictator*.

Mrs. Avery added, "I remember Miss Webber tapping us on the hand with a ruler if we didn't type fast enough, walking everywhere and obeying the 10 p.m. curfew."

Upon graduation, many classmates served in the military service. Franklin Jackson, died in an airplane crash in Clovis, N. M. on Nov. 10, 1944.

Others who served in the war were Donald Anderson, Daughn Avery, Rex Berry, James Betts, Dale Claar, Charles Colton, Willis Cullison, Bill DeKnight, Rex Diehl, Hugh Fawcett, Glenn Flaska, Kenneth Gardner, Jesse Jackson, Myron Johnson, Fred Jordan, James Lazaroff, Val Litton, Ralph McAfoos, Harold Machart, Martin May, Harold Miller, Charles Montgomery, Sidney Morrish, Billie Murphy, Jack O'Toole, Harold Paschke, Derald Purdy, Earl Raymond, Gerald Rezner, Johnnie Richards, Robert Riley, Ellsworth Robertson, LaVern Ruzicka, David Shellanbarger, Melvin Simpson, Noel Thomsen, Wayne Vernon, Lee Waldo, Harold Walton, Loren Welsh, Virgil Wenger and Waldeane Witt.



CLOYCE "RED" HAROLD was on the high school football squad.