

Of the one-room schools that fed into the Kremlin School system, we have the most information, though not nearly enough (!) about Valley Center, Columbia, and Wild Horse schools, because the Mennonites of our parents' generation that we grew up with left behind photos and other memorabilia plus their own memories that they or their children have shared with us. For Wild Horse, most of what little we know comes from two of the Janzen families who lived nearby and had strong connections.

Special thanks to the following for their help in paying for the Wild Horse School marker sign: Vernon Janzen, whose family attended school there, but not him!; Gary Janzen, the current owner of the farm where the school stood; Clark Bittle, who now lives just a half mile further north

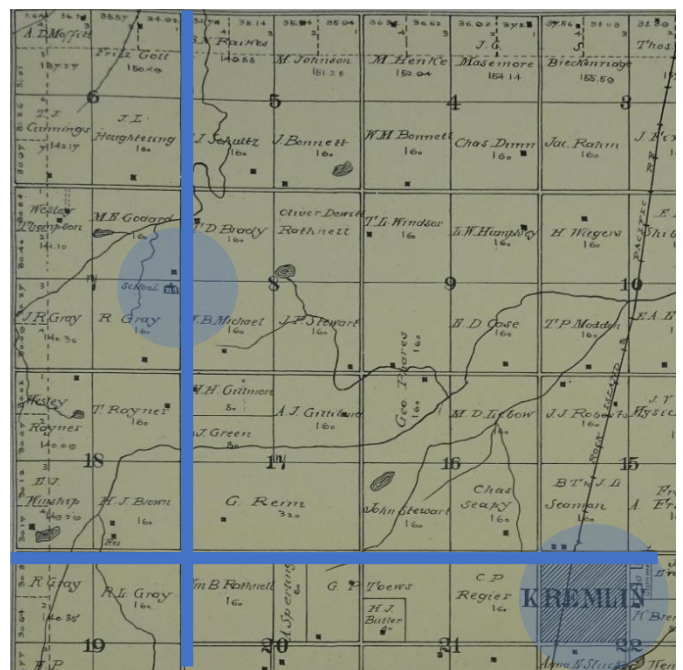
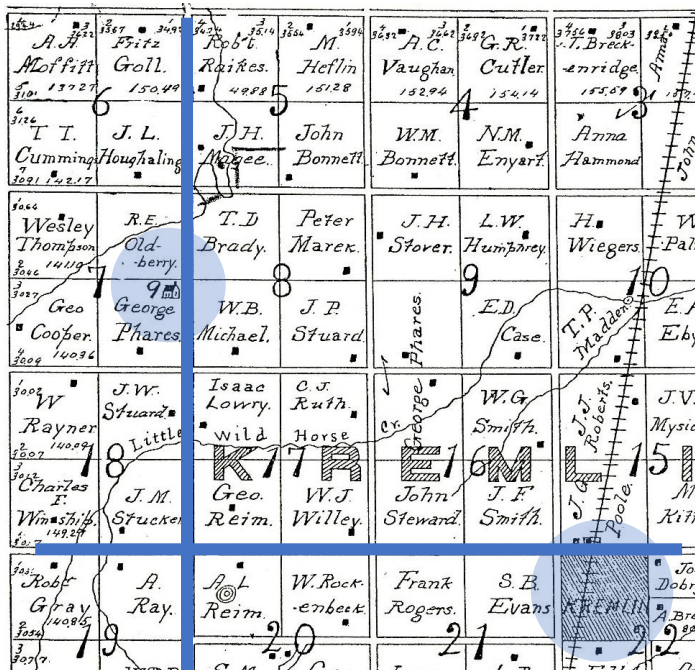
Special thanks to the following for their help with stories and photos: *Vernon Janzen; Gary Janzen*

1. Facts.

- District number: 9
- Location: Northeast corner of the SE/4 of Section 7-24-6 in Kremlin Township
- Started: Presumably 1894
- Last year of classes: closed by 1936, based on Vernon Janzen memories
- Fate of building: Still standing in 1945 aerial photo; fate unknown

2. Location.

A 1901 commercial plat map marking the location of School 9 (Wild Horse) is shown to the left below, and a 1906 government plat map is shown to the right below. The school location is highlighted; the location of the town of Kremlin and of the current paved roads is also indicated to aid with visualizing the location of the school. The 1901 plat map is important because it gives the school number, thus nailing down which school this was.



This school building was located pretty much exactly where Gary Janzen lives now, 1-1/2 miles north of the Midway on the west side of Highway 81. There is an old well and pump at the north edge of Gary's yard, but Gary said that this was not the well from Wild Horse school, as some have suggested.

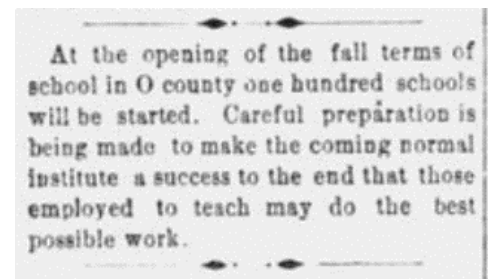
It is a bit difficult to visualize the location of the school now, because the dividing line between the northeast and southeast quarters (where the school was located) is now gone, and Gary Janzen's house and yard essentially span that former dividing line between the two quarters. The southeast quarter of that section where the school was located is indicated on plat maps as owned by George Phares in 1901, R. (presumably Robert) Gray in 1906, Jennie L. Butts in 1936, and Gary's father Abe H. Janzen in 1951. All owners can be found at the County Courthouse.

To the right is an aerial image of the Wild Horse school grounds from 1945. It shows fairly clearly the location of the school building on the school grounds, the property line to the north (top), and the grove of trees to the south (bottom). The playground area can at least be visualized south of the school. A building is visible behind and a bit south from the school that appears to be too large to be an outhouse; perhaps more likely a stable for horses. There seems to be a path going south from the back of the school and then jogging southwest toward what may only be a clearing here, but which I think may more likely have been the outhouse. Outhouses were generally located a good distance from the school because of odor.



Perhaps more important, this photo establishes that the Wild Horse school building was still standing at its original location at least until 1945.

We do not have precise dates for when any of these one-room schools started, but the clipping to the right from an issue of the early Kremlin newspaper "The Cherokee Cosmos" from May 1894 states that "one hundred schools will be started" in the fall of that year. We cannot be certain, but it seems likely that this means "started for the first time"; this would be one year after the Cherokee Strip Land Run opened up this area for settlement by non-natives. The date 1894 shows on the front of the Pleasant Valley School in its photo, lending credence to the idea that 1894 was indeed the first year for these schools in Garfield County.



Wild Horse has recently been popularized as a "moniker" or "trademark" for the town of Kremlin, Oklahoma; one of Kremlin's earlier names was in fact Wild Horse. Wild Horse school almost certainly got its name from the Wild Horse Creek that runs across the land where the school was located, further west and meandering from south to north and then across Highway 81 and to the east and north. Wild Horse was also the name for the "community", the group of people whose children went to school there and others who lived in that area.

3. Photos and memories.

Though we do not have a lot of the history of Wild Horse, it is one of the schools for which we have a very nice photo of the building, shown on the next page. This photo was downloaded from the Oklahoma Historical Society archives. There are several things of interest. First, note that the “Wild” part of its name is on the sign as a word, but that the “Horse” part of the sign is instead an image of a horse—a fun discovery for me. Second, to the left of the school building (south), you can see parts of the playground – a pair of swing chains is hanging near the school and toward the front (east), and further back is a pipe assembly that was likely for one or more teeter-totters, but could instead have been a hitching post for horses.

Vernon Janzen’s childhood home was a half mile south of the school and on the east side of Highway 81, and he provided important information about the building. I first thought that there was a roll-down metal door over the front porch, but I now think not. Vernon remembered entering the building from the porch, walking south to north – going into the north (right in the photo) cloak room and then left (west) into the classroom. He was not certain whether there was another door that was not used going into the south cloak room, but he was fairly certain that there was not a door on the north-south back wall of the porch to walk straight west into the school. I am now fairly confident that what looked like a roll-down metal door is in fact the west wall of the porch and the east wall of the classroom; this makes more sense!



Vernon Janzen did not attend Wild Horse school -- it closed before he started school -- but his three older brothers all went there for grades 1-8. Vernon clearly remembered the school ceasing operations in 1935, two years before he started first grade, riding the bus to the relatively new Kremlin School building at the south end of Kremlin, which graduated its first senior class in May 1933. The newer and nicer Kremlin School building was built in part because of one-room schools closing, and it likely also contributed to more of them being closed down. Vernon nonetheless had clear memories of several parts of the school and grounds, as he shared with me on multiple phone calls -- him at 92 in California and me, not quite that old, in Omaha, Nebraska. More recently I spoke with him in person when he attended a meeting here in Omaha. Several of Vernon's early memories of Wild Horse and the Kremlin town school that he attended are also in his published memoir, "The Enchanted Life." Thanks again, and kudos, to Vernon for all he remembered and shared!

Though Vernon did not attend school there, he was there for school programs for his older brothers. He also clearly remembered the school being used for community and family gatherings also, even after it was no longer used as a school. He had a very clear memory of the last event that he attended there, because it was a farewell party for his family when they were moving to California, where he spent the rest of his days.

Vernon clearly remembered the school location as described above and shown in the aerial image above. The school faced to the east, toward Highway 81, and he clearly remembered the playground being to the south of the school building. He had very clear and fond memories of the tall conical merry-go-round that had been on the playground. He thought that he remembered outhouses there, but was not certain whether they were to the west or to the south. He did not remember whether there was or had been a stable or horse shelter there, or what the back of the school looked like. He clearly remembered that the student's desks faced west, and that the teacher's desk was at the west end. He also remembered a big pot-bellied stove that heated the building in the winter. He did not remember whether there had been any kind of stage, and he did not remember there being a piano in the school.

We have no information at this time of what happened to the school building after 1945. It may have been one of several one-room schools moved onto the Kremlin town school grounds in the late 1940s, as the one-room schools closed down and more and more students went to Kremlin, but we have no documentation at this point to support that, or any other story of its final days.

4. Known teachers.

Iona Marie Beck is our only documented teacher at this time, from the Enid Events Newspaper from September 5, 1930; Iona is listed as living at Hillsdale.

We would very much welcome any and all information from any other people who know of their own ancestors who attended this school!