

LaCrosse and Dewey Township Schools

Early Dewey Township Schools

Early settlers in Dewey Township, realizing the great need for their children to have an education, established the first school at Hog Island in 1858. Located just south the St. Martin of Tours Catholic Cemetery and Apostolic Christian Cemetery at 1850 S and 875 W (Section 4), it was situated on land that was sandy and a little higher than the surrounding area. Miss White was the first teacher. The second school on the same site was in use until the early 1900s and was also called Wagner School. This building was moved into LaCrosse across the street from the present library building.

In 1887 another school was established in the southeast end of the township off Bigler Road (Section 26) near the English Lake area and became known as the Harrington School. The school stood in a grove and was not near any wagon road. The children reached the school by converging paths and by the “Pan Handle” Pennsylvania railroad which passed nearby. “This seclusion, however, did not prevent its being a bright school.” A record found showed use of it as late as 1893.

In 1900 another school was built in the settlement of Wilder Station, three miles south of LaCrosse, now known as “Wilders”. It was west of present day 421 on 2350 S (Section 32). Here there were, in 1904, “some ten or fifteen houses, a store, a saloon, and a school.” In 1921 this school was bought by the Quakers and moved to a different site to be used as the Wilder Friends’ Church.

On July 9, 1920, the Trustee and the Advisory Board met to discuss the erection of a new school building at Wilders. The contract was awarded in the sum of \$13,337.00 to James R. Linton for the erection and completion of the school. This school, grades one through eight, was eventually closed and converted to a roller-skating rink. The building is no longer there.

In January, 1888, the Dewey Township Trustee was Patrick Huncheon. John Tierney was the teacher at the Hog Island School. Emma Hall was the teacher at the English Lake School, and Cora Willis was the teacher at the LaCrosse School known as the Stowell School. It was located a mile west of LaCrosse and quarter mile north of the first mile corner, 1100 West (Section 7). It was a one-room school. Mrs. George Denison of Hanna taught in this school, and Mrs. F.C. Cook was the last teacher there.

Another school in the township was the Holiday School, located in the southeast part of the township at the corner of 2100 South and 600 West. Some pupils from Prairie Township also attended this school and it was also spelled Halliday.

Schools in LaCrosse

The original site of the Town of LaCrosse was one and one half miles north and one west of its present location where two railroads crossed, the Cincinnati and Chicago, and the Louisville and New Albany. The town was platted in 1860. These two railroads eventually became the Monon and the Pennsylvania. Hopes were high for that area when the two railroads crossed in 1861. By 1863 a new depot had been built named LaCrosse, but their hopes were short lived because LaCrosse moved south in 1865.

The Pennsylvania Railroad decided to reroute several miles of its right-of-way. An engineering feat was accomplished. One Saturday morning, with the help of hundreds of men and horses, several miles of ties and track were relocated. Trains were running on the new route thirty-six hours later. The depot from the old LaCrosse was moved down to the new LaCrosse. George Schimmel, who owned the Schimmel Hotel in the old LaCrosse, gave up soon after and later built a hotel in the present LaCrosse. The original crossing of the railroads became known as Schimmels or Schimmelville. Thus it was that the original town of LaCrosse with its several houses and church was abandoned, and the town that was platted in for the original site was never built. With the relocation of the railroads and station, the new LaCrosse began to grow slowly. By 1876 LaCrosse consisted of a railroad station, freight depot, telegraph office, hotel, general store, and several houses.

When the fine new brick building was finished in LaCrosse on Main Street in 1900, the Hog Island and Stowell schools were abandoned. The new school was a four-room building and stood where the Tiger Den is now located. The subjects taught in the high school were algebra, English, Latin, physics, and history. This first high school was taught by Hugh Peffley during 1903-1904. He had a two-year high school, the ninth and tenth grades. In the autumn of 1904 a third year was added to the high school with the principal teaching all of the subjects. By 1909 the school was so crowded that several classes were held in the old Rosenbaum Tavern with Miss Lisetta Sommers as teacher, until two more rooms were added in 1911. The school was commissioned in 1911.

Gust Klemm and his brother, Frank, who, in 1908 operated a livery barn in LaCrosse operated the first school bus. It went as far south as the Clarence Miller farm. In 1910, Mrs. William Sommers took over the bus; and sometimes her daughter, Mrs. Oma Simpkins drove too. A Ford touring car was used; and in the spring a wagon was used on the muddy roads. In 1922 Gust Klemm was hired to drive the first motor bus.

On May 5, 1915, the Dewey Township Advisory Board met to discuss the condemnation of the LaCrosse Public School by the State Board of Health and the LaPorte County Health Office. The township trustee, George Shults, had received an official notice to cease the use of said building after June 1, 1915; that it will be necessary to remodel said building or build a new building. It was decided to erect a new school at the cost of \$24,431. The contract was awarded to Charles Struss and Frederick Struss. The contract in the sum of \$5,074 for the heating, plumbing, and ventilating of the LaCrosse School was awarded to the People's Hardware Company of Gary, Indiana. The contract in the sum of \$439 for the hardware needed in the erection and completion of the school was given to Schultz and Boehlke of Wanatah.

On May 15, 1916, the Trustee and Advisory Board of Dewey Township met for the purpose of receiving bids at the public auction for the old school building with its lighting plant and fixtures, also for the steam heating plant. Charles H. Tuesburg bid \$100 for the steam heating plant with pipe, radiators, and all accessories. Tuesburg also bid \$500 for the old building, with its lighting plant and fixtures included. The Board accepted his bids, and Tuesburg was given 60 days to remove it. Mr. Tuesburg presented the building to the Methodist Church for use as a community house. It became known as the Methodist Church Annex. All of the bricks had to be removed before the north half of the structure could be moved to the lot behind where it had been standing.

The photo of the first school built in LaCrosse and the newspaper clipping dated September 2, 1915, indicate that the new school was completed about the first part of 1916.

In 1948-1949, a gymnasium was built to the south at a cost of \$130,000. The first game was Tuesday, November 5th, 1949. R. B. Miller, the IHSAA board of control president, spoke and quoted "great in sports but greater in sportsmanship." The Tigers call home one of the oldest gyms in Indiana still in use.

In the early 1970s, students in grades sixth thru eighth began being transported to Wanatah.

In 2010, improvements were made to both the school and the Tiger Den and the two were connected by a breezeway.

In 2011, following the consolidation of Dewey-Prairie with Cass to become Tri-Township, parents of LaCrosse students attended a meeting by the new school board and voted to send all elementary students to Wanatah.

Following the 2021-2022 school year, all high school students will attend Tri-Township Jr/Sr High School on the Wanatah campus. The class of 2022 was the last graduating class of LaCrosse High School.

LaCrosse School had a proud century-long history of educating students and preparing them for all walks of life.