

JULY • AUGUST • SEPTEMBER 2019

WESTON HISTORICAL MUSEUM, 601 MAIN STREET, HISTORIC WESTON, MISSOURI 816-386-2977

### Annual Meeting Set For Nov. 10th

The Annual Membership meeting will be held November 10 at Eventful at Locust Grove, starting at 6:00 pm with hors d'oeuvres. The business portion of the evening will follow at 6:30 pm.

Weston Museum vice president Clay Bauske will present a program titled "Reimagining the Truman Library Museum."

Bauske, who is museum curator at Truman Library will present a PowerPoint program and video presentation about the \$22 million project now underway to completely recreate the Truman Library's museum with all new exhibits, visitor amenities and program spaces.

His program will summarize the 4-year project from conceptual plans to schematic design, design development, construction and exhibit installation.

The entire project is funded by the Truman Library's private support foundation the Truman Library Institute. Featured in the program will be a video "fly-through" that takes viewers through the entire reimagined museum spaces.

Cost for the evening is \$20 per person. Reservations are requested by November 6th and may be sent to the Museum at P.O. Box 266, Weston, MO 64098.

#### Carl's Counch

by Board President Carl Felling

The fall is fast approaching and that means many exciting things will be happening in Weston such as festivals, parades and car shows. The Museum will be available during all these events and it will a great time to show people visiting Weston our rich history.

Remodeling the Museum restroom has been completed, made possible by a grant from the Platte County Parks and Recreation Department. The Museum is very appreciative of the support it has received from the Parks and Recreation Department. This project has greatly enhanced our facility for visitors.

Also in this issue is an article by Bill and Carla Sutton highlighting their work on a monument honoring the African Americans slaves and those freed who were buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery. Please read it and I hope you will agree this is an outstanding and compassionate project by the Suttons that would be worthy of everyone's support. Note that the project is still accepting contributions.

The Museum Volunteers look forward to seeing you at the Museum.

# African-American Monument Planned for Laurel Hill Cemetery by William (Bill) & Co

A new monument is being prepared for Laurel Hill Cemetery. With the approval of the Cemetery Board, the monument is being created and designed to honor the African American slaves and freed slaves who were buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery, formerly City Cemetery, with nothing more than possibly a blanket thrown around them and a personal item.

Many of those souls were active in the early days of Weston when Weston was a busy river port. These stalwart men and women helped build homes, churches, roads and schools. They worked alongside the farmers and helped produce crops of hemp and tobacco that were the foundation of early Weston wealth. The dead were brought

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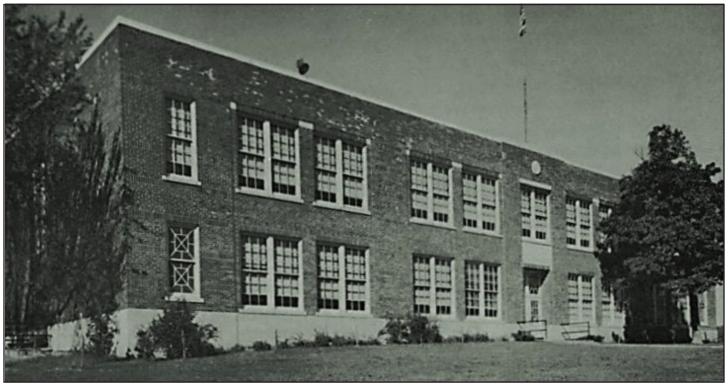
by William (Bill) & Carla Sutton, Museum Members



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# **Beginning of 1953 School Year Interrupted by Fire & Water**

by Ruth Mary Clemens



West Platte R-2 High School's current building started with this two-floor structure, circa 1936.

Some may not remember but the West Platte School campus in Weston was not always as sprawled out as it is currently. At one time all twelve grades were held inside the two-story brick edifice which today can be found encased in the additions that have occurred over the years.

Back in 1953 you walked up concrete stairs, along the sidewalk to the two steps that led up to the large double doors. When you entered those doors, you were first aware of how cool the terrazzo floors and walls made the old building feel. Then your eye was drawn down the short wide hallway that would end in a T, going north and south. At the end of the short hall was the trophy case, gleaming with gold and silver trophies from all the years prior. A turn to the left put you in the center hallway. On the left side was the door to the principal's office and to the right was the south entrance to the gymnasium. There was also an entrance to the north that led you into the gym/ auditorium.

It was not the bright, well-lit gyms we are used to today. The court ran parallel to the main hall and beside the court on one side was an ascending wall of permanent, all wood bleachers. Opposite the seats was the stage with its heavy red curtains. Above the seating area were three windows which allowed stage lights to be worked from

the upper hallway. On either end, way up high were some windows to allow daylight to filter in. This was a WPA project, which started in 1936, opened officially in the fall off 1937. Most of the schools in the vicinity looked a lot alike in those days, because they were WPA projects.

Grade school class rooms were on the first floor, along with the Principal's office, Home Economics, the Band and gym. High school classes were on the second floor. There was no Junior High in those days. Across from the south entrance to the gym was the third-grade class room, in 1953. In 1951 it had been the first-grade class. Up the hall, across from north entrance, were the doors leading to the 7th and 8th grade classes. In 1953, the 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students went to school in what was originally the Presbyterian Manse at the corner of Ashley and Gay Street. It would later become the Superintendent's office.

It was into that setting that the students of Weston entered in September 1953, all fresh faced and ready for a new school year. Well as much as most students could be eager to see the end of their summer vacation. When the bell rang that afternoon they rushed out pellmell, headed for school buses and their homes in town. It was a beautiful fall day, the hint of leaves turning, still

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#### **Ben Holladay of Platte County**

## Stagecoach King Became Missouri's First Millionaire

This article, by Bartlett Boder, is from the Summer of 1952 issue of Museum Graphic (Vol. 4, No. 3), found in the Platte County section of the Missouri Valley Collection, KC, Mo., Public Library. It was reprinted in the September - December issue of "Platte County Missouri Historical & Genealogical Society BULLETIN". With permission, we reprint it today.

Ben Holladay of Weston, Platte County, Missouri, came to Saint Joseph, Missouri, in 1858 and built the Pike's Peak stables, where two years later the speedy horses for the Pony Express were to be sheltered. The stables still stand, though altered. They were built for Holladay's freighting mules and stagecoach horses bound for Pike's Peak, the name for all of Colorado in those days. In 1860, Russell, Majors and Waddell borrowed the stables for their Pony Express venture. Holladay, already wealthy, took the promissory notes of their firm, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Co.

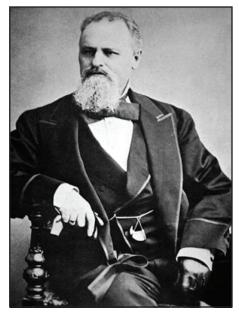
Platte County, Missouri was the home of Ben Holladay (shown below),

though he was born in Kentucky. The Platte Purchase took place at Leavenworth in 1836. Ben Holladay's mother's brother, General Andrew S. Hughes of Liberty, and Blacksnake Hills, Missouri, promoted the purchase and signed as one of the witnesses of Gen. William Clark's signature for the government, and to the marks of the chiefs of the Iowa, Sax & Fox Indians. At that time the rich and virgin northwest Missouri country was opened for white settlement, and Platte County became the southern tip of the six counties formed from it, with Buchanan County and St. Joseph as the next north. Being additions to Missouri, a slave state, slave owners settled there.

Weston was Platte County's river port. The inconstant river first enriched the proud hill town with steamboat commerce, then fell in love with Kansas across the valley. Before that happened Weston was offered the Hannibal railroad. Weston didn't want it. It would bring in "northerners and other riff-raff." Let St. Joe, thirty miles up north, have it!

The Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad, the first in history to reach the southbound Missouri River, was not regretted by Weston. St. Joseph got the "cars" and Platte County kept its own soul and its cultural aristocracy. As for the river, Weston hasn't lost it for keeps, though now its channel is away three miles to the west. The river will be back! What are two or three land miles, or a few centuries, to the longest river in the world?

When Russell, Majors and Waddell failed in business



in 1861-62, Ben Holladay recovered the use of the Pony Express stables, still on land leased from John Patee, the owner of the palatial Patee House, two blocks east of the stables. Sir Richard Burton, the world traveler, who stayed there in 1860, spoke of the Patee House as the Fifth Avenue Hotel of St. Joe. Luxury-loving Ben Holladay knew it well.

The operators of the Pony Express out of St. Joseph had lost severely (\$75,000) at the hands of the Pah-Ute Indians in Nevada in the spring of 1860. Indian trouble on a vaster scale plagued Ben Holladay's overland stagecoaches from 1862 through 1864. Troops had been withdrawn from Camp Floyd in Utah where General Albert Sidney

Johnson had left to join the Confederate forces, to lose his life at Shiloh battle. Such powerful tribes as the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, as well as the Shoshones of Lewis and William Clark fame took to the warpath. Only Ben Holladay's great wealth, and his pride and courage and willingness to take losses enabled his stagecoach lines operating westward out of St. Joseph and Atchison to remain in operation.

Ben Holladay owned slaves, as did General James Craig of St. Joseph, but Missouri had not voted for secession in November 1860, casting her electoral votes for compromising Illinois' Stephen A. Douglas, instead of John C. Breckenridge, the candidate of the radical slave states. So it came about that James Craig, slave-owning Democrat, as a brigadier-general, and using a sprinkling of federal troops, was assigned the job of protecting the stagecoach and freighting lines of another slave owner, Ben Holladay. Elsie, their slave, stayed with the James Craig's for years after the Civil War and is buried with the St. Joseph Craig family at Mt. Mora cemetery. Lila, a slave owned by Nathalie Ann Calvert when she married Ben Holladay in 1849 likewise stayed with them till her death, many years after emancipation.

Out of St. Joseph and Atchison, Holladay's stagecoaches and wagon freighting trains went to Maryville, Kansas, thence to Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and on to Colorado Territory and Salt Lake City, where Holladay was a great

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## Stagecoach King ...

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favorite of the Mormons whom he had befriended as a soldier in the Mormon War in Missouri in 1838. That connection aided him in becoming Missouri's first millionaire, for his stagecoach and freighting business with Utah and Salt Lake City became very large. It was Holladay's Mexican War service in 1846 with Col. A.W. Doniphan's regiment of Missourians which gave him freighting experience of profit to him later, and it taught him how to defend wagon trains which he put to use in the years 1862-64. It also rendered him absolutely fearless under fire, and hardened him for the life on the plains.

Though in 1862 Brigadier General James Craig of St. Joseph had the job of protecting the Holladay lines as far west as Salt Lake, due to the desperate fighting in Dixie of War Between the States, few soldiers could be spared to him by the government. At that time, Gen. Craig tried to protect 400 miles of Holladay's route with only 360 soldiers, and according to the historian J.V. Frederick, the daily mail between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City remained closed. Holladay then joined Gen. Craig for an inspection of his route west of Laramie. They found all stations had been destroyed by the Indians. Holladay then selected the more southerly Cherokee route away from the northern Indian Tribes. This move alone cost him a fortune.

Luxurious Concord coaches built in New Hampshire at first in use by Holladay were supplanted and superseded by "stages" built by him in Atchison which carried nine passengers . . . . Holladay also used the largest Conestoga freight wagons, "prairie schooners," capable of carrying seven tons of merchandise. His feed bill for horses and mules ran to nearly seven figures annually . . . . At the peak of these operations Holladay operated stage lines of about 5,000 miles, divided into several divisions, for which he received \$1,000,000 a year for carrying government mail, plus an \$800,000 bonus for extra efficiency. A division went to the gold fields of Montana and to Oregon (where so many Missourians had preceded him on the Oregon Trail) and his main route went to Salt Lake City, divided into two divisions . . .

On these lines gold and treasure were transported by the U.S. Express Company and their messengers. Then Holladay decided to do his own express business. This involved banking and mercantile business in Salt Lake and other places; for, as with Wells Fargo of San Francisco, banking and express business naturally merged. In 1866 he sold his stage and freighting business to Wells Fargo for \$1,800,000, less than he might have received a few months earlier as railroad competition was already in the offing.

Besides this sum Holladay had much other wealth,



plus his million dollar Ophir Castle farm in Westchester County, New York, a thousand acres landmark for 50 miles, named for his Ophir silver mine in Nevada; also his brownstone mansion in New York City and a luxurious house in Washington. There President Lincoln had promised him the government would make good the losses Holladay was suffering from Indian raids out west.

Mrs. Maude Barton Poss of Weston, Mo., has just furnished us with much historical material which heretofore she had denied to writers and historians. She is grandniece by marriage and grandniece by blood of Ben Holladay. For he and his brother David, married the Calvert sisters of Weston, Nathalie Ann and Phena. Mrs. Poss is the granddaughter of David Holladay.

Mrs. Poss describes Ben Holladay as a born diplomat and fascinating in conversation . . . . He was tall and from his youth had a black beard. His vitality permitted the most fatiguing journeys. On one occasion he rode in his luxurious Concord stagecoach eastward from California, allowing himself hardly any stops for rest and earned for himself the nickname, the "king of hurry."

When scarcely 21 he had eloped with red-harried "Notley" Ann, because the Calverts had feared he was too much of a high-stepper. It was Christmas time and she was at Pleasant Ridge Academy in Weston. He rode out, placed her behind him on his horse and rode to her sister's home where R.M. Johnson, a magistrate, performed the ceremony. Her children were mostly born in Weston, for wherever "Notley Ann" was, she returned to Weston because of a colored mammy who she trusted.

Editor's Note: The WestonMo.com website claims Holladay also built the International Hotel, which later became the site of the Weston Baptist Church and now houses the Weston Historical Museum. In 1856 Ben and his brother, David, founded the Holladay Distillery on the outskirts of Weston. They built above a limestone spring and used grain grown on area farms to make mash from which they distilled whiskey. Now known as McCormick Distillery, the property remained in the Holladay family until 1894.

## WESTON HISTORICAL MUSEUM

# **Annual Meeting**

Sunday, November 10th Social Hour 6:00 pm \* Meeting 6:30 pm





25180 County Rd JJ - Weston, Mo.



# **The Program**

Clay Bauske
Reimagining the Truman
Library Museum

Reservations are \$20 per person. Cash Bar & Hors d'oeurves.

Deadline for reservations is November 6th.

#### RESERVATION FORM

Please mail this form to: Weston Historical Museum, P.O. Box 266, Weston, MO 64098

Name	
Telephone	_
Number of Reservations	Amount Enclosed

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#### **African-American Monument...**

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here from all around the area as Laurel Hill was the only cemetery for miles around that would allow a place for them.

There are more than 400 of these graves in Laurel Hill and they are well documented in a book by former Museum Curator, Carolyn A. Bless Larsen, entitled, "We, Too, Lived."

In addition, Museum member Ann Saugstad, who served the museum many years as a Director, Board Member and volunteer, meticulously photographed and documented every grave in the cemetery. Assisted by volunteer Susan Grinlinton and relying on the information in Carolyn's book and on Ann's photo documentation, Bill & Carla Sutton, the principal individuals engaged in working on the monument project, were able to determine who was buried that did not have a grave marker. They believe, and the Laurel Hill Cemetery Board agrees, it is time for our community to honor those African American pioneers, both slave and freed buried in Laurel Hill.

We are not alone in wanting to recognize this part of



our history. Other communities around the country are beginning to honor the contributions of their early African American population. In Gainesville, Georgia the "Athens Banner-Herald" on October 23, 2017 reported that a new seven foot black granite monument has been erected to remember the 1,146 anonymous African American souls buried there who once lived and worked in their town. In Atlanta, Georgia there is an effort currently being made to fund and complete a \$300,000 restoration of the African American burial grounds located in the city's first cemetery as reported by Cox Media Group February 3, 2017. And closer to home in Parkville, Missouri, a team of geologists, historians and archivists are working to locate 100 unmarked graves in Old Parkville Cemetery because they believe that locating and marking these African American graves is important to preserving the history of Parkville as reported by "The Landmark" May 17, 2017.

Those who are alive today cannot be blamed for what

happened in the past, but it is time now to recognize and bring attention to those who have gone unnoticed.

The proposed monument will cost \$9,000 and consist of a jet black polished stone 72" wide x 6" thick x 48" tall. More than 400 names will be etched in letters one-half inch tall on the front of the slanted style stone. It will sit on a light gray sub base measuring 78" long x 12"wide x 6" thick. The base will be 84" long x 14" high x 8" thick.

Etched on the front of the stone, along with their names, will be this short story:

#### In Memory of Those African Americans, Both Slave and Freed, Buried Here With No Markers

Down the hill from this spot lay the remains of more than 400 African Americas who once lived. They toiled in the fields where our hemp and tobacco were grown, made bricks of horsehair and clay for Weston's buildings, labored in our commercial businesses and worked long hours as domestic servants in our homes. Because this was the only cemetery for miles around that would accept their remains, Laurel Hill became the final resting place for many of those from other communities.

In this area known historically as "Little Dixie", funerals for slave and freed black Americans were often held at night when the workday was over. Bodies were placed in shallow graves with just a few personal items and no marker.

With this granite monument we now permanently embrace these citizens as our own; their names forever immortalized. With it we commemorate African American contributions to Weston, first in slavery and later in freedom.

If any names were missed we also intend this marker to be for them.

What stage is the project in now? Bill and Carla and Laurel Hill Cemetery Board are very thankful that due to the efforts and generosity of many businesses, organizations and individuals, in and around Weston, the fund raising has been very successful. We have now raised the initial dollar amount required to buy the monument, have it etched and place it on its foundation. We are still in need of fundraising to provide the resources for the care of that monument as this will be an on-going need. So, for those who would like to be involved, we are certainly still accepting contributions to the 'We, Too, Lived' memorial at Laurel Hill, and will for some time.

The granite stone has been ordered. When it arrives, the final location will be determined, the design completed and etched. Then, with the cooperation of Mother Nature a stone raising will be planned before the ground freezes.

Those who are interested in donating can visit the Facebook page for more information: We, Too, Lived - Weston's African American Memorial.

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#### School Fire . . .

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warm, though cooling off in the evenings. As there was no daylight savings in 1953, the evening darkness fell about the same time most families had settled down to dinner. Across the valley, shortly after 8 p.m. there suddenly arose the wail of the City's noon whistle/fire siren. It blared into the homes of mothers and fathers, grandparents, and teachers, school administrators and city businessmen. And it meant there was an urgent need for the volunteers to man their stations and put out a fire.

Not just any fire this time. No, the school was on fire. The news rippled through town as fast as the summer breeze. Children stopped playing and stood on porches and sidewalks to see if they could see the blaze. Fathers took off to assist the fire fighters and to help remove records from the principal's office as quickly as possible. Mothers held their youngest close and worried for everyone's safety. And in the school the blaze followed the heavy drapes up the wall, traveling along the gym ceiling, dropping to the wooden floors and seats below.

According to *The Weston Chronicle* of September 4, 1953: The dense smoke and acrid fumes prevented firemen from entering the building. The Fort Leavenworth Fire Department was called but in the meantime Weston men braved the fumes and heat, three of them were overcome by the fumes.

Firemen pulled heavy hoses along the sidewalk and down the halls and aimed the stream at the roaring fire. And they persevered. Heavy smoke filled the entire building and the water needed to stop the blaze poured into the rooms across from the gym. In the upper hall, the projection windows had been smashed out to allow water to be sprayed on the ceiling. The gymnasium/auditorium was a complete loss and there was some fire damage to rooms and closets adjacent to the area.

Firemen surmised the fire had started on the stage, where they believed the stage lights had been accidentally left on, but lowered into their permanent storage positions at the front of the stage. They smoldered there for a while but when the fire burst through the coverings, they hit the drapes which were not fire retardant and the blaze grew. The Home Ec. department was located next to the gymnasium but suffered little damage. However, the Band Uniforms were being stored on hangers on the stage and they were consumed by flames. The Band Room was not touched. Gaining headway, the fire broke through the ceiling and headed toward the front of the second floor, building up terrific heat and causing severe smoke and water damage as pipes burst from the heat. But the school was saved. Said the Chronicle: "The whole building is blackened with smoke, will have to be done over and only time will tell what the water, inches deep has done to the floor."

In the light of day, it could be seen that between water, fire and smoke there would be no use of the building for a while. Children were either very worried or somewhat pleased at the prospect of no school. State officials weren't pleased, school administrators and school board weren't pleased, and parents were definitely not pleased. Weston is nothing if not a resourceful town so they knew if they put their minds to it they could come up with a plan that was better than busing all the students to a different district. And the ministers of the town had the answer. The children went to school in the churches! Yes, the basements, church classrooms and choir areas were turned into makeshift classrooms. At recess the children played in neighboring yards and the year that had just started but stopped suddenly, advanced without a hitch, at least to the students.

Grades 1 and 2 were not affected. Grades 3, 4, 7 and 8 held classes in the Christian Church at the corner of Washington and Spring Streets. The youngest had recess in the church and parsonage yard. The oldest played in the large front yard of the Charles Bless home. Grades 5 & 6 were ensconced in the Methodist Church on Main Street and could play in the yards surrounding the church. Every effort was made to make the transitions as seamless as possible.

Some of the High School classes were held in the Baptist Church on Main Street (now The Weston Historical Museum) and thanks to the hard efforts of the local citizens who had pitched in and started cleaning the walls and floors, some of the HS classes were held in a few of the first floor classrooms and even in the hallway. By October of that year the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades were able to return to classes and by November all students were back in the building. Fresh paint made the halls gleam, everything had been washed and sprayed and really looked quite nice. But the smell of smoke lingered in the building. For years the terrazzo walls and floors managed to keep some of that scent trapped in its porous material and if the school had been closed a short time it was always strongest.

While it was true that all the students were back, not all of the work was completely finished. In the third-grade classroom, one of the worst for water damage, the students sat at desks that teetered because of the warped flooring. It was okay with the kids because the chairs teetered too, and they had great fun, rocking their furniture back and forth. Mrs. Jerry Moore, teacher of that class spent most of the year asking the children to sit up straight and STILL. She solved the problem partially by taking the desks out of the usual neat rows and settling them on the smoothest spot she could find. It gave a distinctively haphazard

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WESTON HISTORICAL MUSEUM P.O. Box 266 • 601 Main Street Weston, MO 64098

"History is not a burden on the memory but an illumination of the soul."

~ Lord John Dalberg-Acton



### School Fire . . .

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appearance to the room but it worked.

By the end of the summer of 1954 all repairs, including a brand-new gymnasium, had been completed and the school was completely ready for the new year.

As a side note, Col. Perry, the Warden of the Fort Leavenworth Fire Department, expressed admiration for the locals. "Weston should be highly commended and congratulated on such a group of firefighters. I do not understand how they coped with the situation as well as they did and they did a splendid job."

## **Help Wanted**

With all the retirements, resignations and deaths this past year or so, volunteers helping with upkeep of files and data entry has fallen to a serious low.

If you have a Monday morning to spare, the Museum would greatly appreciate your time. Besides the displays, we have lots of paperwork that needs to be done.

Volunteers meet each Monday from 9 to 12 at the Museum. Give us a call for more information. Our number is 816-386-2977. Thanks for your consideration.

## Did You Know ...

... that if it wasn't for television the fire that destroyed part of Weston's school building might have been even worse? Mr. and Mrs. Jim Harding, whose home was in a direct line with the auditorium, were watching TV. A mirror over the set showed the reflection of the fire as the flames burst through the stage windows. They promptly called the fire department, which was a tremendous help in controlling further damage.

. . . that after the fire at Weston's School building in 1953, patrons, parents, students and teachers pitched into clean up the mess? Teachers helping: Mr. Ogilive, Mr. Eskridge, Mr. Ell-wood, Mr. Sievers, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Rees, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Keen, Mrs. Page, Mrs. Greenwood, Mrs. Malia, Mrs. Hagan, Mrs. Lamar, Mrs. Kirk, Mrs. Osthoff, Miss Burns, Mrs. Platz, Mrs. Cox and Mr. Pinner.

. . . that Iatan once had a high school? It was a twoyear school for high school student and stared in 1929. One of the first teachers there was Miss Eleanore Renz. Though the school had long ceased to exist, the school building was sold to Martin Turner in June of 1955 for the sum of \$1,075.

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