

History of Pleasant Grove Schools

Pleasant Grove School, located in the southeast part of Shawnee, has a glorious past and many distinguished features making up its history. Its boundaries were established in September of 1892 by County Superintendent C.J. Slattery. Each districted was allotted an area 3 miles by 3 miles unless physical barriers, such as a river, necessitated it being somewhat smaller or larger. Pleasant Grove was somewhat smaller due to the North Canadian River. It was given the district number 29.

C.J. Slattery announced on March 17, 1894, in the Tecumseh Democrat, that 93 schools were now organized in Pottawatomie County. Pleasant Grove was one of them. Many school districts elected school boards but had no money so consequently no school was held for a few more years. This was not the case with Pleasant Grove. A site was purchased and a 2 room building was built in 1894 on the exact same site the school is located on today.

The first public school was west of Tecumseh and was District 40, Newbern, established in the fall of 1892. It was built of logs with bark still on them. The seats were made of split logs. Shawnee and Tecumseh had subscriptions schools that year and next year also. Newbern only lasted 2 years.

There was a government school south of Shawnee that was opened for Kickapoo and Shawnee Indian children in September 1891. Other schools in operation in Pottawatomie County were Sacred Heart and St. Mary's Academy. Sacred Heart was established in 1877 and St. Mary's Academy had its first woman graduate in 1897, these schools were opened before the land run in September, 1891.

Some of the earliest record books have been misplaced and some of the earliest records cannot be reconstructed, however, enough remain to substantiate our history. The Pleasant Grove School board in 1894-95 was J.H. Shambilin, elected in May 1893, J.C. Hoffman, elected May 1894 and S.B. Wolfe replaced by W.M. Shiver in May 1895. The 1895-96 school year began November 4, 1895, for a 60 day term. Susan Alexander, a 19 year old, that made the highest grade on the teacher exam (90+) was named teacher that year. She had a first grade certificate and received \$1.50 per day or \$90 for the school term. A first grade certificate was good for 3 years, a second grade certificate was good for 2 years and a third grade certificate was good for only one year.

The Record of Examination of applicants for teachers certificates show Earl Miller, a 13 year old boy from Shawnee, made a 70% on his test and received a 3rd grade certificate, A fifteen

year old girl, Ethel Clark, received a 1st grade certificate. The oldest applicant to take the teacher exam was C.T. Hickman of Tecumseh who was 65 years old.

All schools at this time were elementary schools with the exception of Shawnee and Tecumseh and they had no graduates for at least two more years.

In 1896-97 John Sargent was the Pleasant Grove teacher. The term was twice as long as the previous year, 120 days. School began November 2, 1896. The teacher for the next few years was S.E. Bruss. The 97 term began October 11, 1897. The appraised value of the school in 1897 was School House \$135, furniture \$98, for a total value of \$233. The only money schools had in the early days was from local taxes. State aid would not begin until the 1930's and Federal aid began in the 1950's. Consequently some schools had terms for as few as 30 days.

1910- Cora Gable was the teacher at Pleasant Grove. Thirty-five children attended that year with 18 first graders, 5 second, 3 third, 3 fourth, 3 fifth, no sixth, 3 seventh, and no eighth graders. Pottawatomie County had 124 schools in operation with 16271 children enumerated and 12,625 attending. The county population was 43,595.

1915- Pleasant Grove's budget was \$730. J.B. Lowery was teacher and his salary was \$60 per month. The salaries ranged from \$45 to \$75 throughout the county.

1920- There were still 110 schools in operation in Pottawatomie County with a population of 46,028. Ten schools offered secondary education with 100 dependent schools.

1930- There were 98 schools with a county population of 66,572, the largest population our county has ever had including our present population of 58,760 (1990).

In 1940 there were 95 schools and in 1950 we had dropped to 51 schools. The next 10 years we were to see a huge drop to only 23 schools. By 1940 we had 15 schools in operation, the same as today with the exception of St. Louis going out in 1993.

Pleasant Grove had been blessed with many outstanding teachers in the past as well as today. It is believed that Pleasant Grove is the smallest school in area in Oklahoma. It is also believed to be the oldest operating district in Pottawatomie County and the only district to have been located on the same site for over 100 years.

Pleasant Grove is perhaps the only school in Oklahoma that twice voted to annex to another school and then later change their mind and have the court restore their district. In the

1920's they voted to annex to I-93, Shawnee. In 1978 they voted to annex to D-32, South Rock Creek. Both times they changed their minds and the District court found for Pleasant Grove.

In 1985 a terrible fire leveled the school but miraculously no one was hurt. Under the leadership of Gene Hill the school was built back replacing the old wooden structure with a beautiful metal and brick building. Mr. Hill had outstanding decorating abilities and the school is the pride of the community. Mr. Hill was the superintendent from 1977 until February of 1993.

Arlene Burton became superintendent in March of 1993 and retired in June of 2012, working at Pleasant Grove for a total of 31 years. She was the assistant principal/principal from 1986 until March 1993. The school was introduced to Great Expectations and implemented it during the 1998 school year. In the fall of that same year, Pleasant Grove began its first full day Pre-K class and the following year another full day Pre-K class was added. Pleasant Grove soon followed up with 2 KG, 1st & 2nd grade classes. Pleasant Grove was the first school in the county to have full day Kindergarten and PK classes.

Two bond issues were passed during Mrs. Burton's years as superintendent. One was passed in 1997 and one was passed on April 1, 2007. As far as it is known, these were the first and only bond issues passed at Pleasant Grove Schools. Through those bond issues and use of Impact Aid funds, Pleasant Grove was able to accomplish many capital improvements. The gym was enlarged by 25 feet and the warrior head was added to the gym floor. There were two additional bathrooms constructed along with two Pre-K classrooms and the library, the first and only library Pleasant Grove has ever had. The next purchase was a new larger portable building. Prior to adding the lobby, new parking was added to the southeast corner of the school. The district then passed the 2nd bond issue and added two more bathrooms to the south hall and a multipurpose room across from the bathrooms.

In 2009, impact aid funds and building fund money was used to add a lobby/concession area for the gym. The multipurpose room was converted into two kindergarten rooms and the nurse's office/new multipurpose room was built. The digital message sign that stands on the corner of Bryan and Walnut was purchased in 2002. In addition, Mrs. Burton worked with a local businessman for 18 years to acquire the land directly south of the school on Bryan Street. It was finally accomplished during the 2011-2012 school year, with the land being gifted to the school for future building projects or expansion.

In July of 2012, Tyler Bridges took over the position as superintendent of Pleasant Grove Schools.