

History of Kinmundy Schools

By Pleasant H. Robnett assisted by Karen (Jones) Robnett in July 2007

The history of the Kinmundy Schools should be prefaced with a short description of our community. Kinmundy has a present population of 900. The town was laid out along the Illinois Central Railroad in 1857. Ten years later in 1867 it was incorporated as a City. Situated in NE Marion County, IL, now on State Hwy 37 and Interstate Hwy 57. In 1894, the C&EI Railroad came to town and intersected the IC Railroad in the south part of the city. At one time the population was 2000 and there were numerous stores, 2 banks, 2 restaurants, 2 barber shops, 2 hardware stores, 2 drug stores, 2 blacksmith shops, 5 service stations, an ice plant, mill and weekly newspaper.

The first school was a log cabin erected in 1856 just west of present C&EI RR. The following year after the town was founded, a frame school 36'x 24' was erected in the SW part of town. Enrollment soon outgrew this building and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was rented to accommodate the older students. In 1865 a new 2-story frame school building was erected on the present school campus, where Middle School is located today.

The first High School graduating class was in 1879 with 3 graduates (For a complete list of graduates from 1879 to 1926 see the 1926 Ki-Hi Annual.)

With the arrival of the coal mine in the late 1800's, the population grew and the number of students increased rapidly. This required the erection of a new 2 story brick building with basement, in 1910, located on the existing campus on South Madison. This building served as both grade and high school until 1954.

Kinmundy High School was accredited by the University of Illinois in 1912. The curriculum was enlarged as years went by to better meet the needs of the students. In 1929 our first physical education classes were started. In 1932 a junior business training class was added, and in 1935 a new commercial course consisting of typing, bookkeeping and shorthand was added. Band was added in the early 1940's. A home economics class with both cooking and sewing was added in 1942.

Throughout the late 1800's and early 1900's the schools were administered by one school district, Kinmundy Public School District #25. In 1924 a new auditorium/gymnasium was built on the north side of campus.

In 1941 a new Kinmundy Community High School District #500 was voted for and adopted by the public, to manage the high school. This district encompassed the Alma School district as well as about 12 outlying country school districts. The existing grade school district continued to administer the Kinmundy Grade School. Since the grade school district owned the building, they rented space for the high school and both districts mutually divided the operating expense.

Two new school buses were purchased in 1941 and students living beyond 1-½ miles from school were transported to and from school. A new building housing lunchroom and classrooms for home economics and commerce was added in 1947, just west of the main building. Hot lunches were available to the students for 25 cents.

The dual system of administration worked well until about 1952, when the state mandated by way of tax distribution, that grade schools and high schools be consolidated in new community unit districts for large areas. There remained only 6 districts in Marion County.

Thus, the public voted Kinmundy-Alma Community Unit District #301 into existence in 1953. The Kinmundy Lions Club deserves much credit for their help in the public relations that was responsible for a favorable vote in the election. Meetings were held at all the country schools as well as schools in Alma, Kinmundy and Omega. This new district encompassed 124 square miles, including Kinmundy, Alma and numerous country school districts, including Booker, Allen, Greenridge, Miletus, Brown, Omega, McHaney and Oak Grove. The hot lunch program and bus transportation for all students were much desired and created the impetus for a positive vote on new unit district #301. Transportation required 8 bus routes to get students to and from school in time allotted. New buses were acquired to accomplish this.

This new district required the addition of several new school buildings. The Board of Education proposed a bond issue of \$300,000. (5% of assessed valuation, the maximum allowed by law). The vote carried by a reasonable majority. This money was needed to provide an agriculture shop building at high school, an addition of classrooms and an all-purpose room and kitchen at Alma Grade School, a new grade school site and building at Kinmundy with all-purpose room and kitchen, and a new gymnasium at Kinmundy High School. After much bantering with the architects, they finally agreed to design a modern pit-type gymnasium. The new grade school required the acquisition of a new site by vote of the people. After 3 votes a location was picked on the north side of the Louisville road.

With the completion of this building program, a much broader curriculum was offered in both the high school and grade school. The Ag shop building was opened in April 1954, the Alma Grade School addition was opened in spring 1955, the Kinmundy Grade School was opened in fall 1955, and the new High School Gymnasium was opened in September 1956. Then, hot lunches were available to all students.

In 1971, a new bus garage and shop building was built west of the high school on 4 ½ acres of newly acquired land.

By 1973 increased enrollments and state mandated reduction in class sizes caused a need for more classrooms. In October of that year, voters for additions to Alma and Kinmundy Grade Schools, and a new classroom building at the high school approved a bond issue in the amount of \$579,000. These new classrooms made room available for enlarged curriculum. New girls interscholastic athletic programs for baseball, basketball, volleyball and track started in 1974. Kindergarten was also added that year. The first year it was a half-day, but after a few years it went to a full day.

A windstorm in April 1975 demolished the old 1924 gym. A new girl's gym and all-purpose room was built on south campus adjoining the new gym, with insurance money and a state grant. The old gym was razed and the lot cleared in fall 1975. A new frame structure was erected on the site in 1976 to house unit offices.

In 1977 the state condemned the 2-story high school building, built in 1910, and the old part of Alma Grade School which was added onto in 1955. That same year, a bond issue of \$559,000 was approved for classrooms to replace those lost by condemnation. Buildings were completed at the High School and Alma Grade School in 1978. In June of 1978 the old part of Alma Grade School was razed, and in October 1979, Kinmundy High School built in 1910 was razed.

In 1984 Kinmundy-Alma High School and LaGrove High School started sharing a Superintendent; ½ day at each school. Financial difficulties required cutting expenses.

By 1985 they were sharing students to better utilize teachers. In 1987 there were 83 LaGrove students coming to K-A in the morning.

Enrollment in September 1985 in Kinmundy, K-6, 346, Jr. High (now at Alma) 67, and High School in Kinmundy 153, for a total of 566 students. Results of Iowa tests given to H.S. students at that time showed us better than average. High School was now offering 2 classes of computer math and 1 class of computer literacy.

In the fall of 1985, the state was putting a lot of pressure on small schools to consolidate. Cuts were made in state aid to promote a sense of urgency. State survey stated our ideal enrollment capacity is 375-400. Farina LaGrove is 420. K-A and LaGrove made a study of curriculum and class in 1987. It showed the advantages of consolidation. Public meetings were held in both districts in 1988, with lots of pros and cons. It became apparent that consolidation was the only solution, if we didn't want to go to a much larger school.

By 1989 the K-A deficit at the end of the year was projected to be \$173,000. That put K-A on the state watch list. The County Judge set the date and polling places for a vote on consolidating K-A and LaGrove districts. A vote was held on 5/23/89 and approved by both districts. (1166 yes and 406 no votes)

The school locations in the new district were decided after a state survey of all buildings. Their recommendation was high school to be at Farina, middle school at Kinmundy and elementary schools at both Farina and Kinmundy.

I have chosen to stop this history with the formation of South Central Community Unit District # 401 in 1989.

Any history of Kinmundy schools is incomplete without the mention of the outstanding school board members, administrators, teachers and other employees throughout these many years. Time and space dictated these be left out of this brief history.

The foregoing facts and figures were gleaned from the school board minutes, old annuals and personal recollections.

(Respectfully submitted to Kinmundy Sesquicentennial Committee and Kinmundy Historical Society by Pleasant H. Robnett assisted by Karen Robnett in July 2007.)