Profile Of An Early Educator

Clarence Vliet;
A Half-Century Of The 3 R's

By LARRY EVOS
Staff Writer

Clarence Vliet has devoted almost his entire 87 years to educating Michigan's young people and has largely responsible for establishing the basis for the topflight school system Birmingham has today. Vliet, who still lives in the family home at 416 Brown, was superintendent of the Birmingham schools from 1915 to 1932. His term of service was longer than any previous superintendent or principal.

Born in Clarkson, Vliet graduated from community high school in 1894. After several terms at Michigan State Normal School he returned to his home town.

After a year of study he dropped out of school to spend a year "hunting and fishing." During the early part of his career Vliet happened to attend a Teachers College at Holyoke. He entered the University of Michigan where his education was completed.

His first assignment was to reopen a school that had been closed due to the economic depression. Vliet earned $10 a month for the three-month period.

"My board and room came to $8 a month, but somehow I managed to pay my school bills," he said. "I would have been off the payroll long before that, but I had a job to attend school.

"I have a tooth pulled," he said. After a single term in school at Seymour Lake, Vliet returned to his home town of Clarkson and began teaching in the high school for $20 a month.

Two years later, after receiving a first grade certificate he was named principal of Clarkson High School. The next three summers were spent attending the University of Michigan where Vliet was awarded a life teaching certificate.

During his summers at U-M Vliet met and married Minna Wilder. After his graduation from Michigan, Vliet was offered and accepted the job of superintendent of the village schools in the Village of Birmingham.

Fortunately for Birmingham Vliet chose the latter.

When Mr. and Mrs. Vliet arrived in Birmingham with their two chil- dren, they found a "fence post village of about 1,500 people."

"I had 10 teachers, one building (Hall School) and one room finished at Barnett," Vliet said. For his efforts he was to receive $1,200 a year.

"It was obvious Birmingham was a school district that was going to grow," he said.

"ALTHOUGH THE ACADEMIC program was in good shape, no attempt had been made to provide a vocational or commercial program, and the athletic program was indifferent," he added.

Vliet describes his 15 years in Birmingham.

The Birmingham Board of Education in 1915 as a half-century ago. The State Board of Education has included, 1915-1918, R. J. Coryell; 1918 to 1920: W. C. Harlan.

Finances Created Problems

In Early Years for B of E

By MARY BAHN
Staff Writer

Birmingham's Board of Education had many problems during its official record began in 1886, but the most troublesome seemed most likely was finances. Many of the earlier problems facing the board can only be as- sumed, however, until 1917, because incomplete or even nonexistent records were kept until then. Clarence Vliet became superintendent of schools in 1915.

RECORDS ARE sketchy on the board's action, and except for newspaper clippings in 1931 through 1934, written accounts of the board's action are available. The board of 1900 faced serious financial difficulties in February when treasurer John H. Roeser protested the issuance of $20,000 worth of scrip in lieu of cash to school employees. Although the suggestion stirred a big controversy in the town, the measure was passed and the schools opened. Keeping the schools open for the year required $41,000 deficit.

The crop was perpetuated because the board had succeeded in collecting only 80 percent of the taxes and no additional state aid was received because the school board had not spent the year's $2,000 insurance.

"ALTHOUGH RPT. of schools showed W. E. Cassady and Ray A. Palmer, president of the board, wanted to depit from the original school calendar and shorten the school year to alleviate the fina-

l burden, Birmingham residents felt that this was an "unsound idea." Said a resident, Frank C. Newell of Lake Park Drive:

"Our schools are Birmingham's greatest asset and if you close your schools, you won't collect taxes, because property won't be worth anything."

The issuance of scrip and the abandonment of a "strictly cash" rule also caused the resignation of the board's publicity director who led the tax stimulation campaign. Charles S. Kinclson.

Clarence Vliet, who was superintendent of the Birmingham Educational Society show the board's campaign to get the people to pay their taxes-and they were successful. In less than two weeks five more than one percent of the taxes were paid. Within the next six days, levies totalling slightly more than an additional one percent were paid.

THE STATE BOARD OF EVDUATION caused Birmingham's rescue in April of 1935 when they approved a $20,000 loan that would keep the schools open until June. The measure passed, but the school board fired the man who had recommended the loan.

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