

Baby Boom led to building of today's Jolley and Austin schools

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One of the most obvious – and expensive – effects of the Baby Boom was the fact that schools which had been suitable for years were suddenly overcrowded due to the influx of students.

This was the case for both the Austin and Jolley elementary schools in Vermillion in the 1950s.

Austin Elementary (West Side) School had been constructed on West Main Street in 1897, while Jolley Elementary (East Side) School was built on South University Street in 1902.

Additions to both schools were made in 1911.

By 1953, school officials were beginning to wonder if these two long-standing buildings would continue to meet the needs of the district as enrollment figures continued to rise.

That summer, the *Vermillion Plain Talk* reported that an investigative committee found the facilities of both schools to be inadequate.

The committee recommended an entirely new Austin school be constructed, as well as a new classroom section at Jolley school that would be designed as the initial unit of a new building to be constructed later.

These additions would arrive just in time for the district, whose students numbers were increasing exponentially. September 1953 saw an increase of 78 elementary students alone. While overall district numbers for 1951 were 724, they had risen to 846 just two years later.

By the winter of 1953, plans for construction were finalized. The new Austin school would consist of a kindergarten and 10 classrooms, as well as an auditorium to be used as a gymnasium, meeting room and cafeteria.

Jolley School would get a five-class addition.

Costs for Austin were estimated to be approximately \$277,000. The entire project was estimated at \$400,000.

Vermillion voters approved a \$240,000 bond for the projects early in 1954.

While the Jolley addition was constructed next to the standing school, Austin found an entirely new location – at what was then Austin Park.

The park was named for Horace J. Austin, who came to Vermillion in 1865. The land was donated to the city in 1893 by his wife, Rachel Ross Austin. The park itself was dedicated on May 25, 1905.

Austin's remaining heir consented to transfer the park land to the school in February 1954, the same month voters approved the bond proposal.

Construction began in September 1954, with crews clearing the way for the new Jolley classroom unit on the south end of the Jolley field.

According to a story in the *Plain Talk*, it was necessary to remove 11 trees from the Jolley building site. A further 32 trees were removed from Austin Park.

Work was completed on the projects by the time school started in 1955, but by that time, the school saw yet another record enrollment. Newspaper articles estimated 925 students

total, as compared to the 846 students from two years previous.

At the time, the district employed 49 teachers and administrative staff, as well as five custodians.

Just three years later, both the Austin and Jolley schools were added to in order to accommodate even more students.

In August 1958, work was completed on three new Austin classrooms, and nine at Jolley.

The old Jolley school was then used as the



The West Side School first opened in Vermillion in 1897, and was known as West Side Elementary. The building was enlarged in 1911, and its name was changed to Austin Elementary in honor of Rachel Austin, an early teacher at the territorial log schoolhouse.

(Photo courtesy of Clay County Historical Society)

junior high school for the first time.

The *Plain Talk* estimated enrollment for the district at 980 students.

When classes resumed, it was found there actually were 1,019 students, 73 above the previous year.



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