History of Roxana CUSD #1

As we look at the history of Roxana High School it is appropriate for us to examine how the school district came to be in existence in the first place. The following account will give you a sense of our history. The following account is part of the district's policy manual and was written by former administrator and RHS alumnus, Stephen Paynic.

The development of the Roxana School District began in 1802 when Gilham's Pasture School was built on the northeast corner where Thirteenth Street and Edwardsville Road intersect. In 1858, a new frame school was built in a dense growth of oak trees and named Brushy Grove School. In 1874, this school burned and was rebuilt. In 1929, a four-room brick school was built on the same location and continued to be called Brushey Grove School. This brick school was used until 1969 when it was sold at public auction in 1971. The Wood River Savings and Loan built a new building after razing the old school. Later the building was sold to Metro Savings and Loan and most recently has been purchased by Mercantile Bank. In the village of Roxana, the first classes were held in a Shell Oil Company staff house on East Tydeman Avenue. The first Roxana School was built on the Old Edwardsville Road about 1918.

Edison School was built in 1926. A gymnasium and stage were added to this structure six years later. Edison School was a two-room junior high school, which was later converted into a primary grade school. Currently the Roxana Public Library is located on this site.

In 1936, Burbank School was built with Works Progress Administration (WPA) Funds. After Burbank School was available, the old Roxana School on Old Edwardsville Road was sold to a trucking company. The Burbank-Edison-Brushey Grove Schools comprised School District 103. District 103 did not have a secondary school; therefore, students had to attend high schools in neighboring districts. In 1939, the citizens of Roxana and eastern Wood River (District 103) voted to form a new high school district. This new district was called Roxana School District 156. In 1941, the high school was completed enough so that the fall semester began with one hundred fifty-five students. The original high school plant consisted of twelve classrooms, a library, gymnasium and office.

The Wanda-South Roxana School District was numbered 105. Wanda School was built in 1923. The old South Roxana School, which was on the site of an abandoned trucking company, was built in 1927. This building has since been razed. In 1949, a University of Illinois survey team recommended the merger of school districts 103, 105, and 156 to form a unified school district. This merger was enacted by referendum in 1950 and supported by court action in the same year. This merger also signaled the first consolidation of school districts to a UNIT district in Madison

County. Therefore after the successful vote the consolidated school districts became known as the Roxana Community Unit School District No. 1.

On January 7, 1954 the large gymnasium at the high school was dedicated. At this same time open house tours were given for Rosewood, Central, South, the Junior High School and additions to the High School. A copy of a portion of the program explaining the various locations is included in the following pages. Land was purchased on route 111 to the east of what is now Wal Mart with thoughts for building a junior high at one time. However, in the mid ‘80's the land was sold to the city of Wood River and is now part of the water retention basin for that area. An intriguing possibility occurred in 1966 when some thought was given and a study was done to examine the possibility of purchasing the movie theatre in Roxana for an administrative center and area for theatrical performances with the remainder of the land for future development of a junior high. However, for some reason the idea did not move beyond the study stage.

Declining enrollments in the 1970's signaled the need for district reorganization and the result was the closing of Burbank school in 1983 (bought by a doctor) and Rosewood School in 1989 (razed) along with the creation of a sixth grade center in the bottom floor of the junior high. Later the Village of Roxana purchased the Burbank School, built a new city hall, police, and fire department to replace the original smaller/obsolete "community building" which housed a gym, village offices, police and fire departments.

The following is a copy of an article that ran in the Wood River Journal, September 19, 1957 special edition celebrating the Wood River Township Golden Anniversary. While some of the information is a repeat of earlier information it is interesting to note the nuances in the stories. The article was copied in its entirety from the edition of the paper. Also keep in mind the article was written in 1957. Therefore, some of the persons mentioned will now be deceased as well as some of the buildings have been razed such as Edison School (the current location of the Roxana Library) and Brushy Grove School (now the site of Firstar Bank). The Wanda School has been converted to a personal residence. The author of the article is unknown.

Roxana School System Has Colorful Early History

The history of the Roxana School System dates back many years. Before Roxana became the present Roxana Community Unit School District No. 1, it was known as the Roxana School District No. 103 in the elementary school and the Roxana High School District was No. 156. The Unit District was formed in 1949, and at that time it included the Roxana High School and Grade School Districts, and Rosewood Heights area was included in that formation. A year later the South Roxana area became a part of the present district.

Many interesting facts are incorporated in the history of the schools in what is now known as the Roxana Community Unit School District No. 1. Perhaps the school that has the most colorful history is that of the schools in the Brushey Grove area.

According to information in 1794 James Gilham came to the Illinois territory in search of his wife and children, who were then held captive by the Indians. Five years earlier while Mr. Gilham was plowing corn on his farm in Kentucky, a party of Indians stole up to his house and captured Gilham's wife and three children. Mr. Gilham sold his improvements in Kentucky and started out in search of his family. With the aid of French traders who knew most of the Indian tribes in the Northwest territory, he was able after five years to locate his family, who were living with Kickapoo Indians. Mr. Gilham was so impressed with the Illinois country that two years later he moved here and sent word back to his ten brothers and sisters in North Carolina and Kentucky to come into the new country. One of his brothers John, arrived in what is now Madison County, in 1802 and his son John Jr. settled where Wanda Station now stands. The farm, or claims extended North and West to include Glendale Gardens, Stalhood's Addition, and the present school site.

Wood River Township is given credit for establishing the first Sunday School, not only in the County, but in the State. The Lippencott family, living near the Milton Bridge near Wood River, having started it in 1819. The children were first taught in their homes, but as early as 1810, school was started.

The first school that was known to be situated in this area, was called Gilham's Pasture School, and started with an enclosed pasture of what is now the Southeast corner of Thirteenth Street and Edwardsville Road in Wood River. This school was one room frame building. In 1858 a new school was built to replace the old one and was given the name of Brushy Grove School, and the school in that area has retained that name ever since.

On Christmas Eve in 1874 the schoolhouse burned down, much to the joy of the children. However, a new school was built by the parents exactly like the old one. After the Standard Oil Refinery located in Wood River, which was known as the fastest growing town in the United States, Brushy Grove School was closed and the pupils attended the town school. When the Shell Refinery came in, quite a few new families moved into the Roxana vicinity, they were attracted by the good wages offered by Shell. But they did not realize that there was no school for them and no money to build one. The on which the Shell Plant was built was still assessed as farmland. Brushy Grove School was in no condition to be enlarged, so a house was rented for the purpose and two teachers hired. From that time until 1929, the pupils were moved from one school to another but in that year enough families had moved in near the old site to permit erection of a four room brick school just North of the old frame building, thus making a total of five buildings at Brushy Grove. The building that was built in 1929 still stands and is being used for school purposes. In Roxana proper, the first school was in a Shell staff house (stucco) on East Tydeman Avenue. The first school was built on the old Edwardsville Road about 1918. Mrs. E.E. Endicott (deceased) was one of the early principals. Dr. Maybelle Williams, of Alton was one of the first teachers and taught in the stucco house. The land for the school that was built on the old Edwardsville Road was donated by Fred

Bender, now of near Edwardsville, who is a retired farmer. Among some of the first teachers were, Mrs. Merle Manley, Mrs. Suzanne V. (Russell) Durham, and Mrs. Raymond Sullivan, all now residing in Wood River. F.M. Scott, former County Superintendent of Schools now deceased, was Principal after Mrs. Endicott and he was followed by J.B. Ogg of Springfield, who is the father of Walter Ogg of Reller Avenue in Roxana. Mrs. E.F. (Elsie) Freese of 105 West Fifth Street in Roxana was the first Truant Officer. Among the earlier trustees were Fred Isminger of Wood River, Curtis Bland, deceased, and J.P. King, deceased. Edison School was built in 1926 while Mrs. Endicott was principal and in 1932 a gymnasium and stage was added. Burbank School was built in 1936 due to the increase in population in Roxana area. This building was erected with W.P.A. funds. John Martin, deceased was then Superintendent. L.E. Harris, present Superintendent of the Roxana Community Unit School, became Superintendent of Roxana Grade School District No. 103 in 1940. Prior to 1941 High School children in the Roxana area were sent to neighboring High Schools, not having a secondary school of their own. Due to the increase in enrollment in the other High Schools, it was necessary to hold an election to form a new High School District. In 1939 the election was held and the majority voted for a High School. The building was completed in the fall of 1941. Due to the increase in population in the Roxana area and annexations, it was necessary to engage in a building program. Since the formation of the Unit District, the District has built four new buildings and three additions, making a total number of fifty-three new classrooms.

The Roxana School District has a rich history. The Roxana Schools Foundation would like to create a historical display in the lobby area outside the district offices. If you have any information, pictures, artifacts etc. that you would be willing to share, please contact the district office at (618) 254-7541 or email fonda.starbuck@rcusd.org.