

SIMS

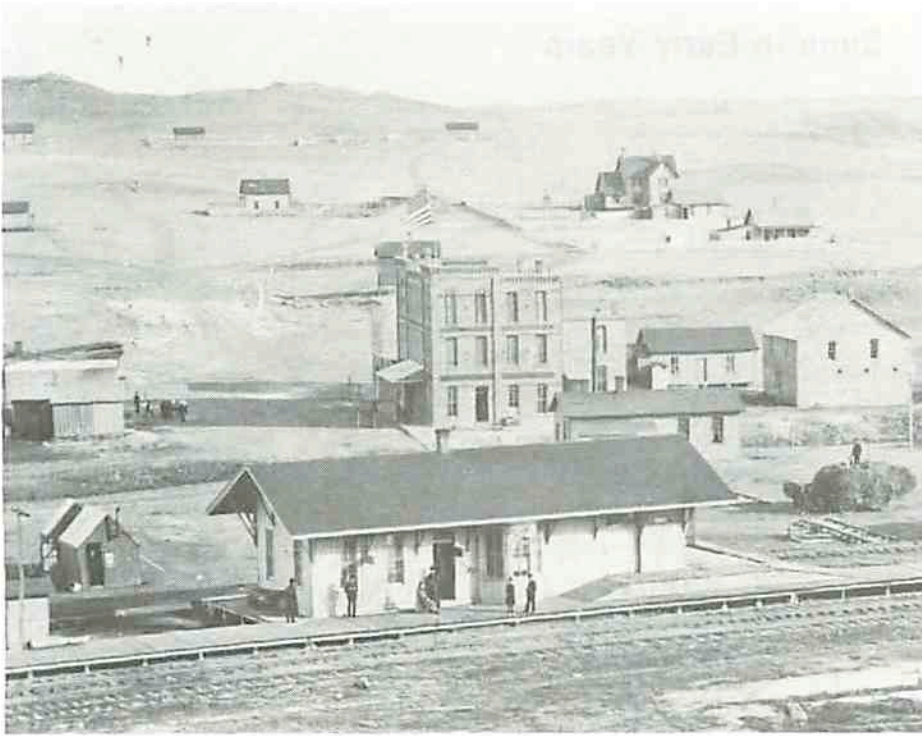
by Sig Peterson

According to "The Record," a Fargo publication, Dennis Hannafin and John S. Warn (likely NPPR surveyors) opened a coal mine about 35 miles west of Mandan in the fall of 1873. They had several brushes with the Indians, so General Custer issued them government rifles. It was then listed as Fort Hannafin. They abandoned the mine later that winter.

The Northern Pacific Railroad tracks reached Fort Hannafin in September 1879. The abundance of spring water and outcroppings of coal made it a promising site for a town. A side-track was made and boxcars were set off for shelter and temporary business places. An 1880 map shows it named "Baby Mine." In 1882 the NP station was named "Bly's Mine." Col. E.H. Bly had purchased all of section 11-138-86 from the railroad company. He opened a coal mine and sold coal to the railroad company for \$2.25 a ton. Charles W. Thompson had opened a mine in 1879 and managed it for the railroad company. At this time locomotives were fired with wood because they could not accommodate coal; however, the conversion to coal was soon to take place.

A list of railroad stations from Mandan west, as of July 15, 1882, shows the following: Mandan, Marmot, Sweetbriar, Sedalia, Blue Grass, Cold Spring, Bly's Mine, Curlew, Kurtz, Eagles Nest, Knife River, Taylor, etc. Cold Spring was a side track 1¼ miles north of Bly's Mine; there the locomotives took water before the pumping facilities at Bly's Mine were made.

1883 was a booming year for this area. The town was surveyed and named Sims in honor of George V. Sims, chief clerk in the New York railroad office. Streets were named Bly, Clough, Taylor, Haupt, etc., indicating it was predominately English. Other local names were McKee, Oaks, Sanborn, Dows, Luke, Hansel, etc.



Sims - 1885 - Dakota Territory

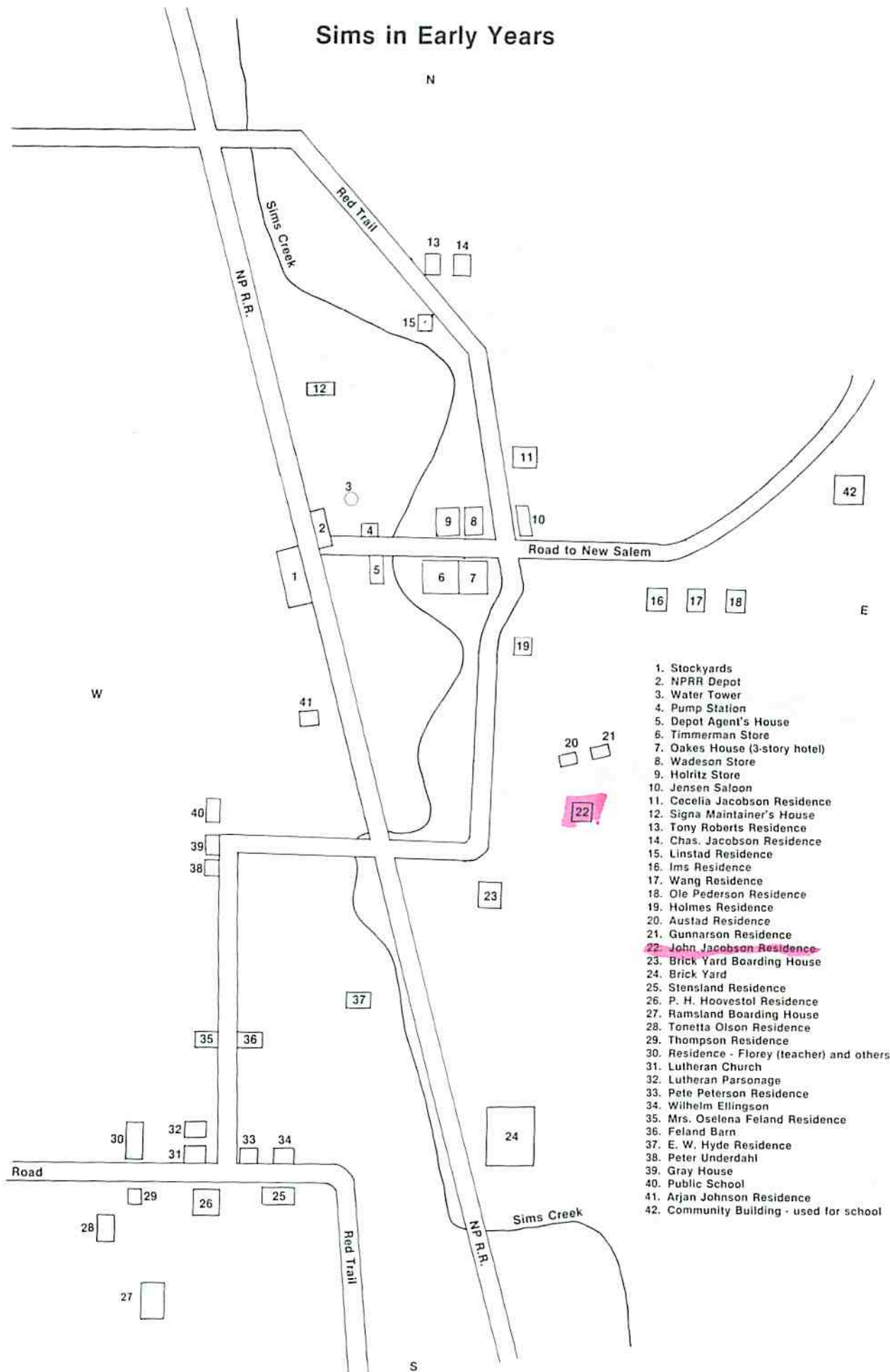


Sims, ND - about 1900



Sims, ND - about 1900

Sims in Early Years



- 1. Stockyards
- 2. N.P.R.R. Depot
- 3. Water Tower
- 4. Pump Station
- 5. Depot Agent's House
- 6. Timmerman Store
- 7. Oakes House (3-story hotel)
- 8. Wadson Store
- 9. Holritz Store
- 10. Jensen Saloon
- 11. Cecelia Jacobson Residence
- 12. Signa Maintainer's House
- 13. Tony Roberts Residence
- 14. Chas. Jacobson Residence
- 15. Linstad Residence
- 16. Ims Residence
- 17. Wang Residence
- 18. Ole Pederson Residence
- 19. Holmes Residence
- 20. Austad Residence
- 21. Gunnarson Residence
- 22. John Jacobson Residence
- 23. Brick Yard Boarding House
- 24. Brick Yard
- 25. Stenstand Residence
- 26. P. H. Hoovestol Residence
- 27. Ramsland Boarding House
- 28. Tonetta Olson Residence
- 29. Thompson Residence
- 30. Residence - Florey (teacher) and others
- 31. Lutheran Church
- 32. Lutheran Parsonage
- 33. Pete Peterson Residence
- 34. Wilhelm Ellingson
- 35. Mrs. Oselena Feland Residence
- 36. Feland Barn
- 37. E. W. Hyde Residence
- 38. Peter Underdahl
- 39. Gray House
- 40. Public School
- 41. Arjan Johnson Residence
- 42. Community Building - used for school

Also in 1883 Charles Thompson started a store and the Carbon Pressed Brick and Lime Company was organized with Charles Thompson as manager. This brick factory had investments of \$30,000, and bricks from this company were shipped to Bismarck, Mandan and used locally. The Oakes House, a three story hotel was also built in 83 at a cost of about \$15,000. In the hotel were the offices of the N.P. company coal mine and Carbon Pressed Brick and Lime Company. A tornado later in 1883 took the roof off the Oakes house and wrecked the N.P. water tower; the home of Arjan Johnson was also wrecked.

The first N.P. depot agent was George H. Luke; in 1880 the postmaster was Robert McKee; the nearest postoffice to the east was Mandan.

The population of Sims increased rapidly; there was work in the many underground coal mines and in the brick factory. Among the first Scandinavians to arrive was the Jonas Ims family who came from Iowa in a covered wagon drawn by oxen. They came on July 4, 1881. Also in 1881 the Ben Ramsland and Arjan Johnson families arrived.

The first church congregation was Presbyterian; the first cemetery was west and north of town and was referred to as the English cemetery. The Lutheran congregation was organized September 30, 1884.

In 1884 there were three general merchandise stores in Sims, two real estate offices and several other business places. A community building was constructed about ¼ mile east of downtown Sims at a cost of \$5,000. This two-room building was used as a school until 1909. School was held three months in the fall and three in the spring. Attendance at this site was up to 80. In 1909 the new school was built south of town.

On November 18, 1890 the residents were



First auto in Sims - owned by Andrew Holritz.

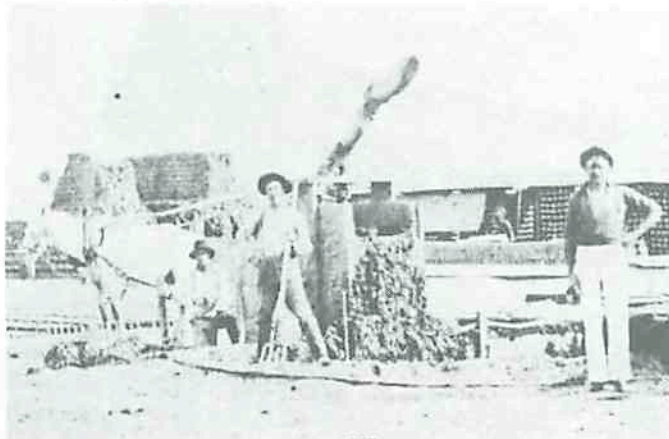
warned of a Sioux Indian uprising and were advised to entrench themselves on the highest hill. This they did on the Anderson Hill northwest of the church. People came from far and near for protection. Mr. Steen (later of Carson) delivered government rifles. He said there were 450 able bodied men in Sims at that time. Some of the local residents did not go up on the hill, but they were advised to be ready at a moment's notice. John Peterson had guard duty. Fortunately the Indians did not come.

By 1886 Sims was already starting to go down hill. The bricks were not of durable quality and better coal had been discovered in Montana. At the peak it is estimated that the Sims population could have been about 1200. A Norwegian newspaper clipping of 1889 states that there was a hotel, a boarding house, two real estate offices, a school, a church, four coal mines and three stores. The stores were operated by Fred Holritz, a Norwegian; Jack Wadeson, an Englishman and C. L. Timmerman, a German. Timmerman had the largest establishment dealing in general merchandise, hardware, lumber, grain, banking, post office and hotel. When Timmerman moved to Almont the office was moved to the depot. Dave Pederson later bought the Wadeson store and when Almont started, he and Fred Holritz moved down there. Fred Holritz moved back to Sims in 1913 after selling his store in Almont to C. E. Kelsven.

Ranchers from as far as the South Dakota state line drove their cattle to Sims for shipping as it was the nearest facility. A locomotive and caboose would often times come up from Mandan



Willman funeral procession.
Sims brickyard about 1885.



Timmerman's store-depot-water tower and water pumping and treating plant.



and load an entire train load. A 1902 brand book shows 75 brands recorded to stockmen with Sims addresses.

The population census of 1906 shows 300 for Sims; by 1910 it was down to 86. The two-room school house located about $\frac{1}{8}$ mile north of the church had an enrollment of 40 to 50 with two teachers; by 1920 the enrollment had dropped to the extent that only one teacher was necessary. The school was later closed and moved to Amont for a teacherage.

Sims has been noted for the abundance of good spring water. Much coffee water was hauled to Almont before the new wells were dug. All locomotives took water there; a steam pumping and treating plant operated 24 hours per day. All east and west traffic went through Sims both by rail and road. In 1928 the new U.S. No. 10 highway was completed between New Salem and Glen Ullin; the automobile traffic was then very much reduced. On December 6, 1947 the N.P.P.R. abandoned the road through Sims and began service on the short cut from New Salem to Glen Ullin. A store and post office was maintained until the final day. It was operated by Simon Johnson until he passed away, at which time Ervin Olin took over his uncle's duties.

The only original buildings still standing are the Lutheran Church, where services are held every Sunday; the parsonage occupied by Willard Johnson; the living quarters of the Holritz store and the Anderson house (also referred to as the Gray house).



Gray house - 1890.



Gray house - 1980.

CURLEW

CURLEW

(Lying in the Shadow of the Three Buttes)
By Leon Olson

Curlew was the name given to a railroad station located approximately six miles west of Almont. Railroad records state that the name was chosen because of the long-billed bird, known as the Curlew, which was a summer resident of that area. Even today, the birds are seen in that area.

The depot and the section house at Curlew were built in 1879 when the Northern Pacific laid out the tracks west of Mandan. The section house was completed before the Northern Pacific bridge was completed over the Missouri River.

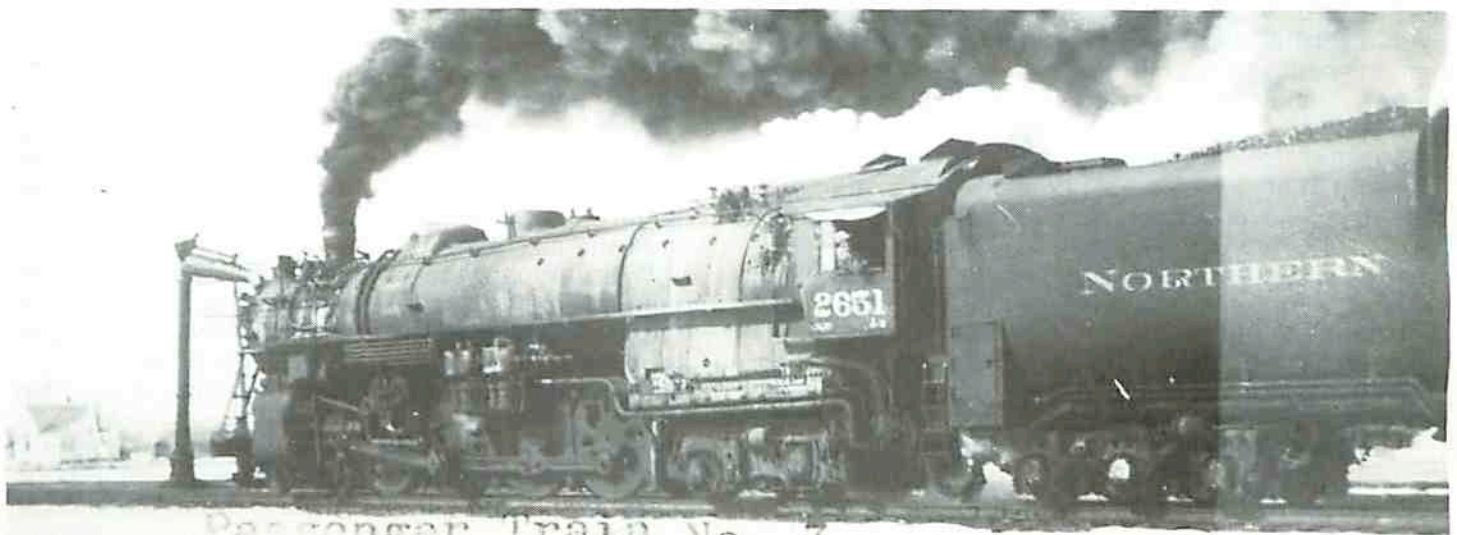
The section house was a boarding house in a sense, as the occupants were required to have a place available for the section men to room and board. This made it possible for the men to be available at anytime in case they were needed for emergencies such as broken rails, stuck switches or any other situation which would require immediate attention.

In addition to the section men, there were occasions which required "Extra Gangs" to be brought in to do some special work on the track or bridges.

Several special railroad cars were placed on the spur track and these cars were modified to serve as sleeping and eating quarters for the men. Also, other cars were fixed up to be "cook-cars" where the meals were prepared. No fancy foods ever came out of the "cook-car" but they did keep the men alive.

Some of these gangs employed close to 100 people but most of them numbered fewer than 50 workers. The men on these gangs represented a wide range of ages and also consisted of men of

September, 1956, saw the last of the steam locomotives. Photo by Fred Ramsland, Almont.



Passenger Train No. 3

March 19, 1956

PETITION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF POST OFFICE

June 7th 1911

To the Postmaster General:

We, the undersigned, respectfully request the establishment of a post office to be known as

Curlew Postoffice County, N. Dak.

(see the reverse of this form) and the appointment as postmaster of

Almont

Postoffice County, N. Dak.

The three nearest post offices to the proposed office and their distance and direction therefrom are as follows:

OFFICE	DISTANCE	DIRECTION
Almont	6 Miles	East
Blue Hill	12 Miles	West
Ima	12 Miles	East

The nearest railroad station is Curlew

SIGNATURES (PETITIONERS MUST SIGN PERSONALLY)	SIGNATURES (PETITIONERS MUST SIGN PERSONALLY)
J. P. Mullett	Louis Erickson
J. B. Galanderson	Gust Jacobson
J. A. Galanderson	Helga Jacobson
Otto Christenson	Gu. Boudet
Mary Christensen	Geo. W. Hanson
Lena Quesenberry	Simon Christenson
Donnie J. Sale	Walter Johnson
	John F. McLean
	Amada Nelson
	John J. Higgins
	Emma Maty Higgins
	Andrew Jorgenson
	Anna Jorgenson
	C. B. Jorgenson
	Henry Smith
	John B. Jorgenson

ADDITIONAL NAMES MAY BE APPENDED TO THIS PETITION

Form 1071

3-1911

many nationalities - many of them barely able to speak and understand English.



Curlew section crew, left to right, Beas Olson, Eilert Smordal, Ole Feland, Fred Holritz, Tollef Christianson and Carl Kilen.

Water was supplied from a "water-box" which was dug into the ground and filled with water each week from a water car on the local train.

A large ice-house, made of timbers, was filled with ice each winter to be used the following summer. The ice was shipped in by rail in the form of huge cakes which the section men skidded into the ice-house by means of a make-shift chute made out of grain doors. A heavy layer of sawdust was then spread over the ice chunks to keep them from melting. Ice preserved in this manner would last all summer to be used in the water kegs taken out on the job. The ice was also used to make ice cream with a hand-crank freezer.

People living in the Curlew area were able to use the railroad for passenger service. For many years there were eight passenger trains a day and they were able to board the train at the depot. At one time, three full-time operators were employed at the depot, but it was finally closed in 1917. Even after the depot was no longer in operation, a person could flag certain passenger trains by merely standing on the track and waving one's arms. Later, it became more sophisticated and a person had to wave a white flag provided specifically for that purpose. (It might be interesting to note that all even-numbered trains were eastbound and all odd-numbered trains were westbound). No ticket was required to board the train - all you had to do was fork over the cash to the conductor, an amount he would determine by looking in his little black fare book.

Soon after the coming of the railroad, Curlew became much more than just a location on the railroad system. It became a community. Settlers in the area soon dotted the landscape and with the settlers came children. Children meant schools and as a result the Benson school was built one mile from Curlew. The school building,

however, served the community in a manner far greater than that of just a school house for it was also the location for church services for many years. Also, the Curlew Ladies Aid served many huge meals in the basement of the school to help raise money to support the minister who came from Sims to meet the religious needs of the community.

For the kids, the Ladies Aid Social was a big event and they all looked forward to it with eagerness. Not only could they stuff their stomachs with the best food ever, but it also provided an evening of giggling for the girls and an evening of roughhousing for the boys. Likewise, the younger kids could really make it tough on the older boys who might like to gain the attention of the older girls. There was no privacy for the couple holding hands and the teasing was incessant. In spite of all this, the course of true love did succeed in some instances and marriages did take place.

The Ladies Aid Fall Festival also provided an opportunity for politicians to appear and appeal for votes for the up-coming elections. They looked out of place there and for the most part we never saw them again after the elections were over.

Christmas programs in the school were well attended with far more people stuffed into the school than fire laws would permit - but who cared about that as long as the candles were lit and the kids were performing. I guess it would be safe to say that no child prodigies were ever discovered but several did learn to play the "sweet potato" producing notes that only a mother could love and a father endure. By the time the program was over, the schoolhouse was hot and steamy inside and everyone was ready for Santa Claus. Several of the older children helped Santa pass out the gifts and sacks holding hard candy, peanuts, animal crackers and one orange. No child was overlooked even though the gift might be nothing more than a popcorn ball.

Another well attended event in the community was a local dance. Furniture would be moved out of a room and a couple of local musicians would play until the wee hours of the morning. The room was small but the enthusiasm was large and no one seemed to care that the musician might miss a note or two. It was not a music appreciation course - it was a chance to have fun and that's what they had.

Whist also helped pass the time on a long winter's evening. Some players took the game seriously and others did not, but win or lose, lunch would be served and the game forgotten until the next time.

With the passage of time and the passing of the railroad, many of those families no longer live in the community. However, some of the offspring of former families still live on some of the places. Other houses are empty and perhaps never again will hear the steam coming from the teakettle or the laughter of children but the memories linger on for those who grew up in that community. It was no different in many ways from other communities but it was theirs and that makes all the difference in the world.