



OUR MOTTO: WE SERVE

The German Township Lions Club in conjunction with the German Township Recreation Department, the German Township Trustee and Advisory Board, and other interested citizens, has remodeled the "Old Wagner School" for use as a community building. Remodeling started in August, 1985 and will be completed by September, 1986. Lawn and foundation plantings were engineered by the German Township 4-H Club.

When complete, this building will serve as a gathering place for many activities.

We, the Lions, welcome you to this first reunion of Wagner School students and are proud to be a part of this community activity.

Allen Hepler, President
German Township Lions Club

WAGNER SCHOOL REUNION

August 16, 1986

PROGRAM

Master of Ceremonies:	Norman Cromwell
Recognition:	Robert Holderman Lottie Pickrel Others
Music:	"The Clef Hangers" (Sweet Adeline Quartet) Eddie Jarrett Trio (Instrumental)
Games:	Horseshoe Volley Ball
Food:	Chicken barbecue prepared by the German Township Lions Club Soft drinks provided by the German Township 4-H Club

HISTORY OF WAGNER SCHOOL

An early picture shows "Wagner School" written on a slate and students standing in front of a white, frame building. We do not know if the building pictured is a school or the location. Some local residents spoke of their parents attending a white, frame school on Brick Road where the John Bierwagen residence is now. Unfortunately, a search of the Bierwagen abstract did not reveal a clue to the school's existence, but a book owned by John Gillis entitled "History of St. Joseph County, Indiana" published in 1880, speaks of a school in Section 21, which includes the Bierwagen property. The book stated that this school was taught by John Martindale, but it did not give a name. Research is continuing to document this early history.

The earliest documentation of Wagner School, thus far, is an 1898 picture of students standing in front of a brick school. Marie Sarle was the teacher. This Wagner School on Portage Road (known as Niles Road and Michigan Road) was probably built between 1890 and 1898. No original deed has been found for this school site. Plat maps locate the site in the northeast corner of fifty-three acres owned by W. A. Gillis in 1909. Many older alumni remember attending classes in this one-room, red brick school located slightly south of the present building.

Esther Rhoades Mitchell, who started at Wagner School in 1914, recalls, "There was a shelf and coat hooks to the right of the front door and a pitcher pump drinking fountain to the left." Florence Smith Bestle says, "The school was partitioned into two rooms when Ullery School, which was near the present Carriage House, and the South School, which was near the north edge of Highland Cemetery, were closed and their students were sent to Wagner."

Irma Rinehart Ladd reminisces, "In my room, each grade was called to the front where we sat on a bench which we nicknamed "the recitation seat". The walls around the pot-bellied stoves were scorched black. Galoshes were non-existent, so wet socks were hung by the stove to dry and they smelled awful." John Gillis recollects, "Some of the teachers boarded with my parents. Silas Hildebrand, an upper grades teacher and principal, and Nina Williams, a teacher, come to mind."

The "school buses" were horse-drawn wagons, carriages, bobsleds and kid hacks. Esther Mitchell has provided a picture of a kid hack which her father, Ottis Rhoades, drove. Kid hacks were enclosed wagons on runners with a door in the rear and benches along each side.

Irma Ladd recalls, "Sam Purucker, an early driver, had an old milk wagon covered in cracked, black oilcloth. He fitted it with benches on each side and threw straw on the floor. We used hot soapstones and hot flatirons for foot warmers during the cold weather." Margaret Howell Dale laughs about the time their bobsled upset, scattering youngsters all over Auten Road. Irma Ladd recalls one snowy night a group was forced to sleep on the floor at Evan and Delbert Gillis' house.

A deed dated March 26, 1920 indicates the School Corporation of German Township purchased, for the sum of \$87.50, an additional .41 acres of land north of the "Old School Lot", from Rome C. and Ella J. Stephenson, for a "proposed new school lot."



THE WHITE FRAME BUILDING



THE FIRST BRICK SCHOOL ON PORTAGE

The one-room Wagner School probably closed after the fall semester of 1922. Second semester classes were held at Portage Chapel Church while the new school was being completed. During the remodeling of the present building, a date of 8/23/22 was found behind a partition in the boys' restroom.

The opening of a larger, modern Wagner School barely received notice outside the township. On September 7, 1923, The South Bend Tribune printed a list of all county teachers, by school, including Wagner teachers. They were: Clell Shupert, Mildred Hill and W. F. Brown. The South Bend News-Times added the information that Clell Shupert was of North Liberty and Mildred I. Hill and W. F. Brown were both of South Bend. For Wagner School students and staff, what a glorious improvement! No more pot-bellied stoves! No more thawing the pump! And no more privies out back!

Could the new Wagner School have been too small from the beginning? Some residents believe it was intended to have only two classrooms upstairs, plus an auditorium downstairs. John Gillis recalls conversations regarding a future two-room addition to the south side of the building, which would have centered the front doors. Whatever the intent, the "auditorium" remained a classroom until the school closed. The first three grades were taught in the "auditorium" with the fourth, fifth and sixth in one upstairs classroom, and the principal teaching the seventh and eighth in the other.

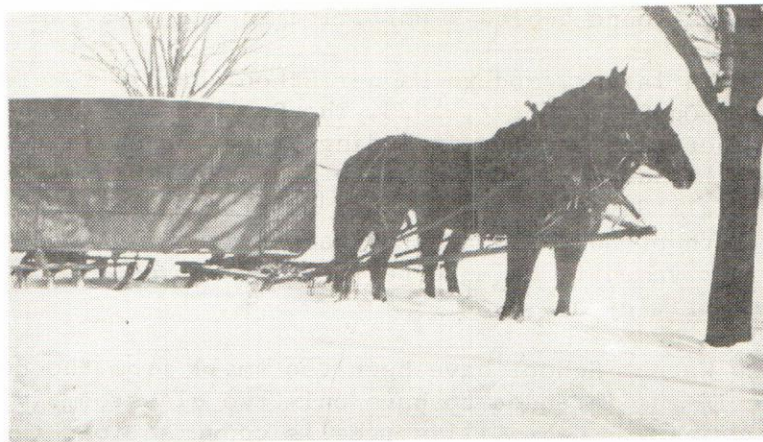
During the 1924-25 school year, Mt. Pleasant students attended Wagner School while an addition was made to their building. The students of both schools were photographed together, as Wagner School students.

A third parcel of land was added to the south of the "Old School Lot". The ground was acquired from the W. A. Gillis proposed subdivision. This land, where the Fire Station is now, provided room for athletic events and ball games. Softball teams were coached by Mr. Shupert. German opponents were: Mt. Pleasant, Ardmore, and Greene. Do you remember the Wagner School Fight Song?

WAGNER WILDCATS (Tune: On Wisconsin)

Wagner Wildcats, Wagner Wildcats....
Fight on for your fame,
We are loyal sons and daughters,
Hallelujah, rah, rah, rah, rah!
Wagner Wildcats, Wagner Wildcats....
Be just like your name -
Fight, fellows, fight, fight and we'll
Win - this - game!

At first, mothers volunteered to cook a couple days a week and the farmers donated food for these one-pot meals. Some of the volunteers were: Ethel Bestle Ashley, Myrtle Mangun Bestle, Lily Purucker Caldwell, Agnes Lobaugh Calvert, Eva Reynolds Gillis, Mabel Smith Rinehart, and Mrs. Wells Eger. Kenneth Wagner tells of his mother, Lottie Dawson Wagner, who was the first paid cook. She walked from her home (now the Huffine Residence) every school day during the late 20's and early 30's, to cook for the children. She received \$5.00 a week.



THE "KID HACK"



AN EARLY PICTURE OF THE PRESENT BUILDING

In 1948, the PTA raised funds to start a cafeteria by holding chicken suppers. They bought an eight-burner gas stove, a refrigerator and a double sink. Members donated silverware and other equipment. Martha Patterson Romine, Ina Jones Bode and Jennie Bell Sherry were the motivators of the project. Marian Fulkerson Kistler helped. Others who cooked were: Helen Steinhoffer Meade, Ellen Treash and Marguerite Meyers. Marie Stafford and Ina Bode helped tutor the children in the lower grades.

From approximately 1925 to 1933, Walter Wagner served as custodian. Others who served were John Dale, Joseph Howell and Marvin Dale. Who remembers that Clarence Ashley drove a 1931 Model "A" Ford School bus, the first motorized transportation? Other bus drivers we remember were: Elmer (Doc) Wagner, George Sellers and Marvin Dale.

By 1953, both Mt. Pleasant and Wagner Schools were seriously overcrowded. Mt. Pleasant was already scheduled to be torn down for airport expansion. During the summer of 1954, Mt. Pleasant was razed, leaving Wagner the last German Township school in operation. Mt. Pleasant students were tuitioned to South Bend Community School Corporation schools. To relieve the crowded conditions at Wagner, it was decided to tuition the seventh and eighth grades to Central Junior High School, thus making Wagner a six-grade school. This was done in the fall of 1954.

On August 23, 1955, the South Bend Tribune noted that Robert Holderman, the new fifth and sixth grade teacher, would be principal; Myrtle Richey would teach third and fourth; and Lottie Pickerl would teach first and second. The article stated one-hundred-five students were enrolled and "improvements over the summer included a new well, new plastering and better heating of one room".

September, 1957, began the final year. Again, the Tribune noted the teaching staff was Robert Holderman, principal and fifth and sixth grades; Clarissa Koontz, third and fourth grades; and Lottie Pickerl, first and second grades.

The warped wooden floors and worn steps had touched many eager feet -- what was Wagner School to them? May Day, sledding on "the hill", Field Museum, ball games, Friday movies in the dark, box socials, 1933 Chicago World's Fair, friends, Soldiers and Sailors Monument, White House hamburgers, hockey on "the pond", a special man named Shupert, the playground maypole, 3-cent milk, swinging on a bell rope, a lickin', closing day picnic, penny pencils, lessons, graduation, scouts, puppy-love, Christmas plays, and "Okey-Doker".

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SOFTBALL TEAM, 1933



CHRISTMAS PROGRAM, 1956



MAY DAY OPENING CEREMONY, 1958