

## Prairie Township Schools

Prairie township originally belonged to Van Buren Twp. in Starke County along with Dewey, Cass, and Hanna townships. Since there was no bridge to cross the Kankakee River, about 1900 this area was given to LaPorte County. Dewey, Cass, and Hanna townships were formed. Hanna ignored the southern area of their township. The area was divided and Prairie township was established in 1903. It is one of the smaller of the 21 townships of LaPorte County containing about 24 square miles. Norman Scriven was appointed first Trustee.

There were two villages in the township--Hayville Station in Section 29 and Willvale Station near the Kankakee River, both on the New York, Chicago, and St. Louis Railroad. Willvale was named for the Wills brothers, Charles, David, and John who came from Wills Township, which was named after the same family, according to a history book. But according to legend, Willvale was named after William Vale, the best loved sportsman Valparaiso ever had. This name arose when the Nickle Plate Railroad was being constructed and the railroad demanded a name for the stop at the river bridge. This area was a great hunters' paradise for sportsmen of all types of game along the river.

There were three one-room schools used by Prairie Township. The children in the southern area of the township went to the Holiday school at the corner of 2100 South and 600 West that was in neighboring Dewey township. Enterprise School was located at 1800 S. and 500 W. (Section 32). Classes began in January 1905 and ended in 1912. The Sunshine School was west of 250 S. and 1650 S (Section 27).

There were two Willvale Schools, the first located at 250 S. and 1750 S. (Section 34). The second brick Willvale School was built in 1912 at 250 W. and 1800 S. (Section 3). The school housed all 8 grades, grades 1-4 on the ground floor and 5-8 on the second floor. This school did offer a two-year high school course for several years in the early 1920's. There was a basement that had a steam boiler that heated the school. Each floor had a small room and a large room. The small room on the main floor was a Home Ec. room with a sewing machine and a carbide stove. The small room on the upper floor was a library. There were usually between 35-50 students who attended and were taught by two teachers, one for each room. The school had carbide lights, an outside pump and outside restrooms. Teachers at Willvale through the years were Pearl Pinkerton, Sada Watson Kennedy, Arnold Perigo, Lucille Grieger Gardner, Violet Gross, Bertha Gross Welsh, Roy Harrison, Cleo Richardson Dunn, and Arlene Sellers.

In 1947, the almost 50 pupils were transferred to Hanna and LaCrosse schools. The State Department of Education had inspected the school and recommended that it be closed. Repairs were badly needed and no funds were available. The original school plot was sold for \$1.00. The era of the little red schoolhouse was rapidly drawing to a close in LaPorte County. Prairie Township trustee paid transfer charges to neighboring schools then educating Prairie Township students.

On November, 1, 2010, Prairie Township consolidated with Dewey Township to the west to form the Dewey-Prairie Consolidated School Corporation. The graduating class of 2011 is the only class to graduate from the Dewey-Prairie Consolidated School Corporation.

Today a monument stands at the corner of 1800 S and 250 W where the last school in Prairie Township educated children over 74 years ago.