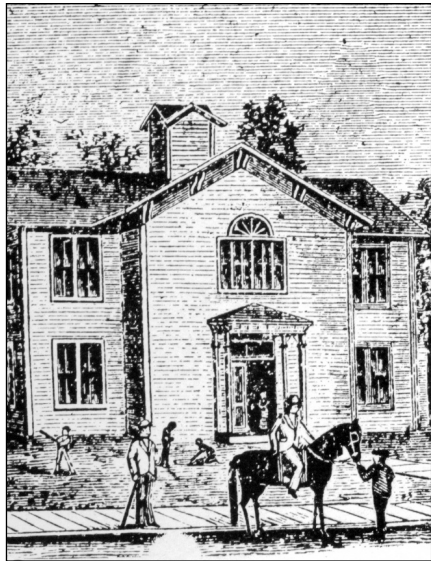


# Antigo schools are ready to open a new chapter

By **JOE HERMOLIN**  
Langlade County  
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When schools closed for the summer this spring, preparations were already in place to open next fall under a different structure. Over the years many changes have taken place in the school system as we adapt to changing economics, technologies, demographics and demands. Changes have not been without controversy. When the public school reopens in the fall elementary grades will be housed

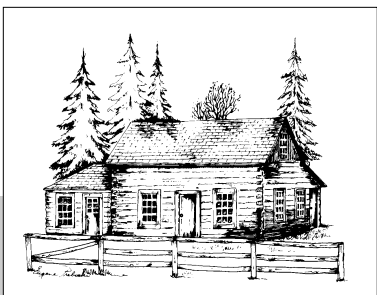


Antigo's first high school was housed in a four room wood frame building that contained a graded school.

It was built in 1883 on the site of the current museum.

in Antigo at the current Middle School. It has been a long journey from Langlade County and Antigo's early schools to what exists today.

Eastern Langlade County, around the Wolf River, was settled



Provided by the Langlade County Historical Society. To donate, volunteer or become a member, call 715-627-4464. Visit the museum complex at Superior Street and Seventh Avenue or check out the Website at [www.langladehistory.com](http://www.langladehistory.com).

**Our History**



Antigo's first elementary school was a 12 x 17 foot log cabin located at Superior Street and Third Avenue.

before the area around Antigo and that is where the first schools were located. The first elementary school, near Elton was built in 1873 and was a roughly thrown together log cabin. The teacher, Addie Westcott, came from Shawano and she managed to procure a blackboard, also from Shawano, for the school. Students ranged in age from five to 18 years of age. Subjects taught included reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, history, and geography. That school was soon followed by two others in what are now Lily and Hollister.

Antigo's first elementary school came a few years later. It was also a log cabin, built in 1879 at Third Avenue and Superior Street. This was only a year or two after the Deleglise family, Antigo's founders, had settled into their home. The school was built by Joseph Krause who intended to use it as his home but decided to settle in Kempster instead. His cabin was a 12 foot by 17 foot basswood, scooped roof structure with a couple of 8 by 12 inch windows. Students sat on wooden benches without backs. Anna Sherriff was its first teacher. She was succeeded by Sophie Deleglise, daughter of Antigo's pioneer family Francis and Mary Deleglise. One of the students was hired for \$1 a month to be a janitor and keep the fire going in a wood burning stove. During the winter the fire kept students and teacher warm, while in the warm weather the fire created smoke that kept the mosqui-

toes under control. The building was primitive but typical of a pioneer school: a log cabin with two or two and a half windows, a floor of mixed scraps of boards, and benches of split basswood logs.

Antigo soon outgrew its first school and, for a brief while, looked for a more permanent home, holding classes in the offices of Francis Deleglise's real estate business and, when that proved inadequate, in the Winsor Hotel. In 1883 the city built a four room wood frame school graded school at the site of what is now the museum. It served as an elementary and high school. The high

school opened in the fall of 1883 with a student body of 41.

As Antigo grew in population, became incorporated as a city, and became designated as the county seat, the need for an improved school system became evident and by the late 1880s ward schools for elementary school students were constructed throughout the city. By the early 1900s there were six ward schools in Antigo.

Rural schools were also established through the county. In 1881, when the first school superintendent's report was issued, there were nine rural school districts in

**See Our History Page 13**



A large, brick high school was constructed in 1890 on the site of the current middle school.

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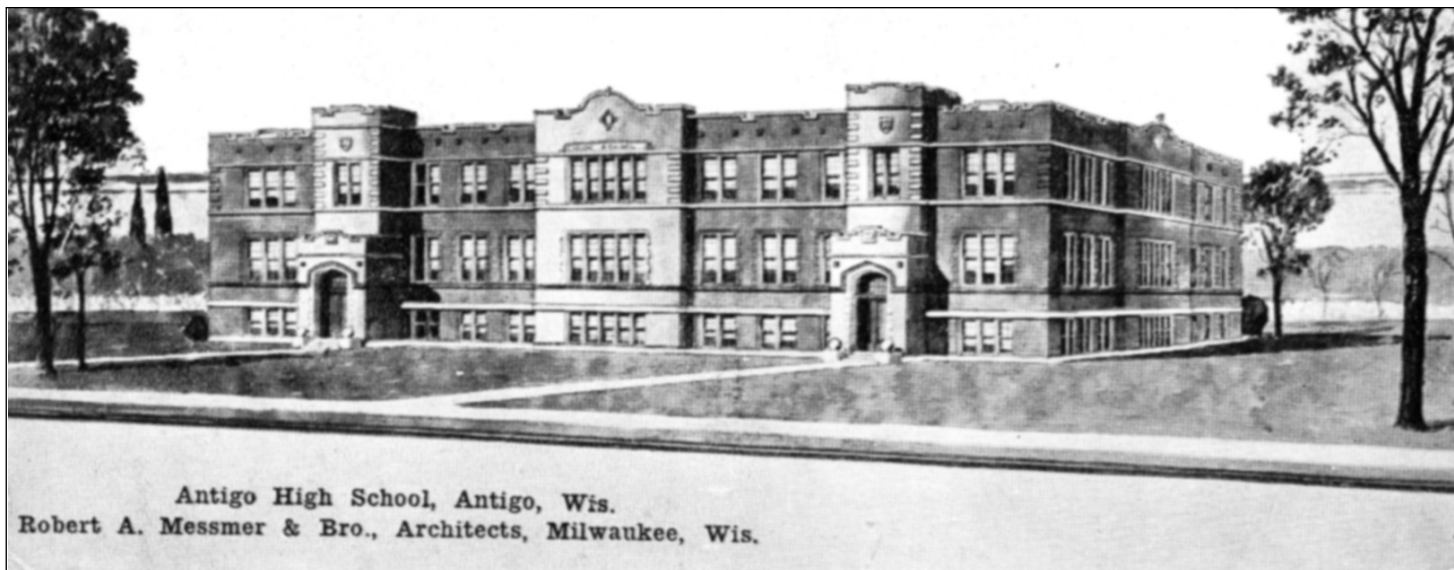
## Our History

Langlade County. By 1921 that had increased to 80 with an enrollment of 3,285 students. In the 1960s many of these schools were closed as consolidation began, (Some schoolhouses may still be seen, converted into homes. Three are available for touring at certain times – one at the county fairgrounds, one at Elton, and the third at Neva Corners at Highways A and B intersection).

In the early years rural school teachers were paid a starting salary of \$25 per month and their job included janitorial work. Rose Schmidt taught at the Springbrook school during World War II and remembers those years as “the best of I ever had. There was a good atmosphere between the teachers and the parents and the school was the center of the community.” Rose Schmidt also recalled that her duties included tending the fire in the school stove and having to shovel paths in the snow to the outdoors toilets.

In Antigo, in 1890, the city approved construction of a new, brick, high school around the corner from the 1883 school. It was to be on land donated by the Deleglise family. That structure originally cost \$16,500 but later additions and improvements were added to keep pace with increasing needs. That building served as the high school until it burned in January 1916. The city scrambled to find classrooms for the rest of the year and immediately began planning for a new building. Classes were held in various venues such as store fronts, lodges, churches, and offices through the rest of the school year while a new high school was planned for and begun on the original site. A Milwaukee architect designed the building and it was constructed by a firm from Fond du Lac at a total cost of \$96,000. By the start of the 1917-1918 school year the new building was ready to accept students. Today, that building, with modifications, is the Middle School and ready to undergo yet another transition during this upcoming school year.

Of course a school is much more than a building to house students. It takes trained teachers to direct their charges. In Langlade County's early days teacher assignments could be haphazard. County Supervisors issued teaching certificates. Sometimes they went to friends without consideration of qualifications. By 1882 the



Antigo High School, Antigo, Wis.  
Robert A. Messmer & Bro., Architects, Milwaukee, Wis.

An architect's drawing of the new high school, replacing the one that burned in 1916, serving as the middle school.

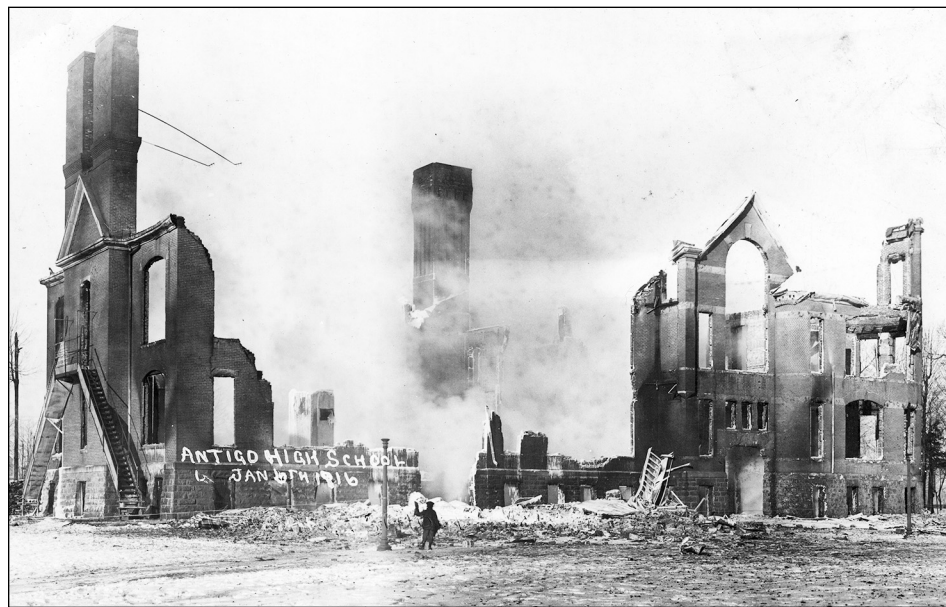
state had issued a manual of standards for teachers. By the beginning of the 20th century a more formal structure was in place to establish standards and train elementary school teachers.

The Langlade County Teachers Training School was formed in 1906. The Carnegie Library (currently the museum) had opened the previous year with the second floor left undesignated and intended for non-library purposes. The space contained a large auditorium and it became a classroom for post-high school graduates to receive initially one year and later expanded to two year college level courses for elementary school teachers. The first graduating class had 11 students.

By 1925, with a graduating class of 28, the Normal School had outgrown its space and a separate building was planned. A two-story Normal School was constructed across the street from the library and opened for classes in 1926. (Today it is the Boys and Girls Club) That graduating class contained 30 future teachers.

That Normal School trained Langlade County's elementary school teachers well into the 20th century. In the 1960s with graduating classes generally numbering in the 30s, rules governing teacher qualifications changed, requiring four year college graduation. But current teachers were grandfathered in, continuing to take qualifying make-up classes in the building until 1971. The final graduating class of the Langlade County Teachers College contained 14 students. At the time there were 20 freshman who ended up completing their training elsewhere.

Rose Schmidt recalled that, during her teaching days in the 1940s,



The old Antigo High School was destroyed in a fire during the night of Jan. 16, 1916.

the school was the center of the community. That has been true for generations. For example, during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, the Home Economics classes and facilities at the high school were put into service preparing

meals for families that had no one healthy enough to prepare meals for the family. Today the theater and athletic facilities at the high school are an asset to the entire community and not just the students.

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