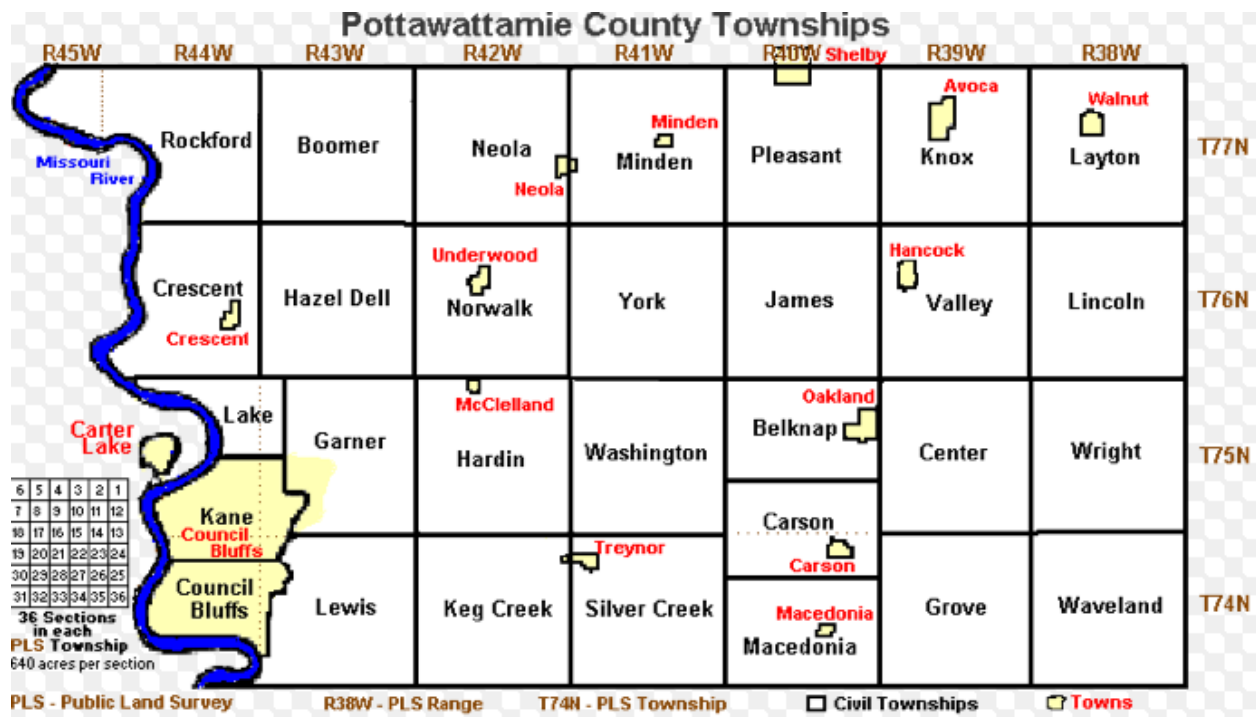


## Boomer and Hazel Dell Schools

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Herein is background for my reports on some of the rural schools of Boomer and Hazel Townships in Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

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### ***Townships and Towns in Pottawattamie County, Iowa***

Courtesy of [iagenweb.org/pottawattamie](http://iagenweb.org/pottawattamie)

As the above map shows, Boomer and Hazel Dell Townships are located north of Council Bluffs in rural northwestern Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

By 1900 Boomer and Hazel Dell Townships each had nine schools, each on an acre lot, and each roughly in the center of a two-mile by two-mile school subdistrict. All were one-room except for the Weston school, which by virtue of being just north of the village of Weston boasted two rooms.

## **My Rural School Reports Index**

I am developing a series of reports for rural schools in Boomer and Hazel Dell Townships. These reports generally cover schools that figured in my family history.

Such a report contains one or more group photographs and/or student lists for that school. If I am fortunate enough to have a student list, my report might include:

- Identifications of the students and teacher(s).
- Identifications of the students' parents.
- Brief information about the students' subsequent lives.
- Brief information about the students' families.

These reports are usually fragmentary; they capture the enrolment at that school only at a point in time.

My reports are listed below. I thank the individuals who have helped with my rural schools report project In the *Acknowledgments and Sources* section.

### **Boomer Township - see township diagram showing subdistricts on page 6**

#### **Boomer #4:**

- c. 1931, Margaret (Rommel) Bertelsen Winkler teacher (photo w/ identifications).

#### **Boomer #5, the Center School:**

- 1887-97 (list of teachers during that period).
- 1896-97, George Henry Demmon teacher (student list).
- c. 1914, Catherine Jemima (Cassidy) Fleming teacher (student list).
- c. 1933, Ruth Frazier teacher (photo w/ identifications).

#### **Boomer #7:**

- c. 1934, Florence (Larson) Larsen teacher (photo).

#### **Boomer #8, the Mackland School: (not yet available)**

- 1920s, (photos w/ identifications).
- early 1940s, (photo w/ identifications).
- early 1940s, (photo w/ identifications).
- 1946-47, Mrs. Ethel (Bertelsen) Ward teacher (photo w/ identifications).

### **Hazel Dell Township - see township diagram showing subdistricts on page 8**

#### **Hazel Dell #1, the Denmark School:**

- 1931, Florence (Larson) Larsen teacher (photo w/ identifications).

#### **Hazel Dell #2, the Parish School:**

- c. 1925, Nellie (Voss) Smith teacher (photo w/ identifications).
- 1926, Nellie (Voss) Smith teacher (three-part Parish School PTA photo of adults and

some children w/ identifications).

**Hazel Dell #3, the Oakdale School:**

- 1930-34, Ethel (Larson) Torneten teacher (photos w/ identifications)

**Hazel Dell #4, the Oamek School:**

- 1927-29, Leona (Larson) Christiansen teacher (separate photo and class list).
- 1934-35, Helen (Larson) Petersen teacher (photo w/ identifications).

**Hazel Dell #5, the Center School:**

This is the school my mother and her siblings attended.

- 1910-1914, Ada (Pagenstecher) Cahill teacher (c. 1910 photo w/ identifications; 1914 student list).
- 1929-31, Leona (Larson) Christiansen teacher (photos).

**Hazel Dell #8, the Frost/Nixon School:**

- 1925-26, Florence (Larson) Larsen teacher (photo and a separate student list).
- c. 1925-28, Florence (Larson) Larsen teacher (photo).

## **Pottawattamie County, Iowa and its Rural School System**

(Robert A. Christiansen, 3 Sep 2014)

As farms were opened in Pottawattamie County between the 1850s and 1880s, rural schools were built, generally about two miles apart, to provide an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education for farm children. In theory a six-mile by six-mile civil township could expect to have nine rural schools, each servicing a school subdistrict four square miles in size. Special circumstances such as the presence of a nearby town might alter the number of rural schools. Schools were generally on an acre lot, and when feasible were situated in the middle of the four square mile school subdistrict.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century a three-level administrative structure governed these rural schools:

- The county level consisted of a county board of education and a county superintendent of rural schools. In Pottawattamie County the school superintendent from 1927 to 1948 was Mrs. Laura Leonard. She had an office in the Pottawattamie County courthouse in Council Bluffs and I believe a staff of one, Miss Ethel Eyres, for overseeing over 200 teachers in rural one-room schools, in unincorporated villages, and in a few suburban areas near Council Bluffs.
- Each civil township was considered a school district and had a school board consisting of a president, secretary and treasurer. My great-uncle, Hans Peter Hansen, was the Hazel Dell Township school board secretary for many years. My father, Alvin Christiansen, was the secretary of the Boomer Township school board for several years in the early 1940s. I had my first experience with clerical work helping him prepare payment vouchers to send to the school board treasurer.
- At the individual school level, each school had one or two subdistrict directors. (In those days we generally used shorthand and referred to "school subdistricts" as "districts".)

Until World War II, the minimum rural teaching requirements were twofold:

- Graduation from a high school normal training program. (Summer programs were available to make up gaps in a potential teacher's training.)
- Being at least 18 years old.

However, during World War II and the resulting shortage of potential teachers, 17 year olds such, as Mildred Kadel, later Mrs. Emil Lehmkuhl of Boomer Township, were sometimes hired.

Until World War II rural schoolteachers were generally young, single females, along with a sprinkling of widows and spinsters. Especially during the Great Depression, married women were discouraged from teaching. Like my mother and her three schoolteacher sisters, teachers typically did not have automobiles and often stayed during the week with a family who lived near the school, and then walked to and from their school. Some were scandalized when my Aunt Florence, who taught rural schools for ten years, bought an automobile around 1930.

By the 1930s most of the original rural school buildings had been replaced. The white wooden replacement buildings did have central heating, namely a coal furnace in the basement. However they lacked electricity, telephones and plumbing.

The typical schoolyard contained two outhouses, a flagpole, some basic playground equipment, and a well with a hand-operated pump. However, well water was often not potable so students would carry water from a nearby farm.

As late as the 1940s, students would sometimes be kept out of school for farm work. In fact, one October during World War II the public high school in Neola even cancelled classes for a time so students could help with the corn harvest.

To graduate from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a student needed to pass a substantial examination. Back before World War I my father did not do as well as his parents expected on his 8<sup>th</sup> grade exam, so he was sent back to his one-room school the next year after the corn picking was completed. Thus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century even some bright students might spend more years in school than one might think before they finally left school for good. In the 1915 Iowa sentence many rural respondents indicated that they had ten years of one-room school education.

As farm size continued to increase during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of families living on farms decreased. Further, the United States birth rate dropped from 30.1 per thousand in 1910 to 19.4 in 1940.

Thus during the 1930s a rural school might sometimes be closed for a year or longer because the subdistrict lacked the five or six children necessary to justify hiring a teacher. The subdistrict's children would then have to make their way to a nearby school. During the height of World War II a scarcity of potential teachers led to the temporary closing of even more rural schools. Perhaps as many as forty rural schools were closed in Pottawattamie County in 1942-43.

With the coming of the Baby Boom after World War II, the number of rural children grew somewhat, even though the number of farm families continued to decrease. However, many potential teachers who had worked in defense industry during World War II were now married and having babies. Thus the teacher shortage persisted. Some one-room schools permanently closed, while others might be closed one year and open the next, depending on the number of children in the subdistrict and the availability of a teacher. The rural schoolteachers in the 1950s, unlike those a generation earlier, tended to be married, to live at home, and to drive to school.

Postwar Pottawattamie County witnessed a massive program to surface rural roads to "get the farmers out of the mud". Consequently it became feasible to transport rural children by bus to schools in nearby towns. It was also felt that closing one-room schools, where one teacher had to teach all grades, would both improve education and reduce costs.

By the end of the 1950s most rural schools in Pottawattamie County were closed and soon they began vanishing from the landscape. Most were moved, torn down, burned or bulldozed. A few were kept on site and converted into rural residences.

Some say rural schools provided a poor educational experience. However, I have only met one former rural school student who felt that his rural school education didn't adequately prepare him for high school.

## Boomer Township and its Schools

(Robert A. Christiansen, 3 Sep 2014)

Below I have diagrammed Boomer Township and its school subdistricts. Boomer Township, a six mile by six-mile civil township, corresponds to the congressional township R47W T33N. In parentheses are the Boomer school nicknames when known.

Sect. 6	Subdistrict 3 ( ) Sect. 5	Sect. 4	Subdistrict 2 ( ) Sect. 3	Sect. 2	Subdistrict 1 ( ) Sect. 1
Sect. 7	Sect. 8	Sect. 9	Sect. 10	Sect. 11	Sect. 12
Sect. 18	Subdistrict 4 ( ) Sect. 17	Sect. 16	Subdistrict 5 (Center) Sect. 15	Sect. 14	Subdistrict 6 ( ) Sect. 13
Sect. 19	Sect. 20	Sect. 21	Sect. 22	Sect. 23	Sect. 24
Sect. 30	Subdistrict 9 ( ) Sect. 29	Sect. 28	Subdistrict 8 (Mackland) Sect. 27	Sect. 26	Subdistrict 7 ( ) Sect. 25
Sect. 31	Sect. 32	Sect. 33	Sect. 34	Sect. 35	Sect. 36

**Referring to the above Boomer Township diagram:**

Most of the original rural school buildings were replaced over the years, and in some instances the school location was moved to a more-central location within the subdistrict.

- Subdistrict #1 was absorbed into the Beebeetown Consolidated School district when the Beebeetown district was formed and the Beebeetown Consolidated School building erected just over the border in Harrison County around World War I.
- The Boomer #3 school building was replaced, perhaps in the 1920s. The older building was retained for a time, and became known as the Farmer's Union Hall. It was in the Farmer's Union Hall that Boomer Township's own Music Man, William Witt met with his Farmer's Union Band. This band of teenagers and young men from the area included Victor Petersen, later my uncle. It was in the Farmer's Union Hall that the McCrickard sisters, Pearl and Mary, hosted a 19<sup>th</sup> birthday party for my mother, Leona Larson, in January 1928.
- For many years beginning in the 1870s, the subdistrict 5 school was located at the brick township hall a half-mile west of the standard location in the middle of the subdistrict. In the late 19th century a standard wood frame school was erected to the east in the middle of the subdistrict. As of 2014 the brick township hall, no longer in use, still stands.

## Hazel Dell Township and its Schools

(Robert A. Christiansen, 3 Sep 2014)

Below I have diagrammed Hazel Dell Township and its school subdistricts. Hazel Dell Township, a six mile by six-mile civil township, corresponds to the congressional township R47W T32N. In parentheses are the Hazel Dell school nicknames.

Sect. 6	Subdistrict 3 (Oakdale) Sect. 5	Sect. 4	Subdistrict 2 (Parish) Sect. 3	Sect. 2	Subdistrict 1 (Denmark) Sect. 1
Sect. 7	Sect. 8	Sect. 9	Sect. 10	Sect. 11	Sect. 12
Sect. 18	Subdistrict 4 (Oamek) Sect. 17	Sect. 16	Subdistrict 5 (Center) Sect. 15	Sect. 14	Subdistrict 6 (Tucker) Sect. 13
Sect. 19	Sect. 20	Sect. 21	Sect. 22	Sect. 23	Sect. 24
Sect. 30	Subdistrict 9 (Barritt) Sect. 29	Sect. 28	Subdistrict 8 (Nixon or Frost) Sect. 27	Sect. 26	Subdistrict 7 (Weston) (2 rooms) (closed 1957) Sect. 25
Sect. 31	Sect. 32	Sect. 33	Sect. 34	Sect. 35	Sect. 36

### Referring to the above Hazel Dell Township diagram:

- The Parish, Oamek, Tucker, Barritt and Nixon/Frost schools were named after prominent early landowners who had settled near the school sites.
- The Denmark School was so named because most of the farmers in the subdistrict were of Danish origin.
- The Weston school was a two-room school just north of the village of Weston.



## **Acknowledgments and Sources**

(Robert A. "Bob" Christiansen, 1 May '16)

Most of the family information in these reports is taken from my *St. Paul's* database of early northwestern Pottawattamie County, Iowa residents.

My reports are bound to contain errors. To report errors or provide additional information, please contact me by phone, e-mail, or surface mail. My phone and surface mail information as of May 2016:

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You can also contact me by E-Mail via the contact form on my website.

### **The following individuals provided general help for my Pottawattamie county history projects:**

- My dear cousins, Richard and Kathy Torneten, hosted me on many visits to the Council Bluffs area.
- My late aunts, Ethel (Larson) Torneten, Helen (Larson) Petersen, Thelma (Schroder) Larson Jensen, and Evelyn (Larson) Sherbondy, graciously submitted to my many questions.
- My cousins, Gladys & Derald Blois and Arlene Driver and their friends, Stella & Willie Witt, were invaluable sources of Boomer Township information.
- The wonderful volunteers at the Pottawattamie County Genealogical Society in Council Bluffs were always helpful.

### **For specific schools I had help as follows:**

#### **Boomer #4:**

- Photograph with identifications courtesy of Derald Blois.

#### **Boomer #5:**

- The teacher list from 1887 to 1897 and the 1896-1897 student list given me by Derald Blois, courtesy of Louise (Christiansen) Ward, from the collection of her late mother, Nannie (Christiansen) Christiansen.
- The student list from 1913-1914 from the collection of my late father, Alvin Christiansen.
- The student body photograph with identifications from c. 1933 probably given me by Derald Blois, perhaps from Stella (Bertelsen) Witt.

#### **Boomer #7:**

- Photograph courtesy of Virginia "Ginny" Larsen from the albums of her late mother, Florence (Larson) Larsen.

#### **Boomer #8: (not yet available)**

- 1920s photographs with identifications courtesy of Joni (Miner) Eggerss, from the collection of her late mother, Viola (Price) Miner.
- Early 1940s photographs were provided by Isobel (Smith) Taylor and Joni (Miner) Eggerss.
- 1946-47 photograph courtesy of Patricia Driscoll, with my identifications.

#### **Hazel Dell # 1:**

- Photograph with identifications courtesy of Virginia "Ginny" Larsen, from the albums of her late mother, Florence (Larson) Larsen.

#### **Hazel Dell # 2:**

- c. 1925 photograph with identifications courtesy of Virginia "Ginny" Larsen from the albums of her late mother, Florence (Larson) Larsen.
- For the 1926 Parish School PTA photograph, the late Olga (Clausen) Schroder loaned an original of this remarkable three-part photograph. Olga Schroder and the late Evelyn (Larson) Sherbondy, perhaps with the help of others, identified those pictured.

#### **Hazel Dell # 3 (1930-34):**

- The photographs, student identifications, and some biographical information, were courtesy of my late aunt, Ethel (Larson) Torneten.
- I benefited from interviews with Ethel Torneten and Donald Thompson.
- For the grandchildren of Minnie Laveck, an e-mail from their cousin, Robert Perske, contributed to their very brief biographical sketches.
- I consulted 1978 Pottawattamie County History Book *Makers of Fire* articles on John and Sophia Bracker; Hans C. Hemmingsen; Scott E. Hemmingsen; Roy and Cora Hough; and Asa and Frances (Florance) Vance.

#### **Hazel Dell # 4:**

- The 1927-29 student photograph, the separate 1927-29 student list, and miscellaneous photos are from the collection of my late mother, Leona (Larson) Christiansen.
- 1934-35 photo w/ identifications is courtesy of my cousin, Sylvia (Gidlund) Snow.

#### **Hazel Dell # 5:**

- My Denver cousins, Sylvia (Gidlund) Snow and the late Rosalie (Gidlund) Nelson, provided their mother's photo of the c. 1910 Hazel Dell #5 student body and the 1914 student list.
- Carroll Lee and Barbara (Larson) Hoyt provided some background information for the latter years of the Hazel Dell #5 school.
- The photos from 1929-31 are from the albums of my late mother, Leona (Larson) Christiansen.

#### **Hazel Dell # 6: (barely begun)**

- Alvina (Larsen) Hjortsvang provided a list of her teachers.

#### **Hazel Dell #8:**

- The list of 1925-26 students, the 1925-26 photograph and the photograph from an unspecified 1925-28 year are all courtesy of Virginia "Ginny" Larsen, from the collection of her late mother, Florence (Larsen) Larson.

**Neola #9:** Not available.

#### **I used the following printed and on-line sources:**

- Pottawattamie County plats for 1885, 1902, 1913, 1919, 1935, 1939, 1950 and 1967.  
As of 2014, the key older atlases are available on-line to anyone with a suitable browser. These atlases contain township plats showing land ownership, and with most farmstead locations marked.
  - The 1885 Allen Pottawattamie County atlas:  
*[digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlas/id/6802](http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/atlas/id/6802)*
  - The 1902 Ogle Pottawattamie County atlas:  
*[historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/9274/Pottawattamie+County+1902](http://historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/9274/Pottawattamie+County+1902)*
  - The 1913 Bee atlas, which includes some surrounding counties:  
*[historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/8559/Mills+and+Pottawattamie+Counties+1913](http://historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/8559/Mills+and+Pottawattamie+Counties+1913)*
  - The 1919 Anderson Pottawattamie County atlas:  
*[digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/atlases&CISOPTR=1060&REC=12](http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/atlases&CISOPTR=1060&REC=12)*
- Ancestry.com is my major on-line source for this and my other local and family history projects. Ancestry.com is a subscription service generally available at public libraries. I find the following components of ancestry.com of most use:
  - United States censuses through 1940 and Iowa censuses for 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915 and 1925.
  - Selected issues of the Council Bluffs Nonpareil for the 1940s and 1950s.
  - City directories.
  - Public record indices.
  - Contributed family trees.
  - The Social Security Death Index for birth and death dates for those who died in the last half century. (This index is available through other web sites than ancestry.com.)
  - A partial Iowa birth index called *Iowa, Births and Christenings Index, 1857-1947*
- Pottawattamie County marriage and cemetery books published by the Botna Valley Genealogical Society and Pottawattamie County Genealogical Society.
  - Marriage books currently go through 1940 and there is an on-line index through 1940 at *[rootsweb.ancestry.com/~iapcgs](http://rootsweb.ancestry.com/~iapcgs)*.
  - Cemetery books are incomplete because they don't include recent burials or individuals who lack gravestones.

- On-line sites that list burial information include *findagrave.com*, *billiongraves.com*, and *iowagravestones.org*. Findagrave.com entries often include additional information such as obituaries.
- Additional vital statistics indices from Pottawattamie County:
  - A 1920-1938 Pottawattamie County death certificate index from the State Historical Society of Iowa. As of 2014 go to *iowahistory.org/archives/holdings* and explore *These linked .pdf files require Adobe Acrobat Reader to be read*
- Vital statistics indices from areas near Pottawattamie County:
  - omahamarriages.wordpress.com for marriages in or near Omaha.
  - omahaobits.wordpress.com for obituaries from Omaha newspapers.
  - iagenweb.org/harrison/marriage/index.htm for Harrison County, Iowa marriages 1853-1905.