



DECATUR COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL, then at 108 E. Ash, now the site of the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center, was in the center of the Class of 1932 composite picture. Fifty-six members were shown with names under their pictures. Four of them plan to gather from 2 to 4 p.m. on Saturday to observe their 75th anniversary at Angel Lane at the Good Samaritan Center, where two, Ruth Nicodemus Laidig and Edla Nelson Olson, now live. — Last Indian Raid Museum collection

# Decatur High Class of 1932 to celebrate 75th anniversary

By MARY LOU OLSON

Even though the Great Depression cast a heavy shadow over the country in 1932, members of the graduating class at Decatur Community High School ended four years of education judged in a mock trial as "second to none."

A handful of survivors plan to gather Saturday afternoon in Angel Lane at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center to reminisce and mark their 75th anniversary class reunion. Two members, Edla (Nelson) Olson and Ruth (Nicodemus) Laidig, now live at the center.

Other class members who plan to join the class Saturday are Tillie (Hafner) Pitner of Atwood and Grace (Bell) Eckhart Reeves of Alma.

Caleb Smick was superintendent in the old high school building when they were students.

"I had much respect for him," Mrs. Olson recalled, "but was also afraid of him."

Just a few months after the class graduated, Mr. Smick died from a stroke he suffered at the Oberlin-Atwood Armistice Day football game in Oberlin at the age of nearly 46.

The majority of the class came from farm homes, Mrs. Olson said, so "batching" in town with classmates was common. The district had no school buses, fewer people had cars and roads weren't good enough to commute to class anyway.

"We brought canned meat and enough food from home to last for a week and we cooked it on a coal stove," she said. "During those four years, I had Ella (Johnson) Peterson, Virgie (Anderson) Nygren, Birdie (Marcuson) Clover and Viola (Carlson) Garver as roommates.

"One year, we had a very small room, so we hung up a bed sheet to



THE CLASS OF 1932 met in 1977 for its 45th anniversary reunion. Shown front row (from left) Gladys Smith Schichtel, Vera Reeves McClure, Lucille Spatz Worden, Grace Bell Eckhart Reeves, Ruth Nicodemus Laidig, Velda Blickenstaff Davison and Frances David Anderson. Second row, Gordon Rathbun, Walter Shaw, Velma Fleming Peters Unger, Lloyd Corcoran, Viola Carlson Garver, Edla Nelson Olson, Fred Peters and Bert Huff.

make a private dressing room. One day when the garter that was holding up a stocking of a friend broke and she slipped behind the sheet to fix it, the sheet fell down. All of the girls in the room roared with laughter."

Mrs. Laidig said she lived on a farm northeast of Oberlin, so she also stayed in town. She remembers staying at the homes of "Ma" Cramer and Lewis Pierce. She said two favorite teachers were Elizabeth Weber and Ruth Elvin.

Among the women's favorite high school memories are the annual Halloween clean-up, when students raked up the leaves in people's yards and took them to the park on the west edge of Oberlin to be burned. Later, the kids enjoyed a wiener roast, compliments of the city. It's a tradition that continues today.

"I had more fun than I should have had," Mrs. Olson said. "When you don't have any sense, you have a lot of fun!"

"When we promenaded in those

days, we just walked a short distance down Main Street, then couples raced in and out of all of the downtown stores. One year, it had rained so much our clothes were really muddy when we finished.

"Due to the hard times, the school made a rule that all prom dresses had to be made from cotton, so there would be no embarrassment for those who could not afford more expensive material.

"I remember the prom when we were treated to ice cream treats at Fleming's Bakery when their daughter, Velma, opened up the case and told everyone to help themselves."

The Class of 1932 gave the 1,500 attending its commencement at the Oberlin grade school a different program. To save the cost of paying for a speaker, the class, under the direction of teacher Lester Kirdendall, wrote a program, "A Trial of Modern Education."

It featured "The Public vs. Decatur Community High School,"

with Robert Geiger as the honorable judge; Gordon Rathbun, clerk of the court; Melvin Stimbert, prosecuting attorney; Doris McCartney, defense attorney; and Ruth Nicodemus, court page.

After much discussion on the merits of what was being taught, the school was deemed "not guilty" of charges, "That Decatur Community High School had failed in its duty to efficiently educate its students in the various vocations, citizenship, culture, music; that athletics were over-emphasized; and that the school was a financial impossibility."

The program also included a vocal quartet, Lorna McClary, Berta Frickey, Myra Redman and Mrs. Olson. Nola Gill played an oboe solo and Velma Fleming presented the senior class spade to the junior class, a tradition at that time.

Harold Dyer was valedictorian of the class and Lila Railsback salutatorian. Honor students were Letha Rehm, Lewis Wurm, Lois Miller

and Miss Redman. Mr. Dyer won a Summerfield Scholarship to the University of Kansas. Diplomas were presented by Elwood M. Brooks, a prominent banker.

During the 1931-32 school year, 700 students were enrolled at the Oberlin schools, according to a story in *The Oberlin Herald*. The Future Farmers of America chapter, now known simply as FFA, received its charter in 1932.

A highlight of the football season was the annual Thanksgiving Day game with the Norton Blue Jays. Oberlin had been undefeated by Norton on its home field until that year, when Norton downed the Red Devils 13-0 to capture the North-west Kansas League championship.

"We made much of our own entertainment in those days," Mrs. Olson said. "We usually went to the picture show, but other than that, except for school activities, it was mainly dances, and I was taught not to go there because dances were 'wicked.' Besides, I knew that if I ever went, I would enjoy it and want to go back."

Class members also included Velda Blickenstaff, Eileene Brooks, Wallace Bryan, Hugh Bush, Mareta Bush, Viola Carlson, Marie Chilson, Lloyd Corcoran, Frances David, Everett and Marlon Drescher, Harold Hamitt, Lester Hanson, Shelburne Hendricks, Bert Huff, Julia Hudson, Maurine Johnson,

Wilma Johnston, Gilbert Kathka, Lois Kirkendall, Ruth Long, Elvin Magers, Aldever Metcalf, Joseph Metts, Herbert Miller, Fred Peters, Henry Peterson, Helen Purdy, Leo Rathbun, Vera Reeves, Gertrude Resch, Homer Roberts, Dale Roper, Walter Roshong, Walter Shaw, Gladys Smith, Lucille Spatz and Berle Wickham.