

The Home Front



by
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Melba SD begun in 1920

Melba School District No. 2039 was established by arbitration on April 19, 1920. That same year a school was built on NE 34-3-2W, northeast of Horndean. This location was on the northern boundary of the RM of Rhineland, and part of this district lay in the RM of Morris.

A first meeting of ratepayers was held at the residence of Jacob M. Martens on the SE 1/4 of Sec. 34-3-2W, with Jacob J. Wiebe, Wm. Hiebert and Jacob G. Toews, elected as school trustees for three, two and one year in that order, with Mr. Martens appointed secretary-treasurer.

The sum of \$5,000 was borrowed and a debenture issue sold at 8 per cent interest to pay for the construction of the school and a teacher's residence. A contract was let to Herman Vogel in the sum of \$584 for building the schoolhouse and two back-houses.

As for teacher's salaries, the board minutes show that it approved a payment of \$125 a month to Jacob N. Hoepfner in the first year for the period from Sept. 1, 1920 to June 30, 1921. The board also approved a payment of \$10 to the teacher to buy Christmas presents for pupils.

At a special meeting Feb. 12, 1921 it was agreed to spend \$1,500 to build a dwelling house and stable. Then in new 1922 elections Anton D. Dyck and Diedrich Harder were elected trustees, with Peter M. Hiebert appointed board chair.

However Mr. J.C. Fehr, who wrote a series on early schools in the RM of Rhineland for the *Red River Valley Echo*, says that the first teacher was Peter J. Dyck. Other early teachers -

Jacob N. Hoepfner, John K. Brandt, Jacob H. Janzen, D.K. Doerksen and David S. Schellenberg.

(Clarification? - Can a reader clarify as to who was really the first teacher in Melba SD? When did the Gentlemen, Mr. Dyck and Mr. Hoepfner, teach at Melba district. - Ph. 324-5281)

Mr. Doerksen was described a man who believed that games should be played, just for fun, so no score was kept as he didn't believe in competition, wrote Fehr.

Later in 1931, Jacob J. Wiebe was appointed chair, and J. J. Wiebe, three years, and Peter M. Hiebert, one year, were elected to the board.

At an annual meeting in 1941, J. G. Toews was elected for three years and Peter M. Hiebert, for one. Jacob J. Wiebe was appointed chair, and Henry Heppner as secretary-treasurer.

In fall of 1941 the board also gave approval for the school to be open for Sunday School, and every fourth Sunday for Jugendverein.

During war-time, in Oct., 1942, the board approved a payment on behalf of the teacher to the Teachers' Retirement Fund and National Defence Tax, a sum total of \$6.30.

This area was quite well populated at one time, the school pupil count being up to 40 or possibly 50 students. At that time the pupils had to share one-seater desks. Many fine Christmas concerts live on in the memories of former residents.

The school operated until January 1, 1967, when it became part of Horndean S.D. The building was sold and today it's being used as a home near Lowe Farm.

As with most of the northern part of Rhineland RM, the farms in this area have become larger. As a result, in the last decade and more, ever more abandoned farmsteads have made their appearance.

The flat land and heavier soil type, wrote Fehr, likely are contributing factors to this phenomenon. Before the dikes and ditches were improved, the spring flooding of the land was always a yearly concern.

Sometime, even in summer, heavy rains farther west caused the almost mature grain to drown out. When this happened, the soil could not be brought back into condition to produce a crop even in the following year.