

**A History of
South Winneshiek Community School
1975-2000**

by
Russell P. Baldner
Social Studies Department
South Winneshiek High School
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In 1971 the South Winneshiek Community School District was forced to implement a unique scheduling arrangement called the split-shift due to an acute lack of facilities resulting from the forced closing of rented junior high space that spring. Senior high classes ran from 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the high school, and junior high classes met from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. in the same space. It was a busy place! The district operated on the split shift for four years from 1971 to 1975.

A bond issue for a new high school midway between Calmar and Ossian to relieve the stressed conditions failed. However, with the passage of a successful second bond issue in 1973 and subsequent completion of a new junior high school in Ossian in 1975 the district was once again able to assume a more normal arrangement. The high school at Calmar resumed a regular schedule in the fall of 1975 and accommodated grades 10-12 while the new junior high had grades 7-9. In addition, the old 1897 Ossian elementary building was still in use at that time prior to its subsequent removal in 1979. Similarly, the 1902 Spillville public school was still standing until its dismantling in 1987. While most of South Winneshiek's elementary classes met in Ossian, additional kindergartens were located in Calmar as well as Spillville, the latter site also serving a few lower elementary grade sections for a time.

District enrollment in 1975 was 920 with Loren Englund serving as superintendent, a position he had held since 1970. Long-time local educator Viola Ludwig was elementary principal, and Jerry Adrian headed the junior high. High school principal, also since 1970, was K. Lee Arrowsmith. At peak enrollment classes at South Winneshiek High School numbered 120+ students in the early and mid-1970s, with the school yearbook still featuring 125 senior photographs in 1977. But that situation would soon change!

In the later 1970s several administrative changes followed in quick succession. High School Principal K. Lee Arrowsmith left the district in 1977. The new principal was Jon David Trotter. Superintendent Loren Englund resigned his position in 1978 during a time of severely strained relations between him and the board of education. Junior High Principal Jerry Adrian also left South Winneshiek that year. Succeeding to their respective positions in 1978 were Russell Loven as superintendent and Clark Goltz as principal. In 1979 Elementary Principal Viola Ludwig retired after many years of guidance and dedicated service to the district. When school began the following fall the Ossian center had become a combined elementary-middle school for grades K-5 and 6-8 respectively with one principal, Goltz. Meanwhile, the ninth grade and several

South Winneshiek was established in 1958.

former junior high faculty came to the Calmar center, and South Winneshiek High School now became a four-year institution, an arrangement which has continued to this day.

By the early 1980s demographic changes in the rural landscape began to be felt throughout the country, and South Winneshiek was no exception. Enrollments dropped. Dramatically! From the 1970s peak of nearly 130 students per class, enrollments fell to around 75-80 by the early 1980s and subsequently dropped even further. By the late 1980s and early 1990s classes commonly numbered only in the sixties and seventies. In a few instances enrollments even dipped into the upper fifties. Since school budgets are largely based on student numbers, there were obvious financial and staffing repercussions for the district. Instead of six sections of a required class, for example, only three were now necessary. Nevertheless, the district did itself proud. In 1986-1987 South Winneshiek High School received the National Excellence in Education Award. In addition, both the elementary-middle school and the high school were recipients of the State of Iowa Fine Award.

The decade closed in a unique manner at South Winneshiek High School. In 1989 David Trotter resigned his position as high school principal, but no permanent replacement was found for the 1989-1990 school year. In the interim Charles Ehler, a faculty member at the high school, served as assistant principal. Thanks to his efforts and those of a veteran teaching and support staff the year proceeded in relatively normal fashion. In 1990 Clark Goltz left South Winneshiek Elementary-Middle School. William Ross succeeded him but left after one year. Charles Ehler subsequently assumed the elementary-middle school principalship in 1991, a position which he holds at present. David Ziesmer became senior high principal in 1990, a position he held for five years until 1995.

In retrospect it seems as if the Calmar/South Winneshiek School District historically has taken on major building projects in Calmar itself about every thirty years or so. In 1898 the community built a large two story wood frame Calmar Public School on the very same site where the present older portion of the high school is now located. In 1908 that building housed the first four year high school. A fine photograph of that building is on page 72 of the centennial book Calmar...Cradled by the Gods. The bell tower and entrance face north; the home to the left at the corner of Clay and Washington streets still stands.

In 1936 Calmar built a new brick grade and high school building on the site of the old facility. Cost was \$83,000. That building is the eastern old portion of the present high school. In 1960-1961 that facility gained the addition of a new auditorium and gymnasium on the west side of the campus with additional classrooms underneath. A glass breezeway connected the two units.

The question of physical facilities has often been a challenge facing South Winneshiek during the last three decades. Most recently the district proposed a large new high school project on the west edge of Calmar in 1989, but the bond issue failed.

However, further discussion and study resulted in a second more modest \$2,520,000 proposal which was put to a vote of the district in 1990, and it carried. Thus, 1991-1992 was another building year, and much needed additions and improvements were made at both the Ossian and Calmar centers. The elementary-middle school gained a south wing of new classrooms and a gym. The high school project consisted of two major parts. A two story addition located in the old breezeway area between the auditorium and the older portion of the high school added three new classrooms, an elevator, new offices for principal, guidance, conference, nurse, and two secretaries, and a remodeled staff work room with adjoining restrooms. A second two story addition on the north side of the gymnasium included several new district administrative offices, a new classroom, and additional athletic facilities. Temporary portable classroom buildings which had become seemingly permanent fixtures to the high school campus were also finally removed. Thus, by the 1990s South Winneshiek had successfully met its adequate buildings needs. Interestingly, in 1992 during construction of the new high school addition one could see, in the excavations adjacent to the driveway between the old portion of the present building and the gymnasium, some previous stone foundation work. Presumably, this was a portion of the old 1898 school building.

Seventeen-year veteran Superintendent Russell Loven and High School Principal David Ziesmer both resigned in 1995 in the midst of controversy and sharp differences between the superintendent and board of education. Wayne Severtson assumed the superintendency in 1995, a position he holds at present. Clarian Wilder, long-time district staff person, was high school principal in 1995-1996. She was succeeded by Jack Grampovnik who has been high school principal since 1996.

During the last decade or so there has been a rather high rate of administrative turnover at the high school, at one point five principals in less than ten years. Standing in contrast to, and compensating in part for, that considerable change of personnel has been the stability of the veteran secondary teaching staff, many of whom have thirty years of experience, most of that at South Winneshiek. That corps of teachers shares a three-decade set of common experiences that have resulted in this group becoming its own sort of family. However, and for the same reasons as above, a large high school faculty turnover is accordingly projected for the not so distant future as that cadre of boomers begins to retire, at least from South Winneshiek High School. By the end of the next decade it's going to look very different around here!

Over the years student enrollment has been a persistent theme at South Winneshiek due, in part, to the district's large local private school element. At the elementary level large numbers of students attend classes at several parochial centers. As a result South Winneshiek's total enrollment has been considerably smaller than it would be otherwise. Since, once again, school budgets are largely the function of student numbers, the smaller enrollment totals have considerable effect on the financial resources and staffing and program needs and capabilities of the district. In addition, the high school is, as a result of this elementary enrollment loss, proportionately larger and the elementary-middle school smaller than they ordinarily would be. Since actual high school per pupil costs are greater than those at the elementary level, this

relatively disproportionate distribution of student population works additionally to South Winneshiek's financial disadvantage.

A recent case in point concerns kindergarten. Traditionally, those youngsters all began their formal education in the public school system. Recently, however, with the advent of parochial kindergartens the district is no longer able to count these students in its totals. The result: an enrollment drop from what student numbers might have been, and, secondly, a disproportionately ever-larger high school. While staff reductions may compensate wholly or partly for losses in instances such as these, small or declining enrollments often pose financial and program repercussions not easily solved by such methods. In this regard South Winneshiek's administrative staff has not lacked for challenges.

The 1990s witnessed significant changes at South Winneshiek High School. We began to use the new addition facilities in the fall of 1992. Computers started to become commonplace about the same time. Now there is one in every room. A few years later the internet and ever increasing additions of technology opened up whole new worlds of possibilities. Computer literacy has become standard. During the 1990s high school class sizes eventually increased somewhat again and have recently stabilized at about 70-85 students per grade. There are about two dozen teaching faculty at the high school and another dozen support staff as well as the district administrative personnel. South Winneshiek has a 1999-2000 budget of approximately six million dollars. And in recent years the financial health of the district has greatly improved. Total K-12 enrollment for 1999-2000 is 675 students. Presently there are 305 high school students consisting of 76 seniors, 84 juniors, 72 sophomores, and 73 freshmen.

Over the years the people of this community have generously supported the school with their time and treasure. Volunteerism and attendance at the many school functions and parent-teacher conferences has consistently been high and speaks well of the positive parental and district support our students and school enjoy. South Winneshiek students do well, both during their years here and out in the world after graduation. A high percentage successfully pursue post-secondary education of some type. We should all feel good about that. Among those to whom we all owe a large measure of appreciation are the members, both past and present, of the South Winneshiek Board of Education. Their able efforts have been and continue to be an investment in the strengthening of our community and the future of our world. Presently serving in that capacity are President Roger Koenig, John Berger, Joe Holthaus, Allan Schmitt and Marty Tieskoetter. It is not inappropriate to speak a word of thanks when next we see them.

Join with us as we look forward to the next 25 years!