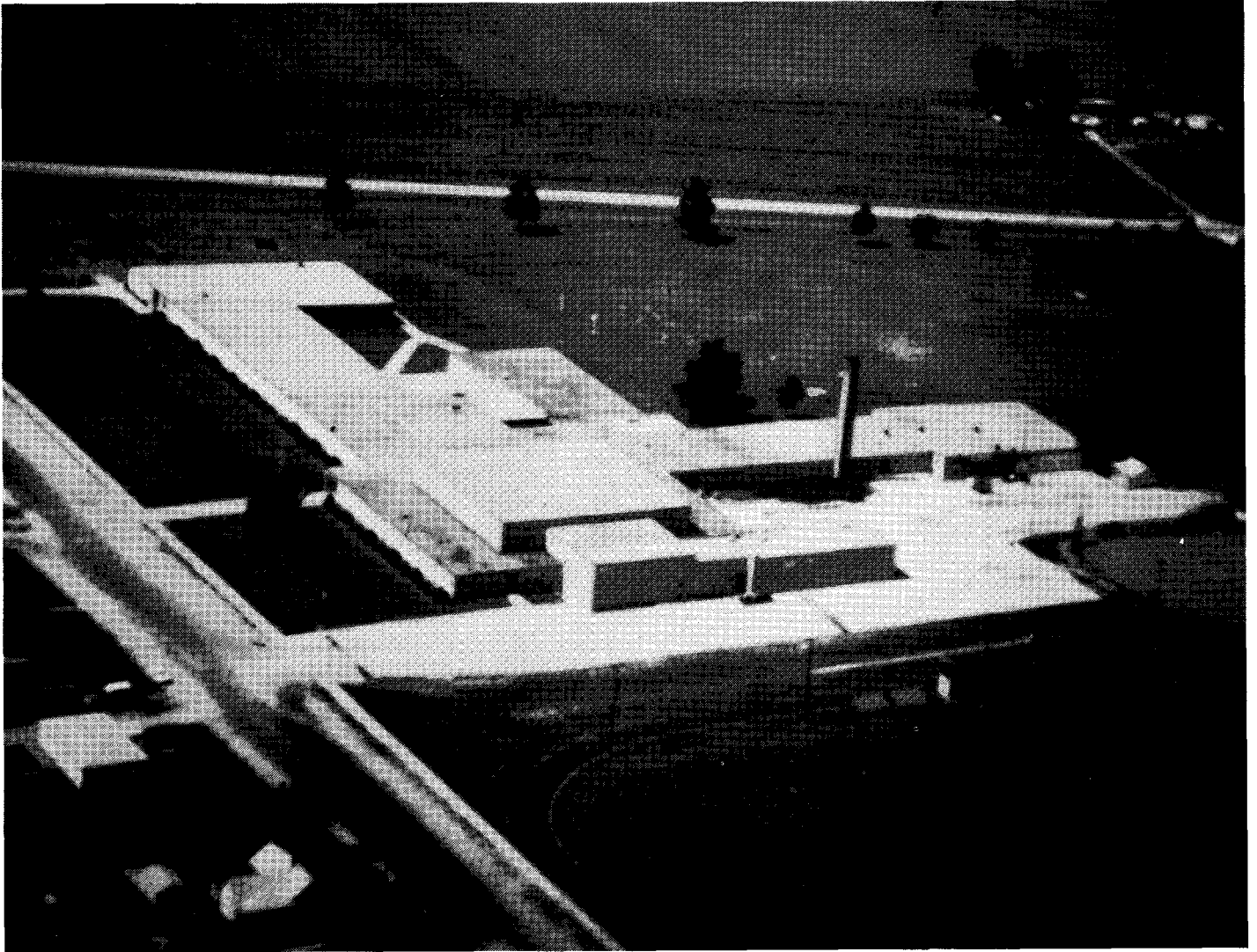


## CHAPTER 4

# Schools



**Moweaqua Unit School—1976**

*Photo by Howard Knight*

## MOWEAQUA SCHOOLS

The early settlers recognized the need for schooling for their children. In 1836, sixteen years before the village of Moweaqua was formed, a school was built about a quarter of a mile north of the present town, probably not far from the school building now in use. This school was a log building containing furniture fashioned by hand. The seats were made by splitting logs, leaving the split side smooth and inserting wooden pegs for legs on the other. There were no backs on these seats and no desks on which to write. In order to have outside light; a row of logs was removed from the entire length of the building and greased paper was pasted over this opening. A large, open fireplace furnished the heat. This school was kept open only three months each year as some of the students had to walk up to six miles each way to attend classes. Also, in the spring and fall the children had to help their families with the farm work.

By 1860 the village of Moweaqua had come into existence, and a two story frame school was erected. It was located three blocks east of Main Street at 130 North Putnam Street. This building was later moved to the corner of Main Street where Hight's Delight is now located and was turned into McHenry's Drug Store. Mr. McHenry also served as postmaster in this building. There was also a private school functioning at this time, taught by Miss Sarah Bacon in her home at 334 North Macon Street.

The next public school was a two story brick building erected at 305 North Hanover. There were two rooms downstairs and one large one upstairs. Only the lower grades were taught there. This school served the community from about 1878 until 1891. By this time the community wanted their children to have the advantages of a high school education. The little three room school, however, was overflowing with elementary students, and money was scarce. Finally in 1890, a new school building became a reality.

This school, known as the "Little Red School House" as it was built of red bricks, was located in the 200 block of South Putnam Street. The original plant consisted of six classrooms, three on each floor. This was adequate space for all twelve grades. Eleven years later, however, more space was needed, and three additional classrooms and a combination study hall and assembly room were added. The first and second grades were housed in the two rooms on the lower floor of the new addition while remaining grades used the original structure. The seventh and eighth grades were combined in one room with one teacher. The high school classes used one room of the original building and the second floor of the new structure with the superintendent and two teachers conducting all classes offered at this level.

Again in 1920 there was a need for more classrooms. Through remodeling, four new rooms were created. The faculty was increased to a total of thirteen members. Four years later an additional building was constructed just south of the original building at a cost of \$60,000. It contained four additional high school classrooms and the first school gymnasium in Moweaqua. Prior to that, inside athletic events had been held in the second floor of the present Legion Hall and upstairs in the Old Opera House, which was located on the site of the Ayars Bank parking lot. This new gymnasium was considered the finest around, especially since it could seat 300 people. (The present gymnasium has a seating capacity of 1400).

While the town children were being educated, their country cousins were not idle. More than twenty country schools served what is now the school district. These were mainly one room buildings heated by stoves and maintained by the teachers. Their individual yearly attendance ranged from less than five to more than twenty-five, usually averaging about ten. Often all eight grades were taught.

Jacobs, located one mile north of Moweaqua, was probably the first school in the district which Negro children attended. These were the four Steele children, whose father farmed nearby. The original building was torn down in 1913 and another built.

Pleasant Flower, located two miles south of town, utilized the teaching services of Jane Stephens.

Goodwill was two and a half miles northeast of town but was closed in 1935 due to its small enrollment.

Chadwick, located three miles east, three south, one east, and three-fourths south of town had the distinction of having its students sing on radio station WSOY in Decatur in 1940.

Long Grove, four miles east and two north, is gone except for the well Bob Hunter once found behind his barn.

Fame, located four miles south and a half mile east, was probably the first school in the area with a hot lunch program which began in 1938. A closet was converted into a kitchen there and a lady from town came out daily to prepare the meals.

Nebraska, five miles west, a quarter north, and a quarter west, was built in 1862, and the same building was still used after 1931, having undergone only minor improvements.

Pleasant Ridge was three miles west and a mile north of town. The building is still standing, although it is abandoned.

Charter Oak, three and a half miles northwest of town, was sold to Roy V. Snyder, Jr. in 1950.

Maple Grove, located 6 miles east and a half mile north of town, had a music teacher in the early 1930's. She formed a rhythm band which played at a county school program in Shelbyville. There was also an active P.T.A. at this school.

Round Grove, three and a half miles east of Moweaqua. In 1942, when Paul Jordan was in the third grade, he noticed a fire in the ceiling of the school. He held up his hand to report it but his sister Florence Ann (Wooters), gave him a dirty look, as they were never to distract the teacher when she was working with other students. He finally attracted his sister's attention to the fire, and they overcame their fears and alerted the teacher. That fire was put out, but on the last day of school that year another fire started and the school burned to the ground. A nearby house was used as the school for several years afterward.

Forest Hill, located two miles west of Radford and a half mile north, had a very active community club.

Pleasant View was five miles southeast of Moweaqua; Friendship was seven miles east and three south of town; Walker was three miles north and a half mile west; Locust Grove was three miles east, four south and three east; Penn, also probably called West Center, was eight miles east and a half mile north; Willow Branch was one mile east of Walker; Oak Branch was four miles west and south of Moweaqua; Sunnyside was three and a half miles southeast of town; and Elm Grove was six miles east and two south.



The "Red Brick School" as it looked in 1915. Picture courtesy of Josephine Coffman

There were, perhaps, other country schools; however, no records on them can be found.

Due to consolidation with the town school most of these country schools were sold at auction early in 1950. There were usually the school building and one or two out buildings and privies included in each sale. Pleak, located four miles east and two south, remained open and was expanded at this time.

Three other country schools were moved in making a four room school containing six grades. Three teachers were employed, and special teachers came out from the town school. Pleak had its own P.T.A. It closed in 1959, ending the country school era in Moweaqua.

In 1947 a new type of school consolidation known as a community unit district was approved by Moweaqua voters. This new district comprised 88 square miles around the town and was called Moweaqua Community Unit District 6 A. The outlying country schools joined the town school and eventually were housed in one central building. This was not done without opposition; however, people came to realize that through this plan every child in the area could receive a broader education. This is the plan which is still in effect.

In February 1948, with the organization of the community unit district, more classroom space was needed. A year later plans were made to include a high school and elementary grades all under one roof. It took until July of 1952 for money and plans from architects Harris, Spangler, Beall, and Salogga to be secured. Bids were taken in hopes that one would coincide with the \$568,000 on hand for that purpose. However, the closest one was nearly double that

amount and did not include finishing floors or ceilings, landscaping, finishing the athletic field, any equipment or the purchasing of the site. The only feasible plan seemed to be for the school board to act as its own contractor and utilize local people as builders. Meeting with men of various crafts was encouraging, and Mac Wilson, who lived across the street from the new site, accepted the job of superintending the work. Early in 1953 work began, but soon pickets appeared from the Building Trades Unions. Meetings were held between the board and union agents, but the picket line remained for several months. At no time, however, did they cause any difficulties. In October 1955, the building was completed at a total cost of \$768,000. The district was able through bonds, interest, and tax money to meet this financial obligation. Many local people contributed hours of free labor in order to accomplish this feat. The finished product is the building now in use on East Pine Street adjoining Route 51.

This 1954 building was only five years old when the educational needs of the school district outgrew it. A new addition consisting of six classrooms, two rest rooms, a study hall, and a library workroom opened in January of 1960. A bus garage was completed three years later. By 1971 the debt from the original building had been paid off, and classrooms were again overcrowded. A building bond referendum was passed in 1972. Through remodeling and additional building, a study hall, new cafeteria, and five classrooms were added to the high school area and an elementary office, six classrooms, and two rest rooms completed the elementary wing. This brought the school plant to its current form.

The current high school schedule makes many courses of study available to the 216 enrolled there. Besides the curriculum of English, social studies, math, and science, students may also select industrial arts, secretarial courses, art, vocal and instrumental music, agriculture, home making, Spanish, French, driver education and physical education. Cooperative work training programs enable students to learn on-the-job skills in the community. Many students take advantage of the Decatur Area Vocational Center half days where training is offered in nursing, child care, beauty culture, machine shop, auto mechanics, wood-working, and other areas. The current total school enrollment is 723, including kindergarten. The basic elementary program is enriched with remedial reading, music therapy, art, music, and physical education, with the

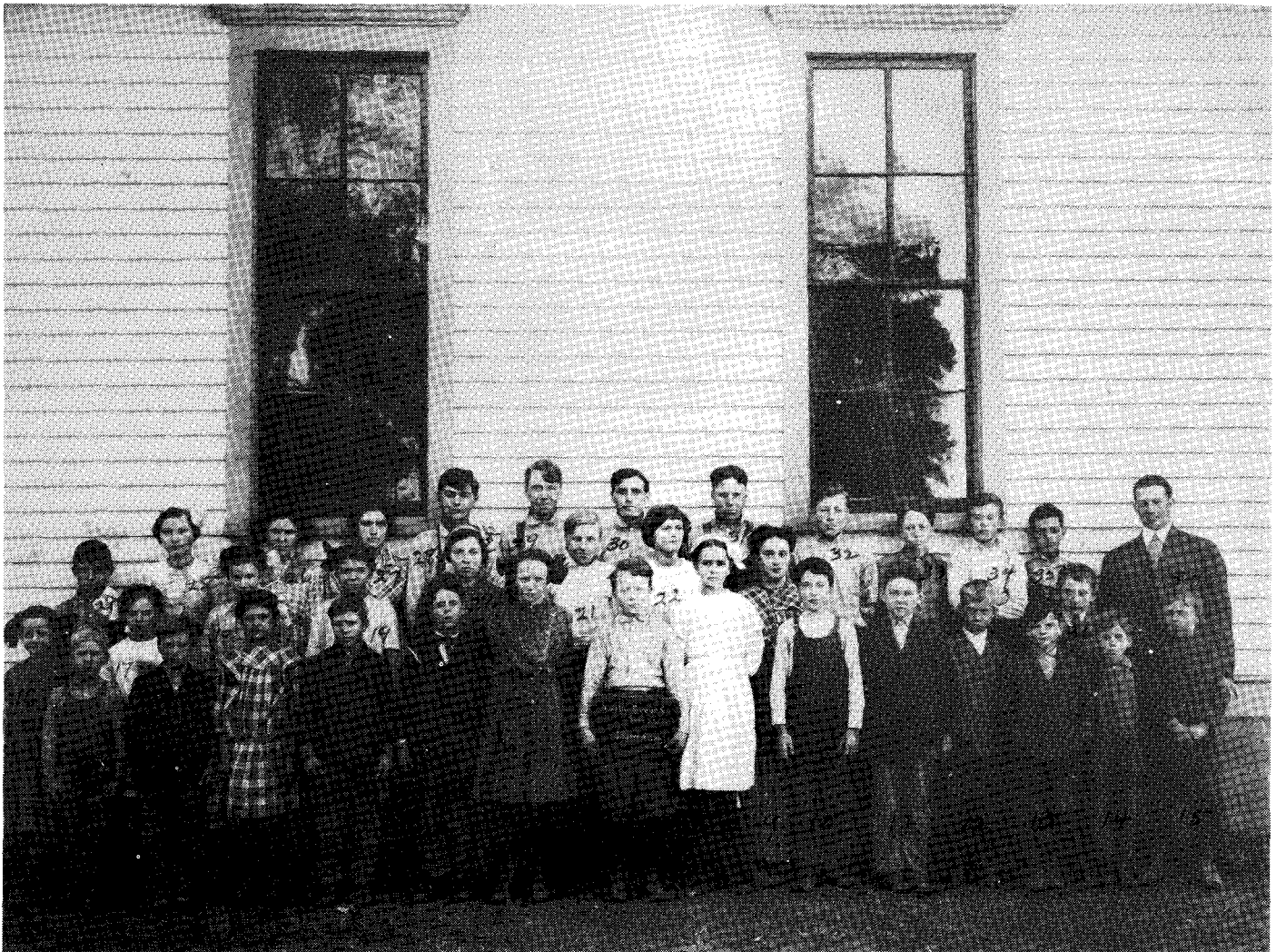
middle school, grades six through eight, also has most of these classes available to them. Special education courses are offered at Taylorville and Decatur.

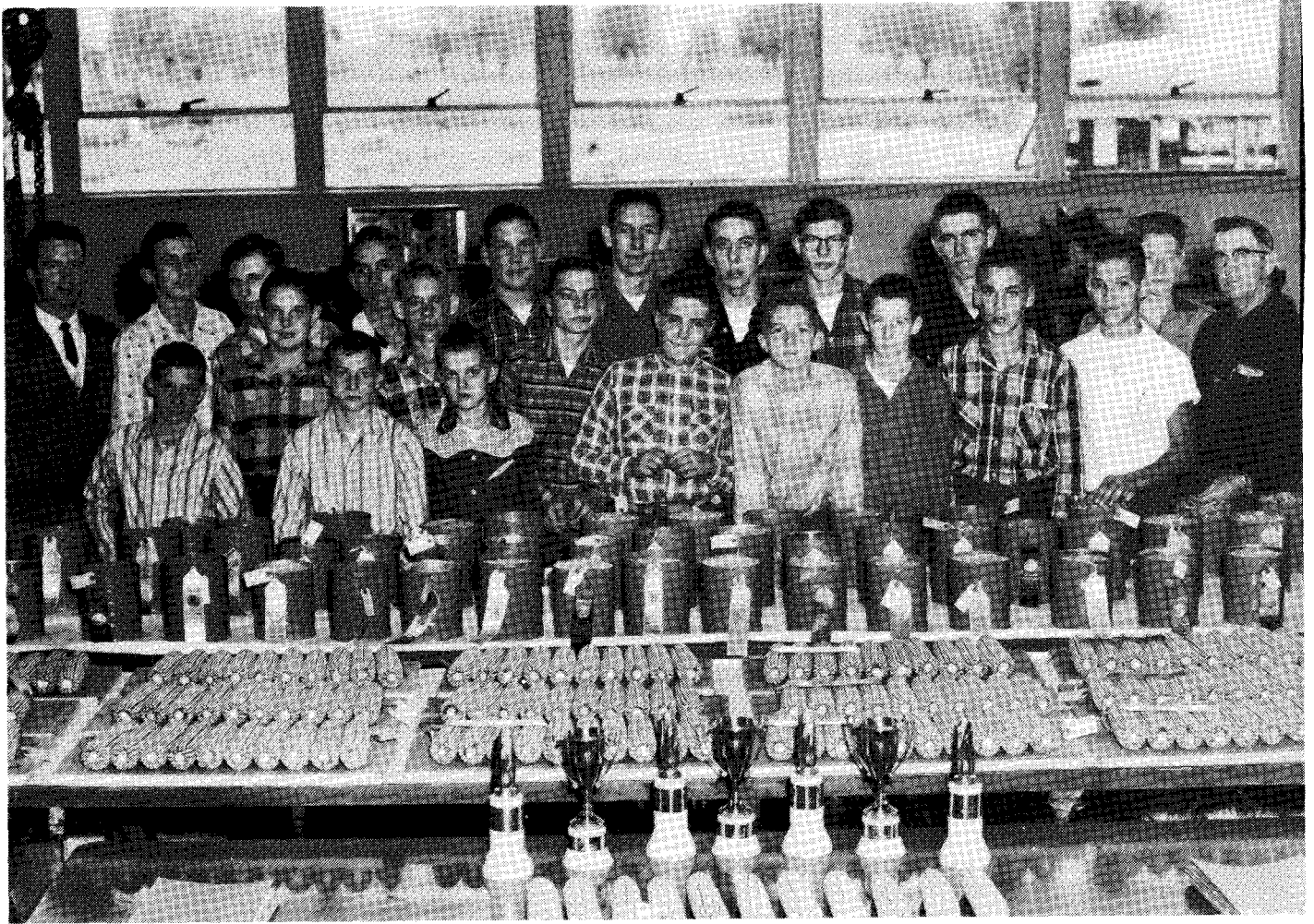
As a past board member, Will Harris, remarked, "Good schools are not the results of good buildings, but they are good schools because they have good teachers." Hundreds of dedicated people have been responsible for educating Moweaqua's children. Receipts found in the school archives show that in 1862, A. R. Miller was paid \$60 for three months teaching, and Martha Peble's salary was \$124 for five months. During the current year Moweaqua faculty salaries range from \$9,000 to \$16,150 for nine months work. Mr. Carl was probably the first superintendent, supposedly filling this position in 1890. Since then sixteen men have held this office, with Mark Gregory, hired as superintendent in

### LONG GROVE SCHOOL — 1913

Allenboro Store Area (4 miles east, 2 miles north)

- |                    |                               |                          |   |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1—Dutton(?)        | 11—                           | 21—Dewey Dutton          | 31—Bert Ekiss   |
| 2—Dutton(?)        | 12—Clyde Lindamood            | 22—Velma Atteberry Boyer | 32—Lawrence Ekiss                                       |
| 3—Lena Sanner Hill | 13—Homer Cross                | 23—                      | 33—Ross Ekiss   |
| 4—                 | 14—Lester Allen               | 24—August Otta           | 34—Tom Hemer  |
| 5—Ora Long (Pooch) | 15—Wayne Hemer                | 25—Helen Bohlen Gregory  | 35—Eddie Sanner   |
| 6—Beatrice Lamb    | 16—Mora Lamb Dillbeck         | 26—Ruth (?)              | 36—Clayton Lindamood                                    |
| 7—Keith Ekiss      | 17—Lois Hemer Hays            | 27—Nora Sanner Macklin   | 37—Forest Moyer   |
| 8—Lola Allen       | 18—Ethel Cross Scribner       | 28—Homer Atteberry       | Missing: Wm. Bohlen (helping<br>on farm) about 16 years |
| 9—Blanche Lamb     | 19—Lural Atteberry Livingston | 29—Lloyd Ekiss           |   |
| 10—Eddie Cross     | 20—Nora Hemer Askins          | 30—Bill Sanner           |   |





Howard Knight, left, and his FFA boys sponsored the above corn show in the 1950's.

1972, and currently serving. Still teaching in Moweaqua Schools after having begun their tenure in the "Little Red School House" are Howard Burns, Howard Knight, and Kathryn Day. Twenty-two years ago when the present school opened Jane Stephens and Lucille Portwood joined the district and are still employed here. The elementary principal is Edward Rauch, with Carroll Scrogin as high school principal.

Not all education has been dull as these true tales point out.

A first grader came into Mrs. Judy McKinney's room to give her the exciting news, "My daddy, has to go to the hospital because he has birthstones."

A little first grader, after their substitute, Mrs. Bernice Stombaugh had told them who she was, later mistakenly called her "Mrs. Butterball."

Mrs. Frances Knights was trying to get her second graders to understand the meaning of "cheap." Jason Gregory said he knew what it meant. As an example he said, "We went to the Blue Mill for dinner, and when Daddy got the bill, he said, 'this isn't cheap!'"

Mrs. Jane Stephens has enjoyed some of her fifth graders misconceptions of various terms

such as:

Export—one who is real good and knows everything.

Import—one who knows nothin' about nothin'.

The most important facet of education is of course its products, the students. Many of them were outstanding in many areas throughout their school years and afterwards.

Recent honor students include Joseph G. Bohlen, M.D. son of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn "Cotton" Bohlen. He graduated from Moweaqua High in 1962. After receiving a B.A. degree in Zoology from Southern Illinois University he obtained his Ph. D. at the University of Minnesota. In August 1970, he presented a scientific paper at the IX International Conference of Anatomists in Leningrad, Russia, pertaining to research he had done on the biological rhythms of Eskimos. He is currently doing medical research for the University of Minnesota School of Medicine. He is married to Michelle Bilyeu and has a daughter Sasha Leigh.

The doctors Alan and Thomas Bilyeu are sons of Mrs. Erma Bilyeu and the late Charles T. Bilyeu. Alan graduated from Moweaqua High in 1964 and Tom in 1968. They both were members of the Marching Illini while at the University of Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois College of Medicine, having won many awards. Alan is presently in a three year Family Practice residence program in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Tom plans to enter this program too.

Brent S. Bohlen, son of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn "Cotton" Bohlen, graduated from Moweaqua High in 1968. In 1972 he was awarded the Southern Illinois University Award for Academic Excellence for being the graduate with the highest grade average. He received a master's degree in Public Policy at Harvard University and is now working toward a June Doctor Degree at Harvard Law School. He is married to Mary Beth Painter.

Besides academic achievements, Moweaqua students have shown outstanding talents in music, industrial arts, agriculture, and other areas. Several outstanding athletic teams have been produced here. In 1964 and 1965 the Indians football team, coached by Dick Jostes, was the Meridian Conference Champions, having an undefeated

season in 1964. The 1974 team coached by Terry Workman, was conference co-champion. The 1947-48 basketball team coached by Robert Oliver, was conference winners. In 1964-65 Russell Myers coached his team to second place in the regional tournament, the following year attaining that same place as well as winning the conference. Terry Workman will be remembered as the coach whose 1973-74 basketball team won second place in the regional, but only three of the 21 games played.

Throughout the 140 years since Moweaqua's first school was built many changes have been made in facilities and curriculum. However, the original goal still remains among the Moweaqua citizens: To continually seek better educations for their children.

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VOL. IV.

MOWEAQUA, ILLINOIS, THURSDAY, JANUARY, 16, 1890.

NO. 23.

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## OUR NEW SCHOOL BUILDING



OUR CITIZENS ALMOST A UNIT IN FAVOR OF ERECTING A

Substantial, Comfortable Building.

The Majority Favor Its Location in the Park.

How Would a Two-Story Building, Similar in Design to the Above, Answer?

There is a point in the discussion of the erection of a new school building that our people should not lose sight of. It is this: "Something must be done."

The time has passed when it was merely a matter of preference as to whether a new school house should be built or not. Now, the time has come when action is necessary. The present building was completed and received by the school directors in the summer of 1867; almost 23 years ago. At that time it was fully equal to the demands for room upon it, but we do not think that any one will claim that its facilities are large enough for to-day. It should not be, nor do we believe it is, necessary to urge any other reason for the new building and increased

advantages to our educational interests, than the important one, of the welfare and advancement of our children on the path of knowledge. There is, however, another and a strong argument to be used in its favor. With the proper erection of a new building, the schools may be graded and improved, more advanced studies can be added, and parents who are sending their children to school in larger cities, may keep them at home to attend school here. It will attract other families who will remove here to take advantage of our excellent educational facilities. Thus, our new school building will be an advantage in a great many ways.

To find the feeling among our business men regarding the erection of a new school building, its cost and location, a CALL-MAIL interviewer has asked those questions of a great many, and below will be found

### WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT IT.

W. GREGORY.—I am in favor of building a new school building, and think one sufficient for the needs of the town, can be built for \$8,000. I think the Park is the proper location for it, and should like to see work commenced as soon as possible.

JOHN T. HESLAM.—Yes sir; I think we need a new school building and would like to see work begun on it this year. Do not think a building, of the kind we need, can be erected for less than \$10,000. Think the proper location is the Park.

A. J. COMBS.—I am decidedly in favor of a new school building, and think it will cost us \$10,000. I think the land south of Joe Armstrong's residence is the proper location for it, and am opposed to putting it in the Park. That should be reserved for the use of a park.

J. H. KIRKMAN.—Am in favor of a new school house, to be built this year, and not cost less than \$9,000.

GEO. E. PATTON.—Yes; I am in favor of a new school building, am ready to pay my share, and would like to see it located in the Park. Think a building to cost \$10,000 should be erected.

W. C. MILLER.—Yes sir; I am in favor of a new school house, and think that we should build one to cost \$10,000. My choice of location is the south half of the Park. That, I think, would make ample room for school purposes, and still leave us some park room.

G. A. KAUTZ.—I am in favor of the erection of a new school building, to be located in the Park and cost not less than \$10,000.

RICHARD GREGORY.—I think that we need a new school house, and think that \$5,000, properly and carefully expended, will build what we need. Would prefer to see it located in the south half of the Park.

B. F. RIBELIN.—I am in favor of a new school building to be located in the Park, if it could be procured. Think the cost should not exceed \$5,000. I only know of one reason why it should not be located in the park, and that is, when we have a new county here, we should want to place the court house on that ground.

J. E. GREGORY.—I believe a new school house should be built this year, and located in the southeast corner of the Park. We cannot build a house to meet the requirements for less than \$10,000.

B. H. McHEWERT.—I am in favor of a new school house, and think it should be built this year. The ground south of J. O. Armstrong's, is my choice for location, and I think \$8,000 is enough for the building to cost.

C. P. GASKILL.—I recognize the fact that a new school house is needed, and think when completed, should cost \$10,000. I am in favor of the ground south of Joe Armstrong's for location.

H. F. DAY.—Yes; I think a new building should be erected soon as possible, and should cost not less than \$10,000. The building in use at present is not safe, and we should not daily jeopardize the lives of our children, by continuing its use. My choice of location is the Park, provided it can be properly secured.

J. W. COWLER.—You may say that I am decidedly in favor of building a new school house, and think it will be better for the town in every respect, if one to cost \$15,000 should be built. I favor the Park for a location, and the "better our educational advantages, the better it will be for the town."

S. M. ADAMS.—The fact is plain enough that a new school house is needed, and I favor the building of one, at a cost not to exceed \$10,000, and if the Park can be used for that purpose, think there is where it should be located. It is centrally located and of the proper size.

G. M. KRAMER.—Something will have to be done, and I am in favor of erecting a new building. The Park is my choice for location, and I do not think that the house should cost more than \$8,000.

M. H. MILLER.—I am decidedly in favor of a new school house, and think the Park is the proper location for it. I think the cost should run from \$8,000 to \$10,000.

(CONTINUED ON LAST PAGE.)

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