

The Story of Dassa McKinney Elementary School

During the mid 1800's two McKinney brothers settled on over 800 acres on Hooker Road. In that era, in order to become a teacher a person had to be at least 16 years of age and had to complete at least 8th grade. With these credentials, a person was then permitted to take a test at the County Courthouse to be awarded a teacher certificate.

Dassa's sister desired to become a teacher, but did not want to travel to the Courthouse alone. She encouraged Dassa to travel along. Upon arrival at the courthouse, Dassa decided to also take the test to become a teacher. As fate would have it, Dassa passed the test, but her sister did not.

Dassa was assigned to a one room school house. She taught at the Euclid School in Clay Township. This building still stands today next to the township building.

As a side note, one of the students in Dassa's class was Ellsworth Naugle. Ellsworth was a rambunctious youth and did not follow directions very well. One day Ms. McKinney directed young Ellsworth to come to the front of the room. Ellsworth refused. This was at a time that the desks were still screwed to the floor. As the story goes, Ms. McKinney picked up Ellsworth and the desk and 'threw' them to the front of the room.

Nearly 100 years later, Ellsworth Naugle's grandson, Robert, was one of the architects to work on the renovation of the Dassa McKinney Elementary.

Dassa ended her teaching career in the 1920's to care for her mother and father. Dassa's mother passed first and her father passed in about 1927. They are both buried in West Sunbury so confirmation on the dates is available. For more details, you may talk to Gay Travaglio, as Dassa lived with her family until her passing in 1957 (*see video of Mrs. Travaglio and our Starfish students*). Gay's maiden name was Wick. Her father was Jim Wick.

The property on Hooker Road was divided among the children of the two brothers. Dassa's father's name was John McKinney, Jr. Dassa also had one sister and one brother.

Dassa really believed in education. She offered land to the school district in 1956. However, there wasn't a need for the land at this time.

Upon ending her teaching career, Dassa became a farmerette (a single female that worked a farm). The courts placed children with Dassa to help her with the farm. Dassa took boys who were interested in attending West Sunbury Vocational School. Jim Wick and his brother were two of the last foster children that Dassa took in.

Jim Wick was one of ten children. We believe he was number 7 in the family and had a younger brother. Jim's mother passed away as a young woman. Jim's father believed his children needed a mother and quickly remarried. Unfortunately, this new wife wanted little to nothing to

do with the children and the courts soon removed the children from the home, placing Jim and his older brother, Art, with Dassa McKinney.

Jim truly appreciated all Dassa did for him. That is why for the final years of her life, Jim, although he had five children of his own, took Dassa into his home. Upon her passing, Dassa left all of her possessions to a nephew and a niece, but left most of the property to Jim Wick.

Jim went on to be a very successful businessman. Jim was involved in the dairy business and the garbage business.

In the mid 1960's, the young Northern Butler County School District (soon to be known as Moniteau) needed to build a new elementary school. There had been several one room school houses (Lone Tree 1, Lone Tree 2, West Sunbury, Euclid, etc.), but the time had come to build the new school.

Knowing of the need for land, Jim approached the school district in 1966 and offered 30 acres of land for the new school if the school would carry Dassa's name. The district agreed to name the school McKinney Elementary. Jim said, "No, it will be called Dassa McKinney Elementary." And so goes the story. The school was built and opened in 1968. Gary Kohlmeyer was a teacher when the building opened, and Karen Hall was a student that cut the ribbon to the new school.

In the year 2000, the district again needed to upgrade the district facilities. The district decided to consolidate the students into one renovated school at the site of Dassa McKinney Elementary. Once again, the district approached Jim for the donation of several acres that adjoined the existing property. Jim once again agreed with the complete understanding that should the school ever cease to exist that the property would be returned to his heirs. The second and final requirement was that the school remains with the name Dassa McKinney Elementary.

A bench sits at the ball field with Jim's name and his request continues today.



