

PREFACE

In December of 2022, I received a package in my office from former Flossmoor resident Marilyn Brown, currently living in Georgia, with a handful of historical documents related to Flossmoor that she wanted to donate to the historical archives. We thank her for this donation.

One of the most interesting documents in the package was this history of the Flossmoor School District 161 from 1915—1929 written by Flossmoor's first village president, Daniel J. (or D.J.) Brumley. I knew I wanted to share this document on the new local history page at the library's website, as it provided interesting details on the political manipulations required to build Leavitt Avenue School I had never seen elsewhere. However, the document was typed many decades ago, and the print was extremely faint in certain sections. I have used photo enhancement software on these images to correct the issue as much as possible.

ABOUT D.J. BRUMLEY

To say D.J. Brumley was important to the early history of the Flossmoor is an understatement. Indeed, he had a hand in a number of civic projects and organizations in the young village. Born March 19, 1865 on a farm in Putnam County, Ohio, Brumley began teaching in local rural schools as a young man in order to secure funds for university. His tenacity paid off, as he graduated at the age of 30 from The Ohio State University in 1895 with a degree in civil engineering. He then began working for the Illinois Central Railroad, eventually rising to the position of Chief Engineer. As an IC employee, Brumley was likely aware of Flossmoor from the very beginning of the village. In 1915 he joined other IC employees when he became a Flossmoor homeowner, buying the house at 911 Bruce Avenue he would live in for the rest of his life and raise his two children.



D. J. Brumley

From 1915—1922 Brumley advocated with others for the creation of a grade school in the village proper. As part of that effort, he was elected to the School Board and served as President. This story is told in the following pages. After the school opened, Brumley was one of the men who met at the school during a party to discuss the idea of incorporating the village. The village was incorporated in 1924, and Brumley was elected to the village board and then chosen as the village board's first President from 1924—1927 (Flossmoor did not elect "mayors" until 1961). In addition to these posts, Brumley was a Justice of the Peace for Rich Township for 31 years. He was also president of the Flossmoor State Bank, which opened in 1927 and closed during the Great Depression.

D.J. Brumley died December 6, 1959 at the age of 94. Brumley Avenue is named in his honor. The home on Bruce Avenue stayed in the Brumley family for decades afterwards.

—David Martin
Adult Services Manager
Flossmoor Public Library

Flossmoor School Matters
1915-1929
D. J. Brumley

It has been suggested by a member of the P.T.A. that I prepare a statement concerning the development of schools in District 161, Cook County, Ill.

I first thought I might do this by relying on my memory solely. However, as I jotted down some of the school activities during the period 1915-1929, I found there were many essential gaps I could not fill in. It was necessary for me to refer to notes, maps, and diaries I had placed in storage several years ago.

First, I think I should tell you that Flossmoor in 1915 was a small community built around and near the Flossmoor Country Club. The residents were, in the main, members of the Club. They lived in their Flossmoor homes during the golf playing season, moved into Chicago for the winter season, and maintained their legal and voting residences in Chicago. Flossmoor community as such was bounded by Wallace Ave. on the north, Douglas Ave. on the west, east along Flossmoor Rd. and south on Braeburn one-half mile and east over to Western Ave. There were twenty homes in the area, about sixty-five residents, and eight children of school age. The incorporation of Flossmoor Village did not come until July, 1924.

School District 161 was a large rural school district, with its north boundary on 183rd St., west boundary on Cicero and Crawford Avenues, south on Vollmer Rd. and east on Western Ave. In addition to this area in Rich Township, there were also small areas in Bloom and Bremen Townships--a total of nearly six square miles. No doubt the location of Coopers Grove Church on 183rd St. had much to do with fixing the boundary lines of the school district.

In 1915 the School house was on the east side of Kedzie Ave. one long block north of Flossmoor Rd. At this time Kedzie Ave. was an ordinary dirt road which was almost impassable for teams and wagons and pedestrians as well during much of the winter season. The building was of wood construction--about twenty feet long and sixteen feet wide. The entrance was toward the west and was protected by a small vestibule and a storm door. The heating system was by means of a stove placed in the southwest corner of the room. All four windows were on the north side of the building. The artificial lighting system consisted of four small bracket coal oil lamps. There was no water supply on the school premises. Drinking water was carried in a galvanized iron bucket from a neighbor's well directly across Kedzie Ave. Each child was supposed to carry his own drinking cup, but there was always a common cup placed alongside the bucket and was frequently used. The schoolground was merely a notch of about twenty feet into a field and about eighty feet long. This notch, with Kedzie Ave., was the children's playground.

This school plant evidently met the needs of a public school, as Cooper's Grove Church maintained a parochial school alongside the church. The plan seemed to be to send the children to the parochial school until they were confirmed and then to the public school until they earned a certificate.

It is understandable why the residents of Flossmoor Community deemed the schoolhouse on Kedzie Ave. as inadequate and unacceptable. Since pleas to the Board for a modern school brought no results they decided to go about it in another way. They conceived the plan of taking parts of School District 161 and of School District 166 which joined on Western Ave. and creating a new district to be known as District 166 1/2. This plan was originated and proposed by J. F. Donovan and Geo. Bliss.

The petitions praying for the new school were filed with the school boards affected and with trustees of schools in Bloom, Bremen, and Rich Townships. All the boards of schools affected denied the petitions. The only recourse was to file an appeal to the County Superintendent of Schools.

At the hearing on appeal before Mr. Tobin, County Superintendent of Schools, it was shown that many of the people who signed the petition, though living in Flossmoor, were not legal residents as they voted in Chicago. The petitions were deemed null and void. Mr. Tobin then suggested that we try again next year. He stated further that if we came with a legal petition and if it were denied by the Township Boards, he would authorize the new school in Flossmoor.

At this point I became more actively interested in the matter and joined with J. F. Donovan and Geo. Bliss to work out the problem of a new school. We employed a competent lawyer at our expense to advise us.

Our first problem was to have all our signers legal residents of Flossmoor. In 1915 the only polling place in Rich Township was at Matteson--three miles away. Through an influential friend, members of the County Board succeeded in having a polling place established in Flossmoor. The advantage of voting in Flossmoor was that personal property taxes would be computed on the Rich Township rate which was much lower than the Chicago rate. Then at the next general election we got all our signers to vote in Flossmoor and thus they became legal residents.

In March, 1916, our second petition for a new school, signed by the required number of legal residents had been properly filed with Boards of Directors and Boards of Township School Trustees. As in 1915 all of them denied the petitioners' plea. The petitioners took an appeal to Mr. Tobin, County Superintendent of Schools.

At the hearing on appeal, it was found that the petition was in proper legal form. After hearing arguments on both sides Mr. Tobin said he did not question the need of better school facilities, but he doubted the advisability of creating a new school district. He said he had made an independent survey and found the territory was barely able to support two schools. If there were three schools, none of them could make levies of enough taxes to maintain standard schools. He approved the action of the local school authorities. He made this decision in spite of the promise made to us the year before. He suggested the people of Flossmoor Community elect a Board of Directors of its own. Then we could build a modern school house in District 161 on a site we chose.

Mr. Tobin's decision from which we could not appeal made our situation appear almost hopeless. Our community decided we would not ask the Board of our district to build a new school since the rural people had a preponderance in the voting, could build the house anywhere they chose and such a type as they might select. We wanted the building inside our community limits. We decided to keep in touch with the situation. Little did we think then that we would be working on the school six years more.

The thing most helpful to us was the firm promise of the I.C.R.R. to electrify its suburban service. The building of new homes began in earnest. The population of Flossmoor increased and thereby helped us to diminish the majority of the rural voters.

In 1918 it was decided we would make a test of our voting strength. At the same meeting I was selected as our nominee. I was elected with some votes to spare. It was noted the opposition did not have their full vote out. In 1919 and 1920 our community failed to elect its candidates, but it was noted our vote was approaching the available total vote of the opposition. In 1921 I was re-elected to succeed myself with a larger majority.

The Supreme test came in 1922. We had to have two directors on the Board before we could go ahead. At the election of April 8, 1922, Harold Dyer was elected by 77 votes; the defeated candidate received 54. We now had a majority on the Board and decided to go ahead at once. Certain details, such as location of the site of the building, type of building, purchase of land, and issuance of bonds were decided at special election held May 22, 1922. It was gratifying to know our voting strength had grown rapidly as the vote on these matters was community 98 and our rural friends 56. The location of the schoolhouse was to be on the west side of Leavitt Ave. on Lots 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Block 6. The lots have a two hundred frontage on Leavitt Ave. and were given to the School District by Mr. C. H. Markam, Pres. of the I.C.R.R. The Bond Issue was approved in the amount of \$13,400.00--the legal limit. The building was designed for two schoolrooms, with full basement. The location and design were such as to admit of extension west, and foundation walls were designed and constructed to carry a second floor load. We found we had to confine our costs to meet the basic requirements of a schoolroom.

The total cost of the two rooms was a little in excess of \$24,000.00. The amount over and above the bond issue was taken care of by issuing tax anticipation warrants to cover the deficiency.

B. A. Beck of Harvey was the architect. The work was awarded to Jos. Tintari of Chicago Heights and was completed in time for school use January 8, 1923.

When school was opened in September, 1922, so many children enrolled we had to divide the school into two sections. One section was in school in the morning and the other in the afternoon. On January 8, 1923, all the school children met in the schoolhouse for the first time. On that morning I went to the schoolhouse to see the janitor about his duties. I was impressed by the delight of the children when they inspected their new school home. They had spacious, well-lighted rooms, cloak closets, clean floors, new desks, new blackboard, drinking fountains, automatically controlled heat, a good and roomy playground--all those things lacking at the Kedzie Ave. School. And above all, they had Mrs. R. T. Echols as Principal and teacher. They knew they could forget their long walks--sometime through storm and mud--to the old Kedzie Ave. School. They expressed gratitude for the many accommodations they could call their own. I considered this full compensation for the continuous effort some of us made to bring this result about. We had finished building the first unit of a school for, not only the Helens, Ednas, Everetts, and Joes who were in school that morning, but also for those of the future.

We had the new schoolhouse but we also had a bonded debt of nearly \$25,000.00. The taxes the Board could legally levy were just about enough to pay operating expenses, pay interest and retire bonds and warrants when due. We had to confine our school activities to such things as the laws demanded. We could not have a kindergarten, manual training, music, or dancing. Building homes in Flossmoor was going on at a rapid rate, and I think the Board wisely decided to keep our finances in shape to meet additional building costs which were not more than four or five years ahead of us. Of course the Board was criticised as was to be expected. However, when we explained our long distance aims much of the criticism subsided.

There was one bright spot in these troublesome times. The P.T.A. of Flossmoor was organized some time in 1923, I think. They came to the Board to proffer their help in any practical way. The Board was not the least bit reluctant to accept their help. They organized and had parties to earn money to purchase shrubs and trees for the schoolgrounds, and they planted them too. They secured a piano and placed it in the schoolhouse. They put up window shades at the south windows. They bought books for a school

library, and did many other things so helpful to the Board. I do not know whether the Board ever expressed its gratitude for the fine work the P.T.A. did. If the Board did not do so, I do this posthumously now, "I thank you very much!" There is one incident showing the interest of the P.T.A. in the school. I asked Mrs. Mead if I could give her any assistance in planting the trees and shrubs. She said she needed some help. I asked her when and she said tomorrow morning. I said I would meet her there at 5:00 AM. I went over about three minutes late, but she was there planting a shrub. I worked until 7:00 then got my breakfast and went to my office downtown. I went over to the schoolhouse that evening and found everything planted; and, don't you know, everything she planted grew!!

Early in 1928 some residents of School District 166 came to our Board in District 161 and asked us if we would be interested in consolidating the two districts. 166 was directly east and joined 161 on Western Ave. The Board of 161 favored it and expressed its willingness to submit the question to a referendum. Since we all thought the consolidation would be approved, we tentatively employed an architect to make plans and estimates for a five room extension to the west of the building on Leavitt Ave. The referendum election was held in both districts on May 12, 1928. The two districts were thus consolidated and designated School District 161. The election for a bond issue of \$64,000.00, purchase of land, type of building was held June 9, 1928. By this time, all the land required was under option to purchase, the bonds had been sold, the plans were approved and competition bids were on file in the Board office. The construction work was awarded to Jos. Tintari of Chicago Heights with B. A. Beck of Harvey as Supervising Architect. The work was begun June 17, 1928. In spite of curing some soft foundation spots which added \$2,200.00 to the cost of the building, it was ready for occupancy on Oct. 15, 1928. With the completion of the extension of the Leavitt Ave. School, we then had a school plant of seven rooms on Leavitt Ave., one room Stelter School on Dixie Highway, and the Community House in Flossmoor Park, which was deeded to School District 161 by the Flossmoor Park Improvement Assn. The total bonded obligation was Stelter School \$5,000.00, original Leavitt Ave. School \$9,000.00, Leavitt Ave. extension \$64,000.00--a total of \$78,000.00. All the tax anticipation warrants on the original Leavitt School had been paid.

The first Board of Directors of consolidated District 161 were: Florence Harms, Grace Silver, Fred Vanderwalker, George Devaneaux, and I.

During my connection with school matters in Flossmoor, I was very much impressed with the enthusiasm and helpfulness of the people on many occasions. It might be said the P.T.A. was a bit selfish. Their sole problem was their own community school. They were studying our home problems, such as courses of study, teachers, teaching methods, and adequacy of school facilities, and I wish to say they were qualified to discuss them.

On November 26, 1928, the Achievement Club of the Flossmoor consolidated School established the D. J. Brumley Fund. The trustees of the fund were to be the officers of the Flossmoor Achievement Club, the president of the Board of Education, the president of P.T.A., and the principal of the school. The resolution creating the fund is signed by 10 children of the first grade, 4 of the second, 7 of the third, 13 of the fourth, 11 of the fifth, 16 of the sixth, 11 of the seventh, 9 of the eighth, Mrs. Margaret Echols, 7 of the class of 1926, and 6 contributing friends-- a total of 95.

I want to make just one other observation. If a stranger looked over my diaries, notes, and plans for the period 1915-1929, he would have some difficulty to determine whether I was employed by the Flossmoor School Board or was Chief Engineer of the Illinois Central R.R.

At any rate, my time adds up to fourteen years, if my algebra is correct.