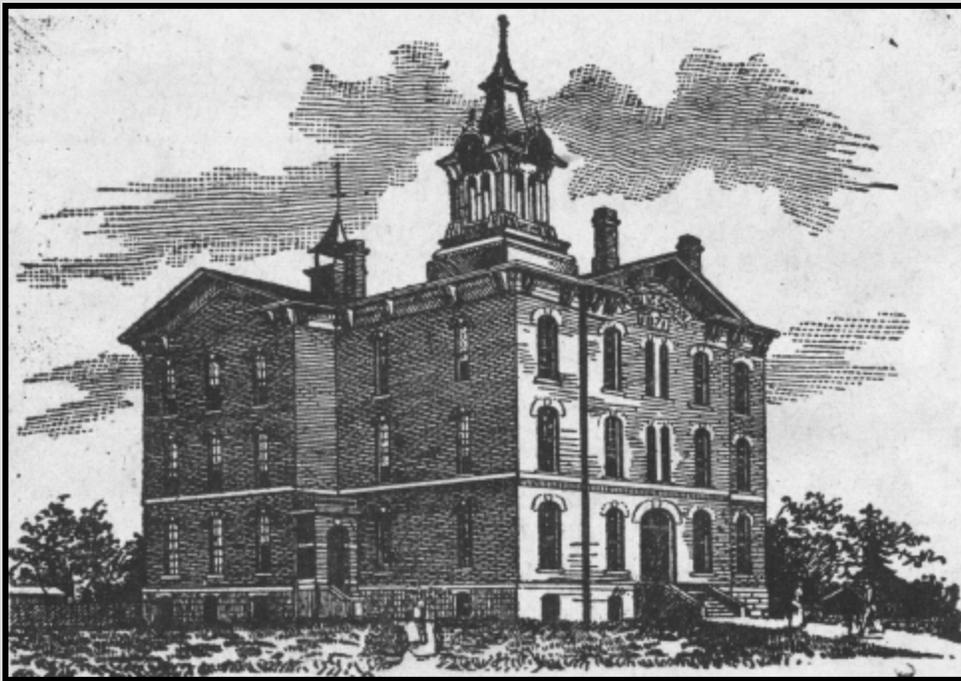


# TUSCOLA SCHOOLS

1858 – 2007

*“Education is the hope of youth.  
Youth is the hope of Democracy.  
Democracy is the hope of America.  
And America, what we stand for,  
Is the hope of the world”.*

*An Essay by W. A. Bozarth,  
Douglas County Superintendent of Schools  
Tuscola Journal Special Centennial Edition  
Celebrating Tuscola’s First 100 Years  
August 15, 1957*



## HISTORY OF TUSCOLA SCHOOLS

Next to the church, there is no institution that has done more for the development of good citizenship than the public schools. The higher the standard of public schools the better are the results obtained. Our school days should not only be our happiest but our best days. They are the formative period of youth; it is then that the foundation is laid for life's work. Hence, the importance of having the very best school in every respect that can be obtained. The work of the founders of the Tuscola public schools has been well done. May our schools ever continue to prosper and their influence for true manhood and womanhood increase year by year as time rolls on. (*Saturday Journal Historical Edition, 1895*)



Education in Tuscola had its meager beginning in 1858 in a one-story frame school building (306 E. Daggy Street) which cost \$500. This was just one year after the city, itself, was organized, so the citizens of Tuscola started looking after the education of young people very early. (Early records indicate that the second building was another brick affair, built on the same location at a cost of \$6,000) When this building became inadequate in only a few years, a brick building was erected.



### **TUSCOLA UNION SCHOOL**

The Tuscola Union School was built on the later site of the South Ward Grade School at the corner of Niles and Daggy Streets. Masons and Odd Fellows, with the usual ceremonies laid the cornerstone on June 26, 1870. The northeast cornerstone contained the organization of Coles County, the partition of Douglas County, 1859 survey of original town of Tuscola, 1857; accounts of the first dwelling, 1857; first store, 1857; and first, second and third bricks built, 1863, etc., first children born, 1857; burning of first hotel, and incidents; Illinois Central Railroad, schoolhouses; first church, 1862; flour mill, 1863; newspaper, 1858; first bank, 1863; first court house, 1861; the permanent court house and population of Tuscola, 1870, 1,500, with 300 dwellings; these by H. C. Niles, who was the first County Surveyor. Mr. R. B. MacPherson placed in the stone a history of Odd Fellowship and Masonry. A history of the school district to date was inserted by Dr. J. L. Reat and W. B. Dryer; Niles also added the latitude and longitude, variation of the compass, exact location of Tuscola, the area of the county, the names of the first Village Board, via L.J. Wyeth, W. T. French, James Davis, F. F. Nesbit, M. V. Vaul, Clerk; also date of charter, first election under charter July 1, 1859. J. H. Martin, Mayor; Council, W. Taggart, M. Pugh, E. Price and J. Williamson; the corporation expenses for preceding fiscal year were stated at \$5,000; a description of former school houses; the average attendance of pupils was stated as 448, in 1869-70. Indebtedness of the school district was given as \$20,000, for which the district had issued bonds due in three, five and seven years with 10 per cent interest, and that the bonds were sold for .92 cents. These with copies of current newspapers were placed in the corner stone, which, by the way was not half-full. It was well secured in the usual manner, and the ceremonies were smoothly and agreeably conducted under the care of Mr. William H. Lamb, the Worshipful Master of the Masonic Lodge, Tuscola, No. 332.

This was a three-story brick building costing \$40,000. It was described as having “a belfry with a large town clock, a basement, steam heat, electric lights, ample fire escapes and flushing water closets.” The clock was considered a most excellent timekeeper, had four dials, facing respectively the cardinal points. It was of genuine bell metal – copper and tin – and weighed 800 pounds. The bell, when tolling or marking off the hours, had a peculiar resonant sweetness. September 19, 1882, at midnight, Tuscola bells tolled the announcement of the

death of President Garfield, on which occasion the ringers of four bells exchanged sounds with each other in sequence, each waiting until an effect had died away. The varied tones, though differing in volume, were of perfect accord, which, with the otherwise silent night, and the hearers between sleeping and waking, were simply and sadly beautiful. The school bell had been heard to strike the hours at a distance of about seven miles, under favorable conditions.

It was at the time this building was erected that the present system of an eight-year grade school and a four-year high school was organized. The high school students occupied the entire third floor of the new, attractive building. Discipline and methods of instruction were very rigid. Boys and girls filed in at separate doors when school began. They had cloakrooms at opposite ends of the building and they played at opposite ends of the playground. All of the students studied in a common study hall, and when one bell rang, they turned their seats; at the sound of the second bell, they stood; and on the third bell, they passed quietly in lines down the hall to the classrooms for discussion and recitations. The first high school graduation class numbered four members who graduated in 1875. They were Lillian Daggy, Emma Wyeth, Tennyson Daggy and John C. Russell. By 1880, the number of graduates had reached fourteen, and from that time on the number wavered up and down, some times going back to four, then up to ten or twelve, until 1910 when the number was twenty-seven. The whole student body in 1887 was sixty-two. The teachers received from \$35 to \$40 a month and the janitor was paid \$50 a month.



## **FIRE**

On October 12, 1921, the Union School burned to the ground. The fire started in the belfry at about 1:00 P.M. By 1:30 P.M., the alarm had been sounded and the children were directed out of the building before it was suspected the fire was serious. Students walked downstairs as they had the day before during a fire drill, as it was "Fire Prevention Week." Many parents, learning of the fire, hurried to the scene, to claim their youngsters. The cause of the fire was never determined. Harold Lincoln, who with Fred Burmeister, was the last to leave the building alive, performed a heroic act in returning to the structure to recover Alliece Warren's watch and purse. They with Roy Bird, a letter carrier who was delivering mail in the building, assisted in getting some of the children's wraps. The first two escaped but it was believed Mr. Bird was caught in the collapse of the ceiling. His remains were later recovered from the ruins. The loss of the building left the schoolchildren without a home. All of the furnishings and books were lost. Every student had to purchase new books, which was quite an expense, in order to continue their studies. However, immediate arrangements were made to put the high school students in the Courthouse and the grade school children in the Chamber of Commerce, the First Christian Church the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church.

## **THE DAY THE SCHOOL BURNED.**

**BY LOIS MARSH  
TCHS CLASS OF 1929**



It was a beautiful, warm Fall Day on October 12, 1921. It was also Fire Prevention Week. We had had Fire Drills on how to get out of the School House in event of a fire.

The old building was square with the first four grades on the ground floor, the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades on the second floor and the high school on the third floor. After lunch every day, the High School Chemistry students went to the basement to class. I was in the fifth grade on the second floor at that time. We heard the high school class going down stairs, but that happened every day. We were having Spelling class when our door opened and Effie Fry English said, "School house is on fire." So we marched out as rehearsed. Our class was the last one out.

Later we learned that Mrs. Hackett who lived across the street from the school was the first to see the fire, which started in the belfry. The windows of the school were open and they heard her say, "School House is on fire." It seems some boys were smoking in the belfry over the lunch hour.

There was only one life lost. It was Roy Bird. He went in the building to get his daughter's books and the bell fell on him.



## **NORTH WARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

In 1895, a four-room North Ward school was erected at Overton, Court and Ensey Streets to accommodate children of the first four grades north of the railroad tracks. It was built when the space in the old Union School was not sufficient to house all the pupils and also kept the younger children from crossing the railroad tracks that divided the town. It was the subject of controversy on a number of occasions. At that time, the North Ward people resented "being put off to one side," and the North Ward pupils have been "a tight-knit set ever since." In 1923, the North Ward parents organized a Parent Teacher's Club of their own. Much was done to modernize the building; electric lights, teacher's lounge, kitchen and play ground equipment. The North Ward student body, faculty and parents always enjoyed working together as a unit. These experiences left many pleasant memories for those that had the pleasure of being one of the above.

Some twenty years later, it was said the building was dangerous. Because of the wooden interior, it was felt by some to be less safe from a fire prevention viewpoint. In 1957 part of the building program funds to build a new high school included restructuring of the "old high school" on Niles and Sale Street to accommodate grades one through eight. In the late fall of 1957, grade school students, grades one through six from the north side of the tracks and grades seven and eight from the south side of the tracks moved into the old high school. This arrangement existed until January 1969 when East Prairie Junior High was built. The original North Ward School building was torn down in 1959.

## MEMORIES OF OLD NORTH WARD SCHOOL

By Lynnita Aldridge Brown

Excerpts from an article published in *The Tuscola Review*, August 19, 1986

The school was built in 1895 at a cost of \$6,500 (not including heating plant, furniture, closets, etc.). It was heated by two hot air furnaces. The building stood on a site which was 100x146 feet, and was located on East Overton Street and North Court. When the building was razed in 1959, the school ground was turned into a double row of new homes.

Though the school is gone, memories of it will last forever in the minds of the students who went there. Early students attended school when there was no electricity in the four-room building. Lois Moulden of Tuscola, former principal of the school, remembers those days well because no electricity meant no night meetings in the building. Trying to teach on dark days was not an easy job, so she was happy when an electrician, Mr. Smith, came in to install electrical wiring. The wiring was put in metal casings running along the wall.

Bernice Barker Northam was principal of North Ward for two or three years around 1918. She was also the fourth grade teacher. Her memories of old North Ward include the big round metal tube, which served as the fire escape. The pupils had regular fire drills in which they stepped off a platform, jumped into a tube, and slid to the ground. Another memory was of the spring May festival. "I developed the May pole dance," she said, "and it was very pretty – quite an event. But the dance didn't just come out of the air. The children had to work hard to produce it."

Her successor as principal was Lois Moulden, who also remembers the May festival. She said that the school had one piano and one pump organ. They once took the old organ out of the building for the May festival. But in the middle of the night, it rained, and that was the end of the organ.

Early history books show that when the school was built, it featured "flushing closets." These old toilets were located in the basement and were still in use when Mrs. Moulden was a teacher. But they were toilets quite different than those used today. These were metal troughs with continually flowing water in them. Seats were placed on top of the troughs. Some felt that the toilets were unsanitary, and teachers rarely used them. Instead, many of them went home at noon.

Lucille Dickinson Starbuck was principal of North Ward 1924 to 1948. She remembers the building layout quite well. The floors were oiled to keep the dust down. She said the rooms were spacious and desks at one time were all fastened to the floor. Miss Dickinson had them mounted on 2 x 4's so they could be moved around. Every room had an outside exit and the upstairs had a hallway leading to the fire escape. Every time the fire whistle in town blew, Miss Dickinson had a fire drill. This was done so the children wouldn't be frightened if the fire was ever at the school. Fire drills became a routine thing. The children had the drills down pat, and every child was out of the building in less than one minute flat. Besides drills every time the fire whistle blew, they also had fire drills about twice a month.

Several improvements were made to the building during her years as principal. On the south side of the stairwell, they added a restroom for the teacher. They made a room with a bed for sick children later. They also added a small kitchen. Many of these improvements were made through the efforts of the local PTA. "The North Ward had a wonderful parent-teacher association," Mrs. Starbuck remembered. "For a lot of parents, that was the only social life they had."

The PTA sponsored events such as the Christmas pageant, a spring picnic in the park, and a big Halloween party and house of horrors just for adults. The Spring May Festival was always a big event. For a while it was held at the school's backyard and later in the park amphitheater. There were different themes for the festival and always flowers and singing. The kids sometimes dressed up like flowers or vegetables and put on a play for their parents.

Mrs. Starbuck also remembers that there was no fence around the North Ward building, but there was a fence on the west end of the schoolyard. There were a couple of houses on the west end and the school board bought them to enlarge the playground. She recalls that one play period a group of children came running up to her to tell her that one of the children had discovered a hole on the playground. Upon investigating, Miss Dickinson found that it was an old well and she immediately had it filled up the rest of the way.

Lucille Starbuck remembers that the principal took the children to the restroom if they needed a paddling. Mr. Collins, superintendent, came over to do any extra paddling if there was any to be done. At the time she was principal of the school, a rubber hose was used as a whip and there was an old paddle from a dining room chair. Miss Dickinson's father planed the paddle down to make it more pliable. "It didn't look so cruel, but it had a sting to it," she said.

Ruby Hance Colwell remembers many of the teachers, especially Mrs. Goff, her second grade teacher who once treated her to hot chocolate she was fixing on the stove in the school basement. She also remembers the May pole dances west of the building, the Halloween parties and dress-up, and Christmas. Her most memorable Christmas at school came the year a huge barrel was filled with a grab bag gifts. She and her classmates were blindfolded and were each allowed to reach into the barrel for a gift. As she was being blindfolded, her eyes spied an orange in the barrel. She was hoping to get it because oranges were a rare treat. The problem was that you had to take the first thing your hands touched. She got her orange!

She has other pleasant memories of the school, including having class under the trees on the school ground. She remembers wishing that her mother could attend the PTA meetings, but there were six children in the family (Ruby, Sella, Daisy, Edith, Mabel and John), and her mother was busy raising kids.

Lois Romine became the third grade teacher at North Ward in 1942. "Every child was special to me," she said. She also added, "They learned in spite of me." She said teaching first grade was special because it was the first year the children were away from their mothers. She had one little boy who cried every day. When she asked him why he was crying, he said, "I like you, but I just can't keep from crying." Children weren't the only ones to cry, however. Mrs. Romine remembers one mother who stood across the street and cried while her son walked bravely into the building. She remembered her first set of twins, Judy and Jim McCumber, and another McCumber – Beverly – who cried because school was out.

Frances Hettinger and Bernice Martin are sisters who both remember the janitor, Mr. Schoppe. He lived in the house just behind the school and dearly loved children, although he had none of his own. He would take out his pocketknife and peel and core apples for the children. Also, he helped the young ones take off their boots and mittens and dried them in the furnace room of the basement. Mr. Schoppe warned the children when school was beginning and ending, and when recess was over, by using a brass bell with a wooden handle. He would let the kids take turns ringing the bell.

Mrs. Hettinger also remembers the May festival because she and Delores Henderson were once sitting in a crepe papered May basket. Their part in the festivities was to jump out of the basket. Other memories include the brass hooks in the hallway to hang coats on, and going home to lunch. The Teeters children, Maurine, Albert, Delores and Irene, went to the old North Ward School. Mrs. Hettinger's sons, Steve and Kenny, also attended school there.

Some of the teachers at old North Ward included: Margaret Fagen Goff, Mary Bostick, Lucy Mae Stickels, Rita Roderick, Emma McGary, Bess Bundy, Laurene Wampler Weaver, Ruth Muns, Helen Kagey Heacock, Ruth Henning, Thelma Warren Huff, Miss Lacey, Lois Romine, Mabel Hoel, Emma Wakefield, Hattie Sluss and Leta Whitacre. Dr. Albert G. Owen was superintendent of the schools at the time North Ward was built. E. O. May was also a superintendent, as well as Mr. Guy Collins. Two janitors were Mr. Fry and Mr. Von Lancken.



Bernice Barker Northam  
Principal in early 1920's



Lois Moulden  
Principal in 1920's



Lucille Dickinson  
Starbuck



## **TUSCOLA HIGH SCHOOL AND NORTH WARD GRADE SCHOOL**

The cornerstone of the Tuscola High School building was laid on Tuesday, November 29, 1921. Sale, Niles, Overton and Indiana Streets bordered the school. The cornerstone was laid near the west door of the high school building, which faces Sale Street. A box was enclosed in the cornerstone which contains a history of Tuscola schools, names of the school board, a list of pupils and the faculty, the names of the builders, some old coins and many other papers, which may be of interest to future generations. On October 2, 1922, the high school students entered their new building for the first time.

A big step in school affairs came in 1947 when school consolidations took place. The Tuscola District No. 301 was approved by an overwhelming vote and it embraced 99 square miles and some \$22,000,000 in property valuation.

In 1957 when a new high school was built, the high school students were moved to their new building and students from North Side Elementary were moved into what then became North Ward Elementary. Grades 1-8 attended here until 1969 when the kindergarten was added and the sixth, seventh and eighth graders moved to the East Prairie School Upper Elementary School. Later the fifth grade was added to East Prairie. In 2003, a new elementary school was built and all the students, grades kindergarten through four, were relocated.



## **SOUTH WARD GRADE SCHOOL**

Construction of the South Ward Grade School began after the fire in 1921 that destroyed the Union School. While the high school was being constructed at Niles and Sale Streets, the grade school was underway at Daggy, Niles and S. Central Streets. This building educated the students south of the railroad tracks in grades one through eight. Later children grades one through six on the south side of the tracks attended South Ward Grade School. The students were moved to North Ward Grade School at the start of their seventh grade year. Before construction began, a prosperous farmer donated a brass bell and striking clock to the new school requesting that his name not be revealed until after his death. The bell rang in the memory of William Brian (the grandfather of Mrs. Mary Ross). Mr. Brian died shortly following his donation. He did not live to see the school or bell in place. The bell was tolled during his funeral procession.

At the end of the 1975-76 school year, its doors were closed for the last time. The building was sold at an auction to Bill Huber and Kenny Ring in 1977. The school was razed in 1980. The cornerstone was removed and held many mementos of the city's history: a Tuscola Review; a Tuscola Journal; letters from the city banks, businesses and organizations; an 1831 coin; an 1863 penny and a 1921 silver dollar. Harold Weber rang the old bell with a hammer 59 times, one time for each year of the school's existence. Bricks from the South Ward School were used to support the school's bell at a new location in front of the East Prairie School in 1983. The bell was relocated again in the summer of 2001 to the new North Ward School on North Prairie Street



## **TUSCOLA COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**

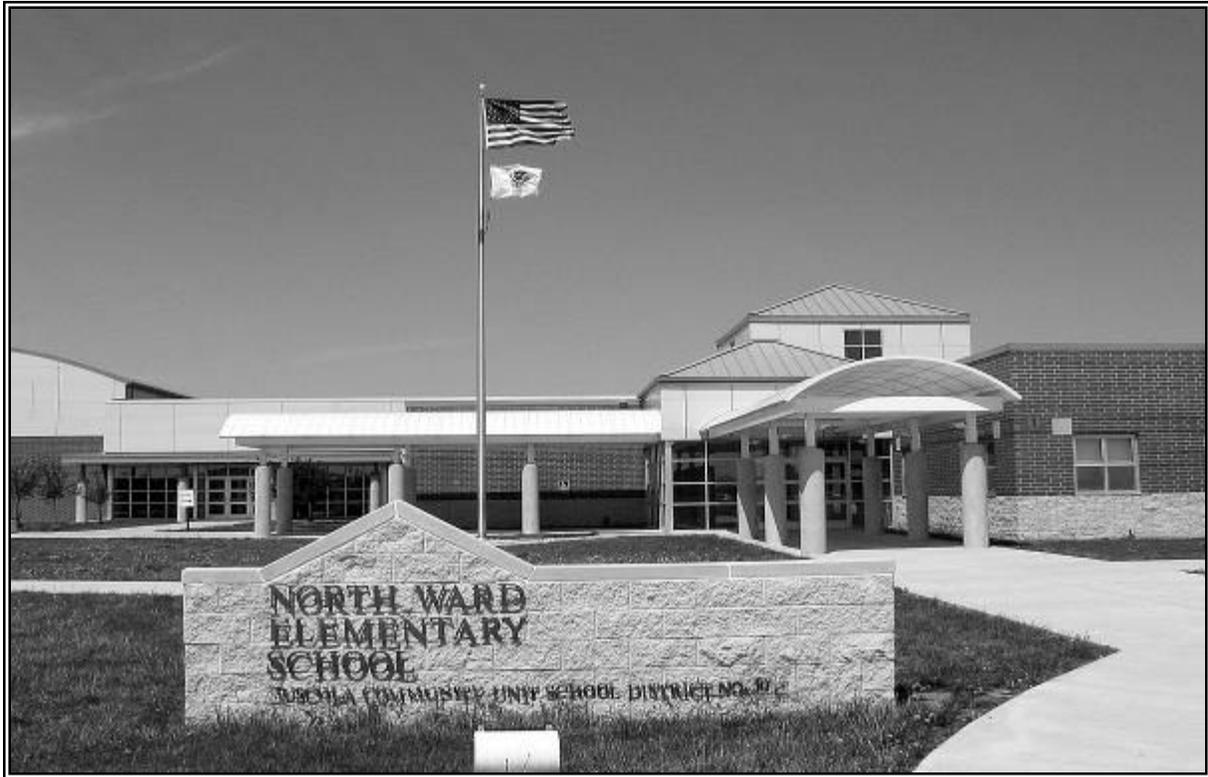
In November of 1957, the entire student body and faculty took part in moving into a new high school located at the far side of Tuscola bounded by Daggy, VanAllen, and Prairie Streets composed of around eighteen acres. The move into the new school took one day. Students were responsible for their own personal effects. Helpers selected ahead of time moved the heavier furniture and equipment for specialized teaching facilities. The moving of the library was accomplished by using students to carry the books and transport them via a school bus. In addition to the school bus, four trucks were used in the move. By 3:30 p.m., the move had been accomplished in good shape. The cost of the building program was approximately \$1,233,000. The principle features of the new building included complete facilities for vocational studies, a gymnasium with 3,000 seating capacity, an auditorium-cafeteria, stage, band and music room and laboratory facilities. The class of 1958 was the first to graduate from this building. Ken Michaels was Principal.



### **EAST PRAIRIE UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

In December of 1965, a nominating committee of C. R. Schrodt, Dr. Stanton Cross, John Smith, Carl Connor, Virgil Ross and William Iles presented a slate of fifteen candidates and six alternates to the board for approval as members of a Citizens Advisory Committee. The new Committee was composed of Gaylord Gates, William McCarty, Mrs. Robert Burns, Garland Strohl, Charles Brewer, Ray Wulliman, Dr. Melvin Lossman, Mrs. Patti Waters, Carl Hackett, Mrs. Hazel McCord, Mrs. Harriett Isaminger, Frank Michener, Keith Hunt, Donald Beltz, Mrs. Althea Deaver and Dean Mulligan. By February of 1966, the advisory committee had its recommendations: a building program be initiated immediately to construct a junior high school building near to or adjoining the existing high school building. A special election held in the Tuscola Community School District on December 10, 1966 asked the voters of the district to approve the purchase of an additional schoolhouse site and to build and equip a new school building on it, and to issue bonds in the amount of \$1,680,000. (1328 voters-yea, 48-nay) Groundbreaking ceremonies were held in June of 1967. Appropriate scripture and prayer was by Rev. Kenneth McConky, Tuscola Methodist Church minister. Among those attending were: Willis Winn, J. Clinton Taylor, Jack Williams, Delbert Davis, Darrell Brown, Mayor Robert Burns, Frieda Lewis, Phil White and Bob Hastings.

Jack Williams, superintendent, announced the opening of the new upper elementary East Prairie School at the end of January 1969. Enrollment included all present sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. All 125-kindergarten students moved to North Ward Grade School and all fifth graders who were at South Ward were also moved to North Ward. Kindergartners who had been schooled at the Nunn Scout Building and Forty Martyrs Catholic Church were also moved into North Ward. That left 492 students at North Ward and 296 students at South Ward. Delbert Davis served as principal of both North Ward and South Ward Schools. Bill Sargent served as Principal of East Prairie.



### **“NEW NORTH WARD”**

On Wednesday, February 28, 2001, ground was broken for the new elementary school at a site along Prairie Street just north of North Line Road next to the new United Methodist Church. The cost of this school was \$8,243,207. Move-in was the fall of the 2002 term. Students of the new North Ward Elementary reap the benefits of a beautiful, modern, facility. North Ward teaches music, art and physical education by specialized teachers. Key instruction programs for academic success include: Phonics instruction, hand-on math lessons and a structured writing program. Special programs include: Reading Recovery, Speech and the computer based H.O.T.S. classes, Special Education Early Childhood (age 3-5) for qualified children, Title One reading and math instruction.



First Kindergarten  
Class to attend  
Kathryn McCumber  
and Angie Allen's  
Parkview  
Kindergarten in  
1960

Last class to  
attend Kathryn  
McCumber's  
Work and Play  
Nursery School  
in 1990.



## **PARKVIEW KINDERGARTEN / WORK AND PLAY NURSERY SCHOOL**

Kathryn McCumber and Angie Allen started the Parkview Kindergarten in 1960. This was before kindergarten was in the public school system. Angie moved to Springfield and Kathryn continued kindergarten until 1966-67. After the kindergarten began in the schools, Kathryn began her program for 3 and 4 year olds. The name was changed to Work and Play Nursery School and continued until 1990.

The city of Tuscola showed their appreciation to Kathryn for her 30 years of service to the town's children with a celebration in Ervin Park. Former students and their families who had attended McCumber's school since 1960 were invited. Kathryn was given a trip to Hawaii and two special scrapbooks with pictures and notes from children.

Contributions for this history were compiled from the following sources: TCHS Annuals, W. A. Bozarth, Betty Iles Carmack, Lynnita Aldridge Brown, Jack and Mary Williams, *The Tuscola Journal*, *The Tuscola Review*, Kathryn McCumber and the *Saturday Journal Historical Edition*, *1895 History of Douglas County*, 1884 by Henry Niles.