

*The **Heart** of a Community*

Bois d'Arc Public School
Bois d'Arc Missouri

In the early days of the United States, rural school districts were especially important to the education of the citizens. This was before the days of fast moving automobiles, when transportation consisted of walking, riding horses and, for the very fortunate, a horse-drawn wagon or buggy. As the country expanded and pioneers moved west with their families, a growing population lived in rural areas where neighbors were often at a distance and an urban education was beyond reach. As a result, these small rural schools often became a cornerstone of the rural community they served, acting as a meeting places and often hosting community events. This paper looks at one such school in southwestern Missouri and the effect this small school has had on the surrounding area and the people living there for over 100 years.

In the early days, Bois d'Arc was a thriving community...the Great Depression changed that forever.



To make the story come alive, people with past, present, and future ties to the school were interviewed.

- ❖ Betty Squibb --- A teacher for 25 years, her children and grandchildren attended this school.
- ❖ Jim Squibb --- Betty's husband, he attended this school, as did his parents.
- ❖ Carolyn West--- She and her 3 daughters attended this school, and Carolyn has been the secretary here for 23 years.
- ❖ Dan McMurray --- He attended this school for the 4th-6th grades, during which time the school was consolidated.
- ❖ Heather Sample --- She is the current principal, and she began her career here as a teacher.

The first school that we have a record of location for was built around 1883. This building measured fifty feet by twenty-six feet and was one story high. There are no longer any visible remains of this building, but it was located east of Center Street on Robinson Street, on the fifth lot on the south side of the road. This building was a two-room public school housing grades one through eight.



“Miss Ollie Johns has been employed to teach the school this fall at Bois d’Arc. She is a first-class teacher and is sure of success.”-- The Bois d’Arc Splinters, June 23, 1887

“No school last Monday on account of wedding at R.T. Johns.” --The Commonwealth, December 8, 1887

“Our school opened Monday with a good attendance. Prof. Geo. H. Redfearn is the principal.”-- Bois d’Arc Budget, September 4, 1890

“Mrs. Jennie Greenup is giving splendid satisfaction with her school.”-- The Commonwealth, June 4, 1891

“Our school house here is undergoing a cleaning up, washing and painting, but not before it was needed.”-- The Bois d’Arc Budget, August 17, 1893

“Miss Mattie Whittaker, of Ash Grove, has secured our school for next term” and “Prof. Geo. H. Redfearn received the Republic school as principal teacher.”-- The Bois d’Arc Budget, May 25, 1898

In the early 1900s, the wooden school building was torn down and replaced by a larger building at the same location.



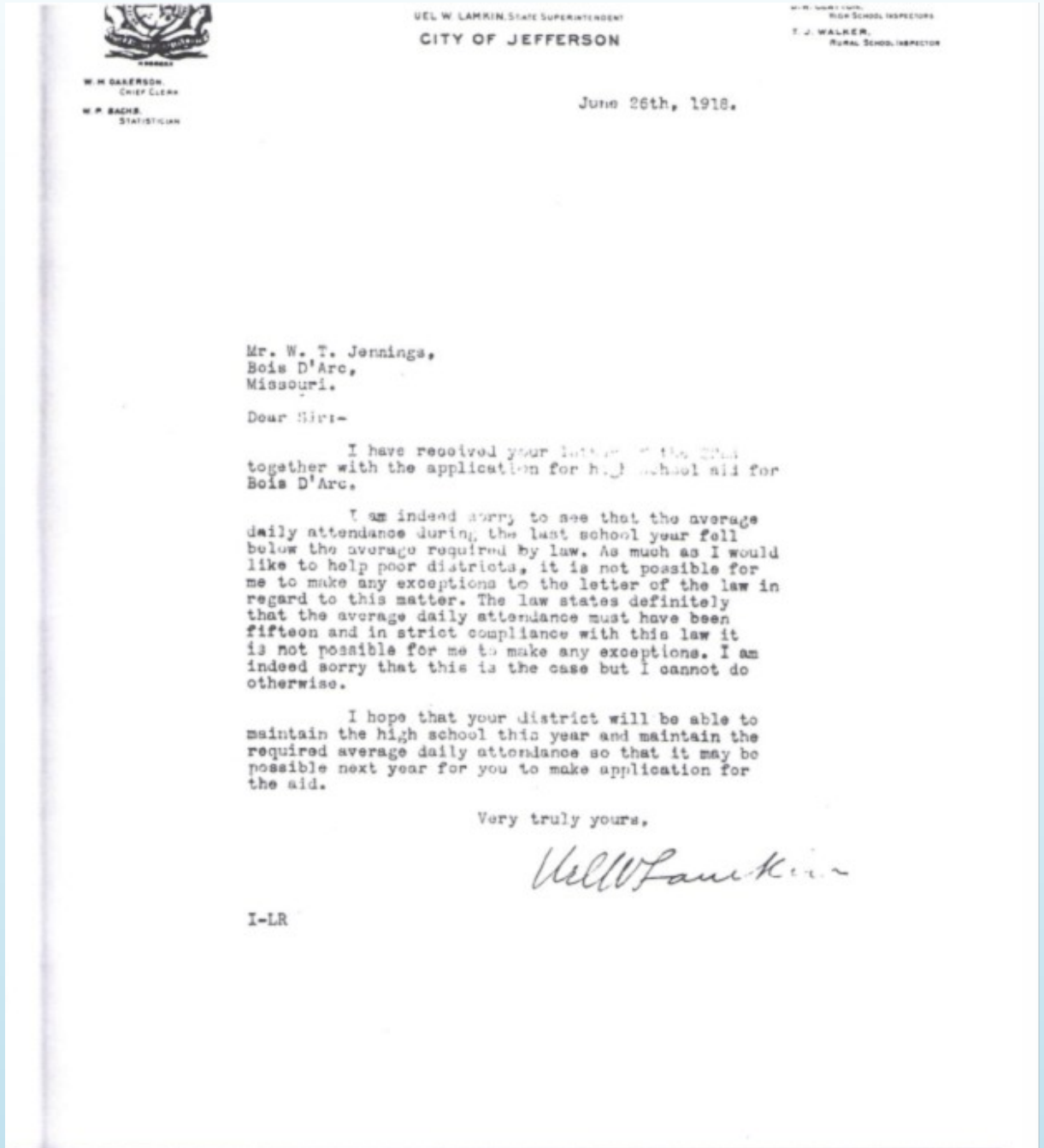
Teachers had a lot of responsibility...

1913-14, 82 students, N.E. Davison

1914-15, 44 students (1-5) Lida Mason
28 students (6-HS) Beulah Speaker

1915-16, 90 students, E. Funston New

In 1918, W.T. Jennings applied for additional funding from the State of Missouri to support the High School. His application was rejected, because the law stated that in order for a school to be eligible for this funding the average daily attendance had to be fifteen students.



March 16, 1935 at 8 o'clock
presented at the community building by the Bois d'Arc School

“Six Wives on a Rampage,”

--- a three act comedy-drama.

Buzz, housekeeper at the summer cottage, Juanita Spencer

Harriet (Harrie) Beulah Lee Hickman

Pamela (Pam) Dalma Louise Redfearn

Romola (Roma) Alice Snider

Celia (Sassy) Donna Whitehead

Bodicia (Co) Irene Cotter

Delia (Dee) Lucille Demore

Jim a mysterious intruder, Thomas Baker

Bungle, a would-be sheriff Earnest Haynie

Jack, a mysterious intruder, Joe Haynie

Bill, a keeper, Leon Carroll.

In 1936, fire claimed the brick schoolhouse...classes were held wherever the community could find room.

Carolyn West remembers “When I was a kid, the foundation from this school could still be seen.”

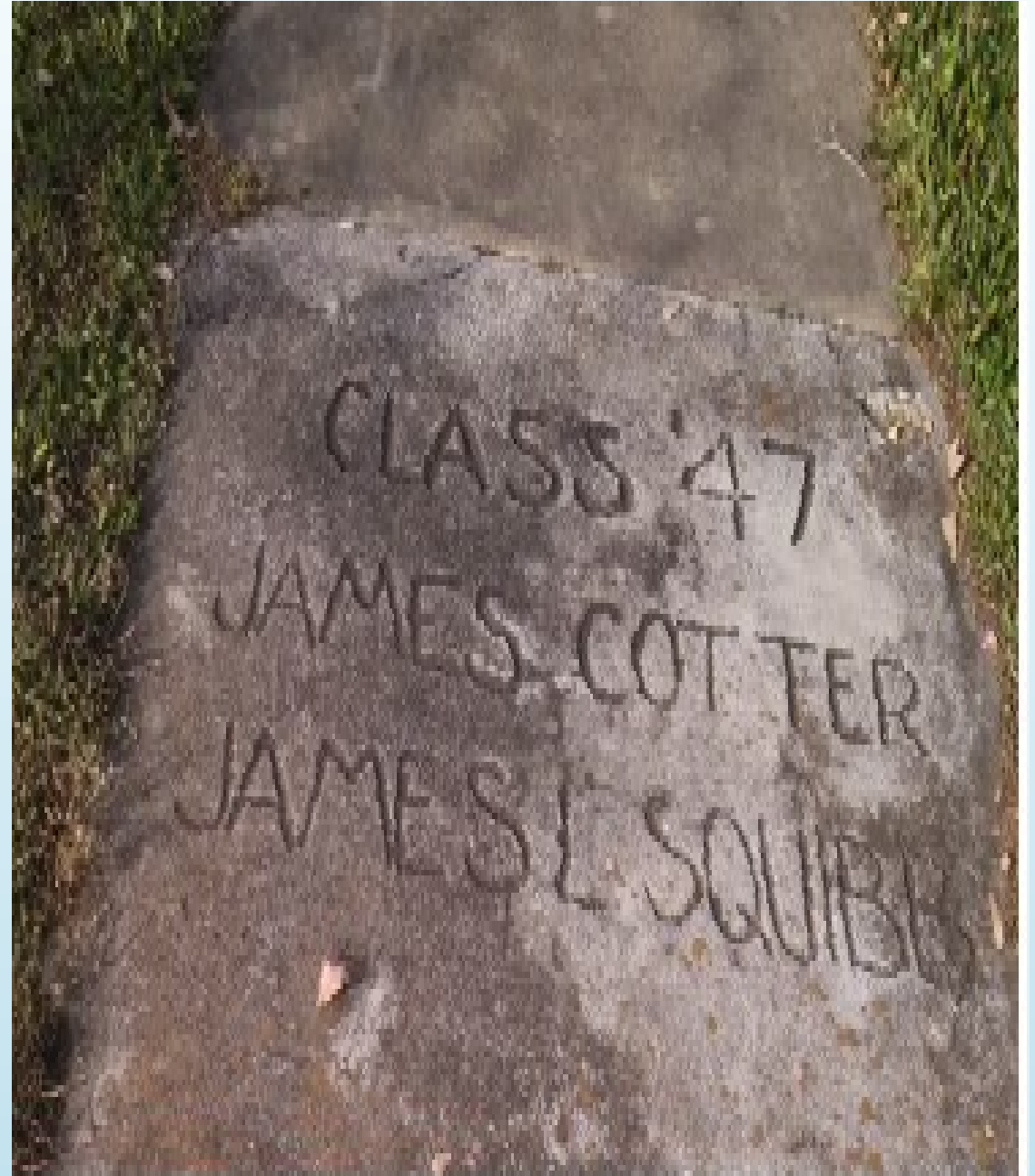
Jim Squibb had started school at the brick schoolhouse, and remembers the effects of the fire. “After the fire, classes were held wherever the community could find room. I went to the 3rd grade in a local garage. But I got to go to the 4th grade in the new building that was built.”

In 1938, the current rock schoolhouse was completed. The labor was paid through the WPA, and bonds were sold to support the project and pay for materials. Dan Sanford was employed as the architect for \$250, and the total indebtedness for the school was \$9000.



One feature of the new school was concrete sidewalks. As students graduated from Bois d'Arc, their names were etched into the sidewalk for posterity. Portions of this sidewalk remain, although where it has deteriorated too greatly it has been replaced by new, unmarked concrete sections.

In 1947 Jim Squibb was one of 13 students to graduate from this new building. He says, “Only two people had cars and drove to school. I never drove, but sometimes I would ride with a friend. Nobody lived high on the hog in those days.”





Carolyn West : “I remember basketball being a big deal for our school.”

Betty Squibb : “Our school was so much smaller than others, our ball team was always low man on the totem pole, and they might win a few games.”

Dan McMurray :. “Basketball games were a big deal. The whole community would attend the games. We were the Bois d'Arc Rockets, and there was a big rocket painted on the wall of the gym. I had a cousin that played, I don't remember any of his stats.”

Bois d'Arc remained an independent school until 1958 when it consolidated with the larger Ash Grove district.

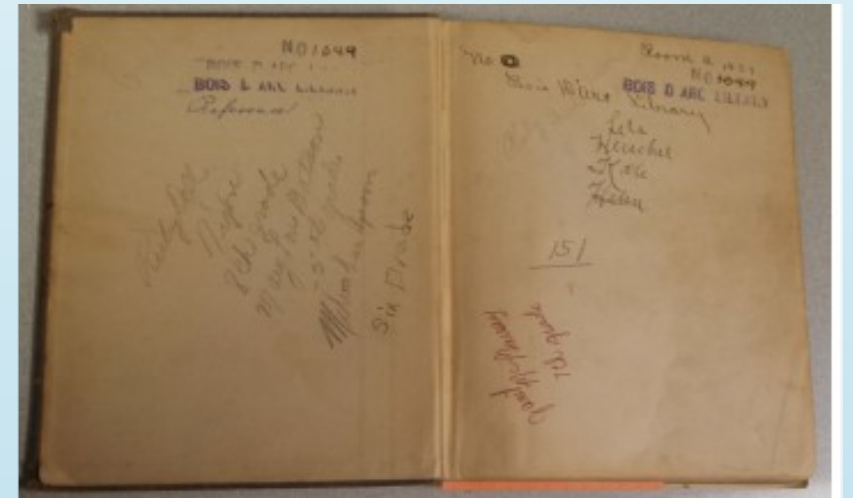
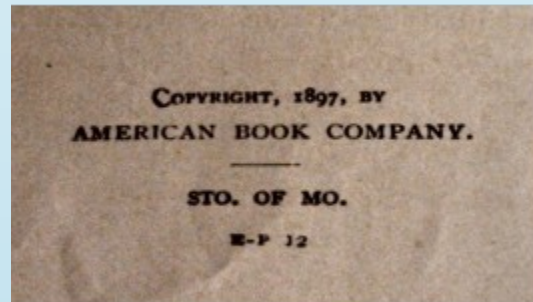
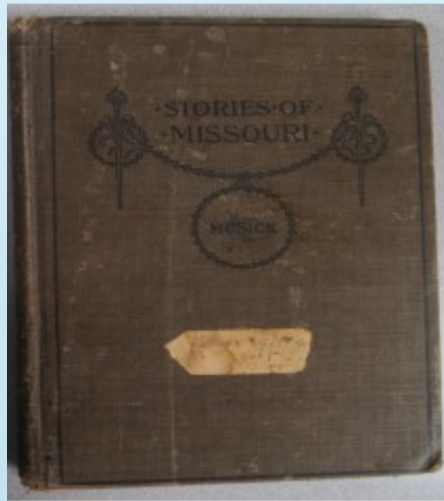
Jim Squibb was on the school board when the decision was made for consolidation. “There were a lot of school consolidations going on at the time. The fear was that if we didn't consolidate, the state would come in and shut us down.”

Betty Squibb: “The school lost some of its sense of closeness, there was no longer the same community feeling. The grades were split on their loyalties.”

Dan McMurray : “I definitely remember the parents talking about the changes. Some of the parents didn't like that the kids would have a long bus ride to school. My neighbor was one of them that had to go.”

Many changes came with the consolidation. The students in grades 9-12 now had to ride a bus 10 miles farther to school. Parents now had to travel with their kids to school activities and events. And the Bois d'Arc building saw changes in their classroom uses.

Dan McMurray says his biggest memory is of an event that happened because of the school consolidation. “The library books were all put into one room, which had been my 4th grade classroom. The students were told to take what they wanted home. I carried books home for days. I only have one of those books left now.”



In 1998, on October 5th, Bois d'Arc School was designated as an historic site by the Greene County Historic Sites Board and placed on the Greene County Historic Sites Register. This action was taken in recognition of the importance of the rural schoolhouses and the value placed on them by early Ozark pioneers.

Designation of Historic Site
Rural Schools of Greene County
Bois D'Arc School

WHEREAS, the rural schools of Greene County offer a unique glimpse at the value placed on education by early Ozark pioneers; and

WHEREAS, since the 1930s, the original 124 independent school districts in Greene County have consolidated and the majority of those rural school houses have disappeared from the landscape; and

WHEREAS, the rural schools that remain standing in Greene County deserve to be recognized before all traces of their existence are gone; and

WHEREAS, Bois D'Arc School located at 10315 West State Highway T, Bois D'Arc, Missouri, meets the criteria established by the Greene County Commission for an historic site; and


WHEREAS, after investigation and consideration, the Greene County Historic Sites Board has nominated Bois D'Arc School for designation as an historic site;

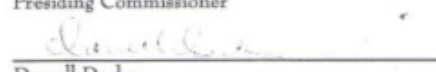
NOW, THEREFORE, we, the members of the Greene County Commission do hereby designate Bois D'Arc School as an historic site and order its inclusion in the Greene County Historic Sites Register.

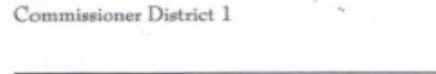
Done this 5th day of October, 1998.



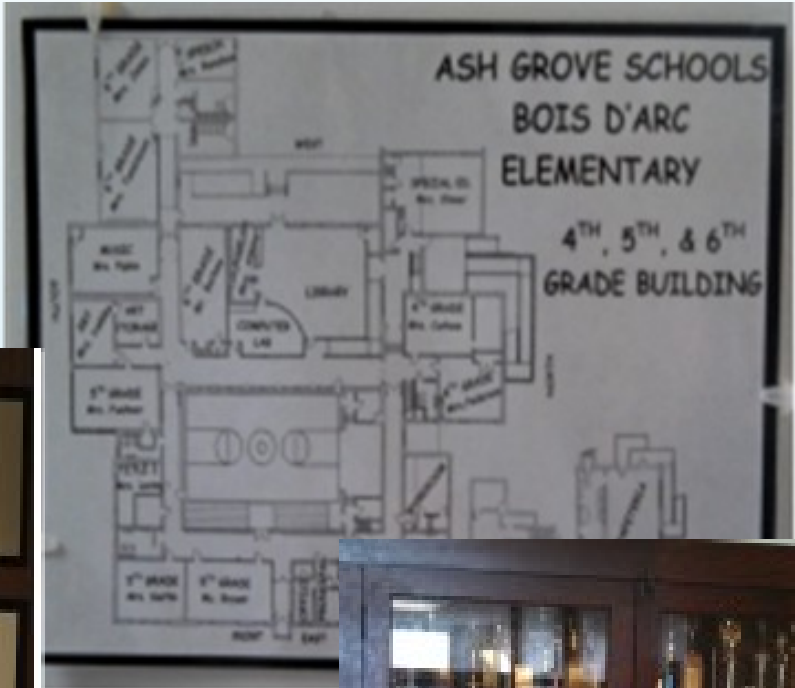
THE GREENE COUNTY COMMISSION


David L. Coonrod
Presiding Commissioner


Darrell Decker
Commissioner District 1


Jim Payne
Commissioner District 2

Bois d'Arc School today...



Carolyn West: “There were 40+ students in my graduating class, and about half of them showed up for our 45-year class reunion. People want to get together and remember their time here.”

Heather Sample: “On grandparent's day, our oldest grandparent was a 93-year old man who came to visit his great-grandchild. He was in the first class that graduated from this building, and his family has now had four generations attend school here. Families are loyal to the school and proud of their heritage.”

Carolyn West: “Change is hard for people. But change is ok. I've lived here all my life and I've adapted to change.”

Indeed, these are the qualities that have enabled this school and this community to survive when others could not – pride, loyalty, and the ability to adapt to change.