

Say farewell to Ulaio School

Written by SARAH McCRAW
Wednesday, 01 May 2013 18:27 -

<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/050213/schoolSM.png> **Demolition ends era for Town of Grafton building that housed one-room school, day care center for decades**

The one-room schoolhouse known as Ulaio School in the Town of Grafton, where children were educated on and off for more than a century, has succumbed to old age and the wrecking ball.

The small red building at the corner of Highways C and Q was razed last week by Ozaukee Day Care and Learning Center, which used the schoolhouse for about 20 years before building a new facility on the property in 2008.

“How much more money do you pour into a building when there’s no more room for growth?” asked Lisa Decker, director of the center. “It’s hard because I hate to see it go, but I understand why it came to this.”

Decker said water issues led to the decision to raze the building.



“It is one of those bittersweet things because there were so many families and memories in the old building,” she said.

The demolition has been an emotional experience for former students.

“It has so many nice memories,” Town of Grafton resident Marge Helm Viesselmann said. “I’m not one for change. I always enjoyed going to school there.”

Viesselmann, 80, attended Ulaio School from 1937 to 1945 and her father Fred Helm served on the school board.

In those days, Viesselmann said, the students were from large farming families in the area. About 18 students in first through eighth grades took turns at the front of the classroom as the teacher gave lessons on reading, writing, arithmetic, history and geography.

“We’d sit on little benches in front of the blackboards and the teacher would teach us while the rest of the kids would be at their desks doing work,” Viesselmann said. “The classes were so small that it was almost like a one-on-one session with teachers, so you got the help you

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needed.”

The younger children had desks on the one side of the classroom, she said, while the older students sat near the windows on the opposite side.

Each day, two children would be assigned to collect water for the school.

“We’d go across the road to a farmer to get our water for the day, and we’d bring it back to fill up the bubbler,” Viesselmann said, adding that students also pounded chalk out of blackboard erasers each day.

The one-room schoolhouse was heated by a coal-burning furnace in the basement, Viesselmann said.

“There was a circular register on the floor where the heat came out, and we’d rest our mittens on it to dry them in the winter,” she said. “It was just a cozy, simple thing.”

Town of Grafton resident Don Burhop attended the school from 1941 to 1949 and remembers using the furnace to cook his lunch.

“At noon, we used to bake potatoes for lunch,” he said. “We’d put them in the doorway of the furnace and let them bake.”

Burhop, 78, and his wife Shirley, 79, were the lone graduates in 1949.

Mr. Burhop said while it was common for students to walk a mile or more to school, he could occasionally catch a ride on a milk truck driven by the father of a fellow student.

“A few times in the winter I got a ride to school on a sleigh with the horses,” he said.

Mrs. Burhop said she felt lucky when she could catch a ride of her own.

“If I timed it right, the teacher would come along and I would get a ride with her,” she said.

While the couple has fond memories of the school, Mrs. Burhop said there was one thing she did not like.

“It was always so cold in the morning,” she said. “The only thing I never liked was that the teachers did not get there earlier to start the furnace.”

Hooks lined a small hallway at the front of the school where students would hang their coats and store their boots underneath.

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“When we were getting ready for a test, we’d go in the hallway to ask each other questions,” Mrs. Burhop said.

Pictures of presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln hung in the front of the classroom, Viesselmann said, and students would recite the Pledge of Allegiance to an American flag each morning.

The tightly-knit community celebrated events together, including a picnic to mark the end of the school year and a Christmas program.

“We had a red curtain that was drawn across the front of the classroom and we’d all come out and say our lines,” Viesselmann said.

“It was small and the parents’ seats were right in front of the stage, but everyone was happy to see their parents there. It was a very important time.”

The small building housed Ula School until 1962, when the school became part of the Grafton School District. The property was then sold to Ozaukee County, which owned it for more than two decades.

The county established a school for disabled children there, but once those students were mainstreamed into area schools, the building sat vacant.

Decker said the county allowed the center to use the property after it was established in 1975.

In 1984, the county transferred ownership of the property to the day care, according to the Register of Deeds office.

Decker said she’s kept a few mementos from the school, including some of the old wooden shingles and a handbell that sat on the teacher’s desk.

The land will be seeded and fenced to enhance the playground, Decker said, but memories of the old building linger.

“It was old; it was small; it was difficult at times to work in, but the charm of that old building was great,” she said. “It was just a feeling you got when you walked in the door, very warm and loving.

“Looking out and not seeing it is going to seem odd for a while.”

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Image Information: HOLDING A BELL that once sat on the teacher's desk at the former Uiao School in the Town of Grafton and a photo of a class that attended the school, Ozaukee Day Care and Learning Center Director Lisa Decker stood in front of the partially demolished schoolhouse at the corner of Highways 60 and Q. Photo by Sam Arendt