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# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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## SCHOOL DAYS

THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS OF ST. THOMAS HIGH SCHOOL

and

REMINISCENCES OF A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL TEACHER



EIGHT GIRLS AND CLARENCE McDONALD POSED FOR THEIR 1914  
ST. THOMAS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION PHOTO

*(Photo by Haynes, Rockford)*

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## FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK



Occasionally a surprise reaches the Rockford Historical Society. Earlier this year, board member Ruth Lunde received an unsolicited package from the Addison Bible Church, Addison, Illinois. It contained photos and a leather-bound book entitled, *The Girl Graduate*. Ruth McGuire, a member of the 1914 St. Thomas High School class – the school's first graduating class – filled her book with accounts of activities; the class will, prophecy, history; invitations, programs, photos and other memorabilia.

Ruth, the class president, lived at 1318 Crosby Street with her parents Charles E. and Mary McGuire and her sister Helen. For this issue of *Nuggets* we've edited and condensed portions of Ruth's book to present a glimpse into the St. Thomas of that era. Eventually, Ruth's book will be given to the Local History Room at the Rockford Public Library.

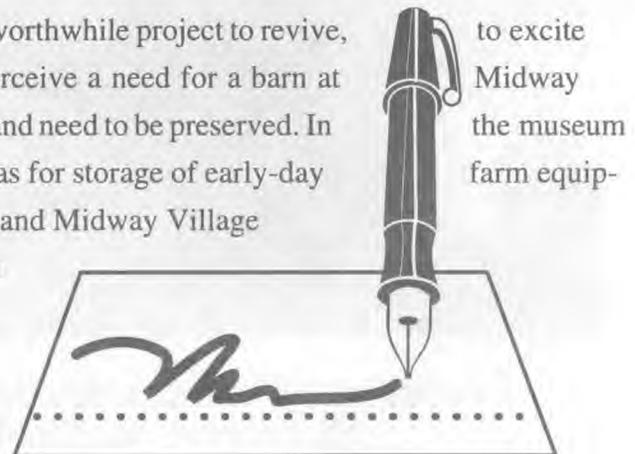
In keeping with our "school" theme, we're also publishing recollections of one-room school teaching as written by Hazel Mortimer Hyde. She taught school for 40 years, and says, "The joy of teaching never deserted me." After experiences in her home state of Kansas, she spent 32 years as a teacher in Rockford at Montague and Washington Junior High Schools. At Washington, she headed the Social Studies Department. A former Associate Editor of *Nuggets*, she has written – and encouraged others to contribute – a wealth of local history stories. Thank you, Hazel. In this issue she recalls her first two years as a teacher in one-room schools.

*Peggy Jensen*  
Peggy Jensen, Editor

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I believe the Rockford Historical Society needs a worthwhile project to revive, and to involve the membership. At the same time, I perceive a need for a barn at Village. Barns are fast disappearing from our landscape and need to be preserved. In setting, it could be used for dances and exhibits as well as for storage of early-day ment. I am hoping that the Rockford Historical Society and Midway Village could jointly investigate ways and means to get a "Barn Again" project underway.

Sincerely yours,  
Elaine E. Carlson



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## EARLY ST. THOMAS HIGH SCHOOL MEMORIES

*Excerpts from Ruth McGuire's Girl Graduate Book, 1914*

*Introduction by Peggy Dahlberg Jensen*

In September 1910, 22 students convened for Rockford's first Catholic high school classes. Known then as St. James High School, they met in temporary classrooms in the namesake school on North Second Street for two years. Following the purchase and remodeling of the original Ellis Elementary School at West State and Stanley streets, students and faculty moved into new quarters, November 1912. Then they adopted the St. Thomas name. Nine students – eight girls and one boy – persevered in studies at St. Thomas and formed the first Classical Course graduating class. (Other students opted for a two-year Commercial Course.)

President Ruth McGuire's *Girl Graduate Book*, written in beautiful script, reveals senior-year celebrations, 1914. She identifies the class motto as "Nisi Dominus, frustra." ("Unless the Lord is with us, all things are in vain.") Her class chose purple and white as their colors; the white rose as their flower. Other class officers: Vice-President, Edna Crotty; Secretary, Margaret O'Brien; Treasurer, Loretta Creagan. Ruth Colloton, Doreen

Schlenk, Gladys Walton, Alice Flanagan, and Clarence McDonald completed the class roll. They composed a class yell, as follows:

Strawberry Shortcake. Blueberry pie.

V-I-C-T-O-R-Y.

Are we 'it'? Well, I guess!

St. Thomas Seniors. Yes! Yes! Yes!

 Gladys Walton   
wrote the Class History.

**Ruth copied the following paragraphs  
into her *Girl Graduate Book*.**

Four years ago today, a class of 24 graduated from St. James School and about an equal number from St. Mary's. On that occasion, our Beloved Bishop (Peter J. Muldoon) announced that in the fall, a Catholic high school would exist. In September 1910, the first class – 22 pupils – assembled at St. James School for high school classes. Our beloved Sr. Eleanor was the superior and had charge of the high school.

It was then, too, that we first knew and learned to love Father Flanagan,

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Sr. Virginia and Sr. Louis Bertrand. We will never forget nights spent after school for Algebra, but never for Latin. We still remember the field trip along the North Second Street road in search of rocks and stones and to sketch a winding stream. It was a happy year and one not to be forgotten.

The second year Sr. Eleanor left us. But one came who has filled her place nobly and whom we will never forget for the love, patience and kindness shown to us the remaining three years – Sr. M.

Gabriella. That year saw a thinning in our ranks; some deserted us for other schools and others left for different branches of study. Another large room was built at St. James. To our fold we welcomed Edna Crotty, Margaret O'Brien and Clarence McDonald who have since proven valuable class members. Geometry seemed to be the enemy of nearly all but "we came, we saw, we conquered."

In September 1912 the Juniors numbered ten. Although the class had diminished, those who remained were steadfast and loyal. Sr. Constanza was added to the faculty and we have since welcomed her happy smile at history time, forgetting for a time whether we knew our history or not. This year Byron High School lost

a studious pupil and St. Thomas gained in the person of Ruth Colloton. Up to this time the High School had been known as St. James, but now we were to have a building of our own and it was to be called St. Thomas. The two months while we waited for the new school to be finished were long. In November we moved to the new high school on West State Street. The class worked hard this year, the chief trouble being Physics. But the new laboratory helped to ease the pain of this science.

The next year came and we had earned the well deserved title of Seniors. One of our members left us and there was left nine incomparables. We missed our Latin teacher, Father Flanagan, but we have appreciated the work of Sr. M. Gabriella in Virgil during the year. We also wish to thank Sr. Xavier, our Christian Doctrine instructor, and also a new member of the faculty, for her kindness and patience.

The last year passed all too speedily and it is with great regret and hearts overflowing that we say farewell to Chemistry, Latin, English and History, to our teachers, beloved classmates, and Alma Mater.

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 Ruth's reactions to an event   
on Thursday, June 11, 1914.

The Juniors gave a banquet for the Seniors this evening and it was certainly grand. The evening of pleasure began at 6:30 with the banquet and after that we danced and sang and had a glorious time. The dinner: strawberries with powdered sugar, (pickles, olives, radishes, etc.); potato salad, roast pork, spaghetti (*sic*), biscuits and butter; nut salad with saratoga crackers; ice cream, cake and mints.

The table looked beautiful with a large bouquet of Roses and Pansies in the center. At every place was a place card and a white rose and pansy, our class colors. Many were the toasts and many were the yells for both Juniors and Seniors. We thought of course it would be lovely but it was grand.

All the Juniors and all the Seniors were there and everyone had a fine time. Special honors were given the president. First I had the honor of the head table and was called upon to say grace. During the course of the banquet a poem dedicated to the president of the Senior class was read:

“She was a Phantom of delight,  
When first she gleamed upon our sight,  
A lovely apparition sent,  
To be a class’s ornament,  
A dancing shape, an image gay,  
To haunt, to startle and waylay,  
A creature not too bright or good  
For human nature’s daily food,  
For transcient sorrows, simple wiles  
Praise, blame, love, tears and smiles,  
A perfect woman, nobly planned  
To warn, to comfort and command.  
And yet a spirit, still and bright  
With something of an angel light.”

Mr. Clifford McDonald was toastmaster of the evening and called upon all the members of the Senior class for toasts. While the banquet was in progress, Margaret Sizer read an address of welcome to the Seniors:

“Welcome, Seniors, Welcome!  
With joy we greet you all!  
Longer would we keep you,  
But your greater duties call.  
Swiftly passed the golden hours  
Filled with memories bright;  
While your class has been for ours,  
A model fair of truth and right.  
Now, before you leave us  
Gladly, one and all,  
We welcome you, we greet you,  
And fond memories recall!  
Promises we make you  
For loyalty, for right,  
For faithfulness to our Senior Class  
To our Purple and our White.”

Romona Dwyer and Margaret Sizer furnished music during the evening. Many thanks to our dear friends and school-mates: Romona Dwyer, Agatha Nugent, Rose Bennet, Margaret Sizer, Agnes McMahan, Marguerite Walton, Clifford McDonald, and Stanley Roche. Clifford and Stanley both spoke of how our good example had influenced them and how they would follow in "loyalty and right with faithfulness to the Senior Class of '14." The party broke up after the Seniors had given rousing cheers: "Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Juniors!"

**The First Commencement**  
 of  
**St. Thomas High School**  
 at  
**Knights of Columbus Hall**  
**Thursday Evening, June the eighteenth**  
**one thousand nine hundred and fourteen**  
**at eight o'clock**  
HIS GRACE, BISHOP MULDON, WILL PRESIDE.

*Historic St. Thomas  
commencement announcement.*


**Ruth tells about a**
  
**Saturday dinner hosted**  
**by Bishop Muldoon**  
**at the Dominican convent**  
**on North Second Street.**

The Faculty gave a dinner for the graduating class at the convent at noon on June 13, 1914. We sat down at a beautifully decorated table. Our place cards were purple and white and also our favors: purple baskets tied with a bunch of flowers and ribbon and filled with salted nuts. At the head of the table was Our Bishop, to his left was Sister M. Gabriella and myself at his right. Father Flanagan was at the other end of the table. A six course dinner was served and everyone seemed to enjoy every bit of it.

Before the sixth course, toasts were given:

To our Bishop – Ruth McGuire

"We are very happy, dear Bishop, to have the honor of your presence for this occasion (*sic*) and we wish to thank you most particularly for all the favors and attentions you have so graciously given us during our whole High School course. We realize that words do not always mean a great deal but we say this with all our hearts, as King Arthur's warriors said to the King, 'Be thou the king and we will work thy will who love thee.'"

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To the Faculty – Clarence McDonald.  
To the School – Edna Crotty.  
To our successors – Margaret O'Brien.

After the toasts the Bishop gave us a lovely talk, telling us he was proud of us and also thanked us for “sticking” to him during the first four years of St. Thomas High School. He asked that we have our pictures taken in a group and give him one as a token from him and also as a remembrance of the school. He told us to take one for ourselves and send him the bill.

Then we all rose and drank to the health of the Faculty. It was beautiful and everyone enjoyed it.

After dinner we went to the parlor. Music was furnished by the Grafanola. Some of our favorite pieces were played such as “Little Old Log Cabin,” Strauss’ waltz; “Mother Machree” and others. After this the alumni was organized. The Bishop acted as Chairman until the following officers were chosen: President – Loretta Creagan, Secretary – Edna Crotty, Treasurer – Margaret O'Brien, Historian – Clarence McDonald.

 In a copy of the Class Will,   
Ruth records some of the following:

To the junior class,

- the desks which we have heretofore occupied, over which we have accomplished the task set out for us to do.
- the dearly beloved Sisters who have worked so long and diligently with us through our trials and tribulations.
- the interest we hold in the Catholic Encyclopedia, a history book to be rightfully used if great results are looked for.
- our chemistry table over which we have pondered, pounded and experimented.

To the sophomore class:

- our interest in the lives of the Saints and other useful books, especially the great poets.
- the lawn and pretty flower beds donated by the Mother's Club.

To the freshman class:

- the drinking fountain, not to be used during fourth-hour study period.
- the interest we hold in the large dictionary.

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**Editor's Note:**

*On an historic Thursday evening, June 18, 1914, Bishop Muldoon presented diplomas to the first Classical Course St. Thomas High School graduates. Over 400 persons attended by-invitation-only ceremonies at the Knights of Columbus Hall, North Main St. Thirteen commercial course students received two-year diplomas. Besides a brief address by the Bishop, music and readings by the graduates, including a violin solo by Ruth McGuire, comprised the program. Source: Register Gazette, June 19, 1914.*



***Class president Ruth Mc Guire  
performed a violin solo at commencement exercises.***

*In 1921, St. Thomas High School moved from its first building into the Coliseum on West State Street at Kent Creek, now a garage site. With the 1929 construction of two new buildings, one for boys only on Mulberry Street, the other for girls at Stanley and Elm streets, St. Thomas dropped its coed status. The opening of coed Boylan Catholic High School in 1960 contributed to the closing of St. Thomas in 1962 and Muldoon in 1970. The 1929 St. Thomas High School building now houses Seton Center. The present Crusader Clinic complex includes the Muldoon building. Source: That All May Be One – A History of Rockford Diocese.*

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## REMEMBERING THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE

by

*Mrs. Harold B. Hyde*

To prepare for a career as a teacher, I studied one year each at Parsons and Independence junior colleges, both in Kansas. My college courses offered little to help a beginning teacher. But several weeks of unsupervised practice teaching (I substituted for a high school history teacher while she recovered from a serious illness) gave me experience in lesson planning. I had also been a substitute Sunday School teacher in the children's department. The latter situation prepared me somewhat for mischief active boys could devise to try an adult's patience. I also drew upon personal recollections of attending a two-room school in Dennis, Kansas, grades one through five. Following my former teachers' methods helped me until I developed my own system.

In 1928, I accepted my first position at Pleasant Dale, a one-room school about 10 miles from Cherryvale, Kansas. I had chosen that school because of its brick construction, and its stage curtain and backdrop suitable for giving plays and programs. I loved drama and the school's equipment delighted me. The next year I accepted a contract at Breckinridge – another one-room brick school – located

between Cherryvale and Independence, Kansas.

During both years, I lived with my parents in Cherryvale, population 4500, and drove several miles to school each day. From my \$900 annual salary, I contributed at home and attended a summer session at college. My goal of attaining a degree never faltered and I would obtain my Bachelor's from Pittsburg (Kansas) State Teachers College and later an MA from Northwestern University, Evanston.

My early duties expanded beyond teaching. Since school heat was provided by a coal-burning stove, a teacher had three choices: start the fire herself, bank the fire overnight with ashes, or hire someone. I chose the latter. Then, too, I had to meet obligations expected of teachers: holding box, chili, and oyster suppers; providing leadership and programs; as well as participating in cooperative projects with ladies in the community. I bonded so well with families that when a darling first-grader died during my first Thanksgiving vacation, the heartbreak was as real as if he had been a member of my family.

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As for establishing discipline, I had been told by many people that you must paddle someone early in your first year of teaching. Only once did I spank a child. A third-grade pupil, a bright black boy, used the floor instead of asking to go to the outside facility. I lifted him off his seat and gave him about three good swats with my hand and told him to clean up the floor. (The other children reported he had done this for my predecessor and that she had wiped up the floor after him for two years.) Although I never forgot my awful feeling of regret, I smile as I think of his little boots kicking me and my determination to gain mastery of the situation. But it could have been resolved differently. Later, I found that a one-to-one conversation with a pupil was usually the best solution. Then, too, parents in rural communities cooperated readily and usually deprived the child of privileges if I informed them. This boy's parents did not lose their friendly cooperation over this incident.

Did the pupils test their young teacher? Yes. Early on, I found a small garden snake in my desk drawer. As calmly as possible, I said, "I seem to have a snake in my desk. Will the boy who put it there please put it outside?" The guilty boy removed the little creature. On another occasion, I gave a written assignment to an eighth grade girl. She worked on it –

seemingly with great interest – while I listened to recitations from a combined fourth and fifth grade geography lesson. That evening as I checked it I read excellent first pages. But the succeeding ones contained repetitions of "donkey," "donkey," "donkey." When I confronted her the next day, she admitted that she wanted to see if I truly looked at written assignments.

Three transfer students from School District 40 engaged in another sort of testing. Nearly every day one of them told me, "That's not the way we did it at '40.'" I told those children firmly that this was not "40" and they were not to mention again the way things were done at their previous school, adding, "We're going to do it 'this way' at Breckinridge." I didn't tell them that "this way" was patterned after methods used by my childhood teachers.

Although not especially athletic, I did play baseball with my pupils during recess. On one occasion, I stopped to drink water from the well. Soon I felt faint and told the children that recess would be longer than usual. I went inside and sat in a swivel desk chair. The next thing I knew, the children were standing with a bucket of water ready to throw in my face. The chair had tipped backward, and I had hit my head. I managed to stay

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the rest of the day. That experience validated my suspicion of contaminated well water. I had previously suggested that the water caused illnesses in several children, but my Board members did not concur. The next day, however, the Board had the well cleaned completely. No more such illnesses occurred.

During my year at Breckinridge, I discovered that one fourth-grade boy could not read. His friends read the lessons and he memorized the words. I might have thought that I was unqualified to remedy this situation. But I visited his parents, who lived about one-quarter mile from the school, and asked that he remain a few minutes each day. I started with "the words" and had him point these out wherever he found them. I had him "sound out" new words. Perhaps it was unorganized, but that boy had a desire to read and he learned how in one year's time. Later he went to high school and made good grades. His parents were appreciative.



*Teacher Hazel Mortimer poses with 15 pupils.*

*Photo: Courtesy, Hazel Mortimer Hyde.*

My eighth-grade pupils all passed required county examinations. Many parents attended the programs, as well as teachers from adjoining districts if scheduled for the evening. I especially emphasized speech and communication. Gradually I worked out simple parliamentary procedures for my classes so

that they participated in opening exercises. Written lessons received separate grades for writing and content.

Breckinridge students entered a county-wide art exhibit. To prepare for it, I

had returned to my junior high school art instructor for more lessons and advice. That enabled me to pass on the skill of cutting letters for posters to my students. For the exhibit we entered painting on glass. Some students displayed creative work that filled me with a sense of accomplishment. As a direct result of that effort, my hometown school hired me to teach art, reading and other subjects for the next year. I had learned a great deal while gaining experience teaching in one-room schools.

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