

*(This report from the Thomas County Historical Society's archives was written in 1974 by a Rexford/Golden Plains student as part of a student research project.)*

## **Schools in Levant, KS**

When school was first held in Levant, Kansas, a one-room schoolhouse was used. When the one-room was not quite large enough, they built a two-room one with a basement. This was moved to Colby, Kansas, and used as apartments. 1924 was the last year they used the two-room schoolhouse. During the summer of 1924 they built a larger schoolhouse. This one you will see now if you go to Levant.

School was held in the new schoolhouse from 1925-1958. During most of this time the people of Levant had church and Sunday school in the schoolhouse. This was until 1950.

In 1950 they built the new church in Levant. When they first started having high school they only had two years of it. Then it was changed to four years.

When Lola Dieffenbaugh, my great aunt, went to school, she and her sisters and brothers had to drive from a farm two or three miles into town to get to school. I don't mean a car, but a horse and buggy. When they got to school there was a barn behind the school in which they could hitch their horses until school was out.

Back then they had two classes together. They had one teacher for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, a teacher for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, and so on.

My grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Elmer Garrett, both graduated from Levant High School. Lola Dieffenbaugh graduated in the first graduating class in the newest building which was in 1925. Her daughter, Mrs. Marilyn Collett, graduated in the last class which was in 1958. My mother, Mrs. Alice Wolf, went her first four years of school in Levant (1<sup>st</sup> thru 4<sup>th</sup>). Levant High School had a few sports. They had basketball and volleyball. They didn't have football or track. The year my great uncles, Wilbur Garrett and Lloyce Keck, played on the team, the basketball boys went to state. Garrison, a team they had to play, was slated to win the tourney that year, but Levant beat them in the second game. By this time they were feeling pretty good, until in the final game they lost to Pretty Prairie. This was the only game they had lost all season.

When my grandpa, Elmer Garrett, was in school, the boys were pretty ornery. They used to have the old-fashioned desks with the inkwells in them. He said that the boys got a kick out of getting the girls' pigtails and sticking them in the ink!

Back then all the boys wore overalls. When Elmer was in high school, all the older boys went into the restroom and found the littler ones. They would hang them on the coat hangers and leave them there. Another one of the many things that happened during my grandpa's school years was the boys took matches to school. They would light them and see if they could make the person in front of them jump! They did this by holding the match between the crack in the seat under the person's behind. One day a boy did this to a girl. Before she felt the heat of the match, it had burned a hole in her dress! These are only a few things they did back then!

In 1958 when Levant stopped having school and unified with Colby and Brewster, Jack Reed of Colby, Kansas, bought the schoolhouse. In 1961 it became the Levant Nursing Home. Its purpose was to help older people who needed help or just company. It closed just this year (1974) because the state changed its specifications and the nursing home wasn't qualified to meet them all.

Written by Orba Dee Wolf

*(Source: Interviews with Mr. Elmer Garrett and Mrs. Lola Dieffenbaugh)*

When Art Towslee married, he built a two-room sod house in the northwest corner of his parents' large yard. Art and Sadie lived in this place one year before buying a farm of their own located two miles west of the Towslee homestead. On March 31, 1904, a son was born to them. They named the boy Theodore Arthur in honor of his father and President Theodore Roosevelt.

Art Towslee farmed for several years before selling the farm and buying the only general store in Levant, Kansas. At this time, Art changed the spelling of his name by changing the *w* in Towslee to *u*, making it Touslee. One reason for selling the farm was a large syndicate from Illinois and Indiana, known as *the Seminary Land and Ranch Company*, purchased all of the land adjoining Art's farm. The land company first tried the game of bluff and freeze-out. Their bluff failed as Art Touslee was made of stern stuff and was not to be bluffed or scared. He finally sold at his price after deciding to try the merchantile business.

The only store in Levant was a small building with basement which Art bought from Mr. Alexander. Later he owned a new store building much larger and built of cement blocks.

The town of Levant was quite small at this time—consisting of mainly one store, one livery stable, one blacksmith shop, one grain elevator, a grade school, including one long sod house which stood for many years and a U.S. Post Office with two rural routes running out of it.

Since the former storekeeper in Levant had lived in the back room of the store, there was no house available for a family of six. Art Touslee bought a large two-story house with four large rooms from the Freeman farm, three and one-half miles south of Levant.

*(The information shared here is courtesy of Boyd Touslee.)*

5895 So. Elati St.

Littleton, Colorado.

Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1959

*The Colby Free Press-Tribune,*

Colby, Kansas.

Gentlemen:

The early day history of Thomas County written by Mrs. Rasmussen and Mr. Snell remind me of some of the happenings my parents used to tell about. My grandfather Stephen Waters, my uncle Robert Waters and my father William Waters homesteaded and timber claimed at and

near Levant in the fall of 1885. They returned to Nebraska for the winter and in the early spring of 1886, just after the big blizzard, they came back and built their soddies and my brother Roy, now deceased was born in our sod house one mile west of the present Levant August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1886. As you will note that tops Mr. Snell by about a year.

My grandfather platted the townsite of Levant about 1889. He wanted to name it Fingal after his old home town in Canada but the Post Office Department or the Railroad people would not agree to it so they named it Levant. I remember when the frame school house was built in 1889 and I think it still stands in Levant but has been moved from its original site. I also remember when the first depot was built and the laying of the Rock Island track in 1887. The black smoke and the whistle of the construction engine scared me. I was only two and one half years old. My father said there was only the A.H. Bieber home between what was then Colby and our home.

Uncle Robert had the first Grocery store in Levant and he bought his stock from the J.B. Morrison & Sons store in Colby. It was later the C.G. Morrison store. The first store in Colby was owned by M. Donelan, grandfather of the young men who now have the Colby Super Market. My father used to haul merchandise for the Donelan store from Oakley and Monument before the Railroad came to Colby.

Yours truly,  
J.F. Waters.