

## **For Alma Mater Dear**

Colby High School \* 710 West Third

“Nothing seems more certain than that Colby must bestir itself once in the matter of a new school building. For two years now the school authorities have vexed themselves over the question of how to take care of the school population and with the initial report of Supt. Klemm on the enrollment this year the problem is shown to be on increasing importance” CFPT 9/4/30.

How familiar these words sound to those in the Colby community and undoubtedly in many other places where providing adequate facilities in which to house the halls of learning (and activities) is not the only an ongoing challenge but a constant source of debate in the board room and coffee shop. Securing a new high school in Colby in the 30s could be viewed as next to impossible as we view the decade in retrospect but at the onset, the community was not aware of the difficulties that lay ahead nor of the opportunities that the Depression could present them.

“An intolerable condition exists in the Consolidated school here and the public will have to sponsor a school bond issue next year, and early, too, to properly house the enrollment. State school authorities are giving the Colby school black looks on account of the terrible overcrowded condition of almost every room in the school. Some teachers are trying to herd more than fifty restless youngsters which i reminiscent of the good old days when the schools sometimes ran up enrollments of 60 or more pupils. But in those days about all they taught was the three R’s while today that curriculum is a minor part of the study that is crammed into youthful minds.

“There is talk of relieving the situation by building. It will take six new rooms to handle the situation as it exists today, and these may become inadequate in a few years if the city continues to expand at the rate it has maintained the last few years.

“This talk of a new school or of added school room is slightly satirical in note. When the Consolidated school was built early in last decade everyone beamed with satisfaction and regarded the entire problem settled indefinitely, but it was competent for only a few years” CFPT 12/11/30.

A petition was circulated for a bond issue of \$150,000 in May, 1931 but by September the school board was planning to rent the Sunday school room and the basement of the Methodist church to relieve the overcrowding. “The agitation to build a new high school was in full stir last spring but died down when wheat prices slumped to such a tragically low level. Hardly anyone had the nerve to ask a farmer to sign a petition for a bond election when wheat was worth only a quarter a bushel. However, in the face of the present overcrowded condition in both the Consolidated school and the high school, of the utter inadequacy of the high school building both for room and for modern high school needs, and considering the fact that building may be done more cheaply now than ever before or ever again it is believed the public looks more kindly upon the proposition, since it is a long time proposition and better times are sure to come” CFPT 9/9/31.

In December of ‘31, the school board decided to build a 30 by 90 foot one story school building near the high school (the South Range location) to house the domestic science and art classes. This would then free up space in the Consolidated school building for the two grades that

student body by sitting two at each of the single desk with a dozen or so boys and girls standing up in the rear room.

"It is in a situation like this that the current offer of the federal government in its public works program comes at a timely moment. In the effort to spur the erection of public buildings and other public improvements, the government offers to foot thirty percent of the cost of buildings, and to accept the bonds of a community at par and at an interest rate of four percent or less.

"The Consolidated school is so badly crowded that no room can be spared to take care of the overflow from the high school. One of the reasons for discontinuing kindergarten this year was the crowded condition of the school" CFPT 10/18/33.

"The [high] school has no library facilities. Only one stairway, of wooden construction, leads from basement to second floor and the possibilities of a fire are tragic. Because of lack of room and equipment some of the departments have been able to enroll all the students asking for instruction" CFPT 3/14/34.

The election was held in March 1934, and the bond issue passed by a tremendous majority. Within Colby, voters approved the project nearly 14 to 1. In the rural precincts, "the vote was much closer than was expected except in South Randall and summers townships where the vote was very much against the high school. South Randall really snowed it under with only three voting in favor while an even 30 voted against it. Surely the proposition must not have been very thoroughly explained to those people.

"At that, however, only a little more than half the possible vote of the whole district was cast. Many persons conceded that the school proposition would carry without any trouble and did not go the effort of voting at all" 3/21/34.

By the first of April, the school board was planning a trip around Kansas to look at other schools. "The purpose is to get just as much school house for the money as it is possible to crowd in. They want something that will not only serve the purposes of a school well but will be something to admire from its outward appearance" CFPT 4/4/34.

In mid-summer of that year, it was reported that the architects, Mann & Co. of Hutchinson, had prepared the blueprints and specifications and that their task was complicated by the fact that they had to keep up with all the regulations from Washington since the project was getting PWA funds. The next concern was getting bids that would come within the limits specified by the bonds.

With 200,000 appropriated for the purpose of building a new school, bids failed to come within the limits by six thousand dollars at the end of August. Eleven bidders were on hand for the opening (bids ranged from \$206,000 to \$249,000), and the board met with the three lowest bidders in an effort to get bids within the limit but were unable to do so. So they revamped the plans a bit and asked for new bids.

The next month, with only three bids received and all ranging far above the minimum, the board had no choice but to reject the bids and hold off for three months before making a third call.

"This time, it is believed, satisfactory bids will be made. The board has cut down some of its specifications and left out some of the things it really desired for the school building in order to get

present possibly the finest example of the art of architecture to be found anywhere in Western Kansas. The brick is a rough finish red much like the brick in the consolidated building and the trim will be of cast stone, too, so that the two buildings will be greatly similar in appearance in most respects--that is they will not clash in any way, it is hoped. The front of the new building will be somewhat more ornate than the other.

"The new building will accommodate a student body of 400 pupil without crowding and can take care of at least 50 more by a bit of crowding. And all of the activities of the school, except outdoor games, can be accommodated within the building. Thus there will be a full range of cultural activities as well as the extra-curricular activities all pursued under the one roof and without any interference between the various departments. The department idea for school work has been carried out to a remarkable extent, and every effort has been made to prevent any clashing between them. Thus the music activities will center around the auditorium where the band and orchestra will practice and where the school events will be presented. Besides the auditorium, there are several other music rooms, one for vocal, one for instrumental and three studios for private instruction, besides a special storage room for band and orchestra instruments and music. Sound proof walls and acoustic plaster will be used in this department.

"At the other end of the building is the commercial department which will permit the students to practice and observe up-to-date business practices.

"One of the outstanding features of the whole set up is that for scientific instruction and laboratory work. The instruction room furnishes an innovation by mounting the students' tables on successive levels so that from any party of the room the students may look down without obstruction upon any experiment that is being conducted around the instructor's desk. The scientific program embraces instruction in biology, physics, general science and chemistry. The laboratory room features a large electric panel. The scientific equipment is very complete for high school instruction, and it is very necessary in the preparation of student for the sort of work in which many of them will engage professionally.

"The new rooms and the new equipment will permit the school to follow the most advanced type of instruction. Among the newest ideas in instruction is supervised study. In its present cramped quarters the school has been working toward that type of work, and the new building will permit it to be developed completely. In this fashion of teaching there will be 60 minute class periods, half devoted to study and half to recitation.

"Throughout the building there is a telephone connection between each room and the superintendent's room. On the front of the main tower of the building there is a large clock face and the clocks in each room, as well as the master clock, will be synchronized. One of the outstanding features of the new building is the public address system. With a portable microphone which may be set up in the principal's room, the auditorium or the gymnasium any sort of program can be broadcast to any room in the building or to all of them and over to the auditorium of the Consolidated school building. This system will also take care of special radio program by phonograph.

"There are too many features about this building to cover at one time, but there is every

“The first work of construction will be the excavation of 3000 yards of dirt to accommodate the furnace room and another large room whose function is not yet decided upon, but which may some time become a cafeteria for serving hot noon lunches” CFPT 2/20/35.

And then just a year later, the high school students, faculty and staff were moving into the new building. The February 12, 1936 issue of the *Colby Free Press Tribune* reported that they were enjoying a welcome vacation that week while the equipment and materials were being moved.

A public open house and dedication was held in conjunction with graduation on Thursday May 14, 1936. To encourage a large crowd, the public was assured that the program could be heard through the new public address system in each room of the building with the gymnasium the first to fill after the auditorium overflows.

The total cost to build and equip the new high school was \$213,00. the federal government's portion, under the PWA plan, amounted to \$61,000 leaving a balance of \$152,000 for which the district was responsible to pay over a 20 year period. The bonds bore just 4% interest. The new building cost the district just \$12,000 more than the Consolidated building.

“Many persons, besides those who bought the senior annual published last week, will be interested in the page of pictures of the first class to be graduated from the new school building of the Colby Community high school district. This distinction was especially appealing to the young people themselves and hundreds of patrons of the district were equally interested in what has been regarded as something of an epochal event. The new building, in the minds of many people, marks a great step in educational advancement in this community” CFPT 5/27/36.

The grand building served as a high school for the next sixty years. Of course, changes and modifications took place. While a large number of these changes were really quite minor, some major ones notably changed the outward appearance of the building.

In April of 1947, a terrible hail storm hit Colby in the late afternoon and did considerable damage throughout town. “Perhaps the sorriest looking sight in Colby resulting from the hail is the fine high school building where, with some 300 windows knocked out, gives the appearance of a small army of boys having thrown rocks with good aim” CFPT 5/1/47. That summer the school board voted to brick up the east windows of the auditorium rather than trying to replace them. However, since both sides of the auditoriums windows are bricked, they must have decided to do the west side as well at the time.

By 1958, space in the public schools was a concern again; even with the pending construction of the parochial school. “Also needed is additional music space in the high school. If the junior high is built west of the high school auditorium, then sometime in the future the two buildings could be joined and a band room placed between to serve both schools” CFPT 11/3/58. In December 1959, voters in the Colby school district voted to build new junior high building.

“Construction is underway on a new music building between the new junior high building and the present senior high building. This 60x70 foot, one-story brick building will fill this area between the senior and junior high buildings with these two buildings forming the end walls of the new music building. The new music building will have a band practice room with risers to hold about 80-90 musicians, three small practice rooms, and instrument storage room, an ensemble

the teams. Both additions were brick faced to match the present school building.

On March 4, 1996, Colby High School held its first day of classes in the newly constructed building located at the corner of Franklin and Davis in south Colby. The building of the West Third was remodeled and today houses the grade school library, and classrooms for the third, fourth, and fifth grades. The Consolidated building was torn down in the summer of 1999. The auditorium is shared by the grade and middle schools and the former high school gym is available for practice sessions and games as well as serving as the grade school gym.

Historically, the former high school building is significant in the context of WPA projects. Architecturally, for its time and rural location, the intricacy of stone embellishments and elegant appearance is remarkable. Fortunately, with the adaption of the exquisite structure, it remains a viable and relevant part of the community.