

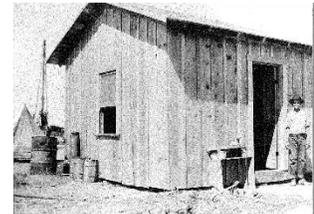
History of the Nadaburg School House

Historical narrative provided by Ms. Ellen (Griffin) Simmons, Sparks NV



Undated photo of William H. Griffin

William Hovey Griffin, my father, and the founder of the present town of Wittmann, was born in Texas in 1875 and died in Peoria Arizona in 1956. He was the father of 11 children. The railroad siding was named Nadaburg years prior to the opening of this area for homesteading. The Department of Interior Act of December 29, 1916 formally opened this Arizona land to homesteading for the purpose of raising stock. W.H. Griffin filed his homestead petition in September of 1920. The highway was not paved at this time. He drilled a well and built a small board and batten house near the well. This was the first school house. Four older Griffin boys camped beside the school and during the day eight or nine other pupils came in from other homesteads to attend school. Miss Helen Carpenter was the first teacher in that original school house.



Old shack used as first school

In 1920, W.H. Griffin plotted out the town site on his 1/6 section of land and donated a block of ground to the Maricopa County School District. Early in 1921, the School District built a permanent structure which, in the early days was painted white. It is now this little red school house, being used currently as the Nadaburg Unified School District Governing Board's Boardroom.



In the early 1920s, my father did a lot of surveying and placing of benchmarks for the U.S. Geological Survey Department. He then moved the rest of his family and household and two cows from Glendale to Nadaburg, by train. At this time, there were four buildings in the town site. The town site was formally surveyed and recorded by Robert Williams for W.H. Griffin in July 1924. Many of the town streets bear Griffin family names, i.e. Hovey, Myers.

In 1926, lots and acreage were given to Joseph Wittmann in payment for his promise to bring irrigation water to the town of Nadaburg. The plan was for a dam on the Hassayampa River. In the mid 1930s, the town name was changed in his honor to Wittmann. Neither the water, nor the dam ever came. About 1946 a group of residents sued for return of their property and eventually recovered about half of it. The highway was first paved in 1932. It was widened in 1943 and at that time the right-of-way overlapped the underground well house.



*Left to right: top: Alvin, Mamie, Ermon, Short,
middle: Mr. Griffin, Guy, Mrs. Griffin, front row:
Alfred, Harvey and Elbert*

My younger sister and I were the first babies born in Nadaburg. Our mother did not go to a hospital. But a doctor by the name of VanMarel came out from Glendale to attend our births in 1931 and 1933.

In the early years, a fuel oil heater was used in the school until a propane heater was installed in the early 1940s. Electricity came to Wittmann in 1944. Prior to this, only the school and several businesses along the highway had gasoline generators for electric lights. There was a galvanized tin garage building behind the schoolhouse which housed the generator so that we could have lights for evening programs and social events. Sometimes this building even housed a family temporarily. For several years hot

lunches were prepared in the little school kitchen and served in the classroom. But usually we had an hour and those who could, walked home for lunch.

There were so few children in the school district in 1939, that the County School District threatened closure the following year. W.H. Griffin did not want this, so he advertised in several distant newspapers that he would give five acres of land or two town lots to families who had two or more school children and would move to Wittmann. Several families responded and the school remained open. The names of some of those families were Belmont, Bryant, Everett, Ferguson and Janes.

The schoolhouse served as a community center for all those early years. Christmas was a community affair. Times were hard and few could afford a tree so we all used the school Christmas tree. After the school Christmas program, in which all the students participated in plays, poems and carol singing, all the families placed their personal gifts around the tree and Santa Claus passed them out. My father often wore the school Santa suit. We attended many Sunday school church services there and several funeral services. Many evenings we had a community sing at which Leona Griffin, Lois Bryant, or some more experienced adult, played the piano. Sometimes we held parties or potluck suppers or dances, and a guitar or fiddle was played along with the piano for dancing. Memorial Day was always celebrated at the school. A potluck picnic was held in the school yard under the trees and all the men went out to repair the road to the cemetery and clean up the gravesites.

Mrs. Augusta Crozier was the first teacher in the new schoolhouse. She lived on a homestead to the west of the school and she remained teacher for five or six years. School discipline was never a problem after 1923, when Mrs. Crozier was furnished with a paddle by the school board to chastise pupils who misbehaved. Some of my older brothers were so chastised. This paddle was of thick cowhide shaped similar to a ping pong paddle, but it was almost 20 inches long. Someone

slit it down the center in the late 1930s, but it was still in occasional use in 1945, when I graduated from the 8th grade.

My father, W.H. Griffin, always seemed to be on the school board and he always played an active role in the operation, direction and maintenance of the school, with no wages involved. He planted quite an extensive cactus garden on the school grounds and quite a number of trees. He cut flowers from his big garden to decorate the school on many occasions. The washes were not bridged and several times after a severe downpour, they ran full and my father came to the school and carried smaller pupils through the water on his back and lead older ones across.

I have consulted family records and some of my older siblings for some of the information.

Postscript: Unfortunately, we do not know the date this narrative was written by Mary Ellen (Griffin) Simmons and sent to the then principal of the Nadaburg Elementary School.

Thank you for your interest in Nadaburg School October 2014