Climax History

This is the story of Climax as remembered by some of the "Old Timers", and the few record books available. The village was first located about one and one-half miles southwest of its present location. This site was along the Red River on the old Steenerson farm. The mail route passed this way, beginning at Fish-Fer's Landing and making stops at Neby, Climax and Nielsville. At this first location there was a general store, post office, blacksmith, harness shop and a doctor who was also a veterinarian.

In 1893, the Fargo and St. Vincent extension of the Great Northern Railroad began building in the Sand Hill area, coming through where it now is, thus bypassing Neby, Frog Point and Old Climax. The first railroad train came through in 1896. The town was moved to its present location at this time. Levi Steenerson had arranged to have the depot built on his land and the village was plotted around it, taking the name of Climax from the old post office. Mail often came addressed to Sandville, as this is what the railroad officials called the town.

Dr. Norman's office was moved and it also served as a post office until a new one was built. The harness shop and blacksmith shop were moved and parts of these buildings are still in use. The school was moved from its former location south of Berry Cemetery and was used until a larger two-story building was erected. The first old school is now the Coral Ridge residence. Part of the Sheridan home (formerly owned by Gunder Bjaland) was the first residence in Climax, built by Gunder Bjaland's mother in 1896.

During these years a diphtheria epidemic swept through the area and many children died.

The town was growing and a lot of building was done in 1896-1897. Among these were the general store, post office, butcher shop, photography shop, several hotels, drug store, hardware, restaurants, machine hall, livery stable, bank and a number of saloons. Papers of incorporation were filed on October 25, 1897. Two elevators were built on their present locations. They were the St. Anthony, Monarch and the Northwestern. Three lumber yards were also located along the railroad tracks. The value of the town as assessed in 1900 was reported at $49,600. This included both personal and real estate. A barber shop was opened with charges of 15¢ for a shave, and 25¢ for a haircut except on Saturdays, when the charge was 35¢. These businesses changed hands often during the following years.

The Climax Dairy and Creamery was organized in 1902. The total cost of the building and equipment was $3500. C. M. Davidson was hired as buttermaker for a salary of $55 a month. Ole O. Estenson was manager. The two men held these positions as long as the creamery operated. The building was sold at auction in 1920 for the sum of $105.20. In 1902, we find that the Buxton, Reynolds, Belmont and Climax Telephone Company got consent for the right-of-way in Climax. Part of the town burned in 1902 and had to be rebuilt. The churches and schools were showing progress by now. The Climax Lutheran Church and Ladies Aid were organized in the late 1890's. The larger two-story school located at the west end of town was now in use. In March, 1909, the town went "dry," so all saloons were closed.

By 1915, electric power came our way. The power was first furnished by F. G. Stearns, who operated the flour mill. This mill was destroyed by fire in 1919 and was never replaced. In 1918 came Prohibition, followed by boot-leg moonshine days. A short spurt of prosperity followed World War I and then came the Depression years. The banks closed.

In 1939, a group of 100 farmers, each buying a $100 share, formed the Climax Co-op Elevator Association and bought out the old St. Anthony Elevator, selling their grain through the Grain Terminal Association in St. Paul. Later the Monarch and Victoria Elevators were purchased and added to the company. In 1956, a seed plant was added and the barley house in 1961. Potato production had increased in the Valley, so storage houses were built. The old creamery building was used as office building for the Climax Potato Company for many years. In 1969, the Crookston Credit Union merged with Climax; in 1970, Beltrami was added; in 1972 Sherack, and in 1974 Warren joined. A new post office was built in 1959. At the present time (December, 1975), Climax has a population of 255 permanent residents. Many of these are third and fourth generation descendants of the first settlers.

We also have a volunteer fire department with adequate fire fighting equipment. A sewage and water system was installed a few years ago and in 1974, a garbage pick-up was begun. The Climax branch of the Polk County Library is located here and is open to local residents three days each week. Our main streets are paved and two main highways join here.

For social activities, we have an active community club, Jaycees and Garden Club, plus many school and church activities.

History of the Climax School

The first grade school on record for the Climax area was located at the old town site south of the present Bergit Cemetery. When the railroad was completed in 1896, the Village of Climax was moved to its present location. The small school building was moved and used for a few years. Then a two-story school was built on the west edge of the town. When the consolidation took place, this became an apartment building and eventually was moved to the center of town and served as a town hall. It still stands and is now the home of Ronald Peterson.

In 1918, the first consolidated high school was built in Climax. It was constructed of brick and for its day was considered a most outstanding building. The first graduating class in 1920 had two graduates. The class sizes increased until the largest graduating class was the one in 1965, which had 44 members. The original building served its purpose until 1939, when a large addition was built. This consisted of a new gymnasium, library, kitchen and lunch room. With the new athletic facilities, the school's basketball teams became known and respected throughout the district and region. They were always a threat to the larger schools and won the district 31 crown in 1943. On February 24, 1954, the district was dealt a shocking blow when the entire school was leveled by fire. It seemed rather hopeless to face the task and cost of rebuilding. But the people rallied to the cause, and the outlying districts to the north voted to join the original district. Plans went ahead with great speed and the building which is now in use in Climax was completed in December 1956. Since that time, the districts of Shelly, Nielsville and a part of Eldred have joined the high school area to make the present school district 592.

The standard of education of the school has always been superior. The percentage of graduates who continue on to schools of higher learning is far above the state average. From this small high school have graduated students who have gone on to enter the professional fields. These include three doctors, two dentists, one chiropractor, one minister, one lawyer and a large number of teachers, registered nurses and medical technicians.

Through the years, since the 1918 consolidation, the school has had the following able leaders serving as superintendents: Mr. R. Wakefield, Mr. I. Amundson, Mr. E. Swenson, Mr. J. Westby, Mr. O. T. Olsen, Mr. G. Kerestes. For the past three years the school has been affiliated with the area vocational school at Crookston, which includes the schools of Crookston, Climax, and Fertile.

This offers a variation of subjects not taught as a part of the regular curriculum. The voters of school district 592 recently showed their loyalty to and confidence in their school by voting a twenty mill increase in the school tax, thus making it possible to operate the school at its present high standard, during the inflation and rising price index. As the smaller schools are forced to close and eventually become a part of a larger high school area, the people of district 592 proudly support their