

The Winkler School District

The Winkler School District #747 was formed on April 22, 1893 with an enrolment that fall of 62 pupils with Mr. Cornelius B. Fast as the first teacher. A year or two prior to that there were some private schools held where the main objective was to teach religious instruction and the three Rs.

The first one room public school building in Winkler was erected in 1893 on the corner of Mountain and Sixth. By the following year there were 106 pupils and a second teacher was hired. In 1899 the enrolment rose to 131 and a two storey structure was added to the first building. This was later sold to Gerhard Hildebrand near Schanzenfeld and stands there to this day, occupied by his grandchildren.

By 1912, with 150 children enrolled, a new brick building was constructed on the same lot. The problem of enough room for the growing school population continued and in the summer of 1929 a "new four-roomed school building of framed construction" was built. The brick building was used exclusively for high school classes from 1949-1954. In 1948, after the high school was classified as a collegiate department, since 1929, four teachers in the upper grades were employed, raising the status to that of a Collegiate institute. In 1954, the brick school was demolished and a new 14-room school and auditorium was built to accommodate the increased school population which had risen to 552 by then.

During these early years country schools dotted the countryside, such as the Burwalde School #529 north-west of Winkler in 1888 and the Birkenhead School south-east of town in 1921. But by 1967 many schools had a dwindling school population and the Garden Valley School Division was formed with children being bussed in from their farm homes to the town schools. As the country schools closed the school buildings were either moved away, demolished or used for other purposes.

In 2010 the official school enrolment in the nine schools which make up the GVS division, was 4,304 with 297 teachers plus numerous Educational Assistants. The need for a bigger high school is urgent. Parents have expressed their concerns over the extreme crowding issues at Garden Valley Collegiate, which has 1,200 students crammed into a facility with a basic infrastructure for closer to 750, not including the 20 portable classrooms on-site. A new high school, the Northlands Parkway Collegiate, is being planned for 2013 to be built north of highway 14. When it does get built, the 112,400 sq. ft. school will include 2,400 sq. ft. of dedicated choral space.