

The Record of an Indiana School District, 1837-1844

*Edited by Arthur R. Hogue**

The lack of a centralized, state-wide system of schools produced a condition in Indiana, during the period 1816-1843, which contemporary observers and later historians viewed with regret. Indeed, not until after the Civil War did the schools secure a real measure of state organization. Prior to that time the purely local character of school management permitted school district trustees to provide terms of unequal length, books of their own choice, poorly qualified teachers, and their own methods of payment. This situation, wrote Logan Esarey: "lasted until the revision of the school law of 1843. The latter date perhaps marks the lowest level of general intelligence ever reached in the State. The harmful effects of the failure to organize were felt in all classes and fields of social life."¹

The document published here throws some light on the procedures and financial records actually employed by school district trustees in Jennings County, which, by reason of its proximity to the Ohio River, had received an influx of settlers as early as 1815 and by 1830 contained a population of 3,950.²

In stark simplicity the document sets forth the affairs of School District No. 6 in Congressional Township 6 North Range 9 East. Located in the southeastern part of Jennings County, it comprised most of Bigger Township and part of Vernon Township.³

The manuscript, discovered in 1949 by the editor, consists of sixteen soiled and faded pages, 5½" x 7¾", stitched together to form a little book without covers. Since the pages are not numbered one can only conjecture that they form the entire account without breaks or omissions until the voters decided to discontinue the school. So far as possible the arrangement of the materials and the spelling of the unknown clerks is re-

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¹ *A History of Indiana* (2d. ed., 2 vols., Indianapolis, 1918), I, 329-30.

² *Ibid.*, I, 315, quoting the *Vevay Messenger*, September 27, 1831.

³ *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana* (Chicago, 1876), 146.

produced exactly as written without editorial comment. At this point, however, one can note the variation in the spelling of family names. Thus one finds: Agon, Agan, or Again; Bingaman, or Bingerman; Frasee, or Frasey; Hughs, or Hughes; McLaughlin, or Mcglaughin; Vardiman, Vardaman, or Vardamon.

Terminology within the document deserves a word of explanation. For example, the "draw," mentioned on September 3, 1838; February 27, 1839; March, 1840; and March 28, 1844, undoubtedly refers to the funds available to the school district trustees, who, by a law of 1833, could "draw" on the township treasurer for sums produced by the sale or lease of land within section 16 of the congressional township, section 16 being land set apart for school purposes.⁴ Since these funds could be deposited, if the school trustees so desired, one will come across references to drawing the interest (6%) on March 1 and September 1.

The financial amounts given in the document will not seem large to modern readers accustomed to modern prices, nor were they actually impressive amounts a century ago. Land sold at about two dollars an acre; thus an entire section might produce only \$1,280.00 for educational purposes when a certain section 16 was entirely sold. This was supplemented, of course, by school taxes, managed by the school district trustees and paid by each qualified voter according to his wealth. Moreover, the trustees could hold each male freeholder liable for two days work each year on the schoolhouse. How heavily the school tax bore upon those paying it—and what the financial compensation meant in real income for the teacher—can be indicated roughly by giving some prices for the period. A letter from Hamilton County, 1840, stated that in central Indiana: "wheat is worth 50cts per bushel; corn 18¾ to 25 cts; oats 18¾ cts; Irish potatoes, 12½ cts; sweet from 37½ to 50 cts per bushel. Pork is worth 3½ cts per pound; beef 2½ to 3 cts per lb.; butter 8½; honey 10cts; suger (home) 12½; New Orleans, 14; tallow 10; beeswax 25 cts; chickens 75cts per doz., eggs 4cts doz."⁵

⁴ "An Act incorporating congressional townships and providing for public schools therein," February 2, 1833, *Laws of Indiana, 1832-1833*, pp. 78-104; see also the law of February 17, 1838, dealing with the procedure of drawing interest on school funds deposited with the superintendent of the loan office, *Revised Statutes of Indiana, 1838*, pp. 509-45.

⁵ Nathan Parker, Westfield, Hamilton County, Indiana, to Nancy Crew, Mt. Pleasant, Jefferson County, Ohio, December 20, 1840. An unpublished letter in the possession of the editor.

The attendance record for the period from October 14, 1839, to January 11, 1840, of the document must represent the total numbers of pupil-days attended by all of the children of one family, for the totals are too high, in some cases, to have been accumulated by the attendance of one pupil. Five of the entries show totals of one hundred or more; the maximum number of days between the opening and the closing of school—between October 14 and January 11—is 88, including Sundays.

School laws required the trustees to make the enumeration of pupils between the ages of five and twenty-one. They also required the trustees to keep a record of the land held by the qualified voters.⁶ The holdings of the voters are not given at any point in the document which follows.

A list of the names of
the inhabitants entitled to
vote with the number of children
in congressional township No 6
in township [range?] No. 9, in school district
No 6, in said township
August 24th 1837

Rott [Robt?]		James Brown	7
Armstrong	2	Isaac hughs	
John Anderson	9	James hughs	9
Joseph Mosley	9	sarah Jones	5
James M Torbet		Vardiman hughs	
John brown	3	David brown	
John Mc laughlin	5		
Isaac Frasee			

September the 6th 1837
Received for school house purposes

	cts		cts
James hughs	18¾	John Brown	12[½?]
David Brown	12½	Isaac hughs	25
Joseph Mosley	12½	John Trousdail	12½
Isaac Frasee	12½	James M Torbet	25
James Brown	12½	Vardiman hughs	12½

A list of the names of the
inhabitants Entitled to vote with
the number of children in

⁶ *Laws of Indiana, 1832-1833*, pp. 78-104; *Revised Statutes of Indiana, 1838*, pp. 509-45.

the 6 District in Township
No 6 March 1st 1838 —

James Hughes	4	David Brown	
Sarah Jones	5	John McLaughlin	5
Vardaman Hughes		Isaac Hughes	
John Anderson	9	James M Torbet	2
Joseph Mosley	4	Robt. Armstrong	2
John Brown	3	James Frasey	1
James Brown	7		

September the 3rd 1838
An act of the 6th District in
Town 6 of Range 9 The voters
of said District doth her by
order that their portion of
the School funds remain in
intrest till next March
Draw in the year 1839

Febuary the 27th 1839
anumeration of pupels
between the age of 5 and 21 in
the 6 District in Town 6
of Range 9

John Anderson	8	Joseph Mosley	5
Robt. Armstrong	3	John Brown	3
John Mclaughlin	6	Sarah Jones	6
James Brown	8	James Hughes	2
James M Torbet	1	Robert Torbet	1
	—		—
	26		17
	17		
	—		
Total	48	Amount	
		N B	

Febuary the 27th 1839
A meting of the qualified
voters in the 6 district in town
6 of 9 Range

Art. 1 that the trustees of sd
District draw and make distri
bution of that portion of money
due the 6 district at September
Draw 1838 that was ordered
on intrest til March draw

the year 1839
february 27 1839
By order of the voters in
6 District the trustees of sd
district draw and apply that
portion due them at March
draw to the furnishing of
the School house

the trustees has ishued orders
for that purpes —
School Bill

School Bill for the year 1839
Commenced oct 14th Same year &
Ending on the 11th January 1840
In the 6 District in Town 6 Range 9
Shewing the names of pupils as
also the No of Days for Each one
of them as follows towit

Sally Jones	----- no of Days -----	45
Isaac Hughs	----- do -----	59
Vardamon Hughs	----- do -----	11
Joseph Mosley	----- do -----	142
John Anderson	----- do -----	105
John Brown	----- do -----	116
John Mcglaughlin	----- do -----	102
Robt Armstrong	----- do -----	100

Taught by David King

[Various arithmetical calculations
which cannot be related
to the other materials.]

Febuary the 28th 1840
A list of the pupils betwen 5 and
21 years old in the 6 District in
Town 6 of Range 9

Joseph Mosley	-----	5
Thomas Agon	-----	2
John Mcglaughlin	-----	4
James Hughs	-----	1
Robt. Torbet	-----	1

Robt. Armstrong - - - - - 3
 Vardamon Hughs - - - - - 1
 James Brown - - - - - 5
 John Brown - - - - - 4
 John Anderson - - - - - 7
 Sally Jones - - - - - 3

—
 Total 36

Received of the Town Ship
 Treasurer 14 Dollars 37½ cents
 Of March draw for 1840 and made
 Destribution on D. Kings school
 [This section with a large X drawn through it]
 Febuary the 27th 1841

A list of the pupils between 5
 and 21 years old in the 6 Distr
 -ict in Town 6 Rang 9 —

John Brown - - - - - 5	Thomas Agan - - - - - 2
John Anderson - - - - 8	James Brown - - - - - 5
James M Torbet - - - - 2	John McLaughlin - - - 4
Vardamon Hughs - - - - 2	James Hughs - - - - - 3
Thomes Stott - - - - - 1	Sally Jones - - - - - 4

—
 18

—
 21

18

—
 Total 39

March the 8th 1841 Town ship Treasurer
 Received of Caleb Moncreef Elevon
 Dollars — and made Dividend
 of the Same on Averilla Barnes
 School taught in the 1840

	\$.cts
Paid John McLaughlin - - - - -	1.57½
to James Brown - - - - -	1.52
to John Brown - - - - -	1.93¾
to John Anderson - - - - -	1.87½
Vardamon Hughs - - - - -	1.37½
Sally Jones - - - - -	56¼
Robt. Armstrong - - - - -	1.18¾
Received for services - - - - -	1.00

—
 [in pencil] \$11.03¼

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Enumeration list of the Children between
5 and 21 years old in the 6 District
Town 6 Range 9 Febuary the 9th 1842

Robert Armstrong	4
James Hughs	1
Vardamon Hughs	2
Sally Jones	4
John McLaughlin	4
Thomas Agon	2
David Brown	2
John Anderson	7
John Brown	5
Thomas Stott	1
Isaac Hughs	2
Samuel Graham	3

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Numeration list of the Pupils belonging
to the 6 District in Township No 6
North of Range No 9
January the 25th 1843

Samuel graham - - - 4	John Brown - - - - 5
James Brown - - - 4	John Anderson - - - 7
Robt. Armstrong - - 4	David Brown - - - 2
John McLaughlin - - 3	Isaac Hughs - - - 3
Thomas Agan - - - 2	James Hughs - - - 1
Sarah Jones - - - 3	John Bingaman - - - 1
Vardamon Hughs - - 3	James Spalding - - 1

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Numeration list of the Pupils in
the 6 District in Township No 6
North of Range No 9

- - - - - Febuary the 8th 1844

John Anderson - - - 7	John Brown - - - - 6
Robert Armstrong - 4	James Hughs - - - 2
Vardamon Hughs - - 4	Thomas Stott - - - 2
Isaac Hughs - - - 3	John McLaughlin - - 3
Thomas Again - - - 2	John Bingerman - - 1
David Brown - - - 3	Samuel Graham - - - 4
Sally Jones - - - 3	—

26

18

26

Hole num[ber?] 44

March the 28th 1844

A cald meting in the 6 Distri
ct in Town 6 Range 9 to say
What or how said march draw
Should be appropriated

1st By order of Said District that
Said money be applied to a
Six month and a three month
School all of which was taught
By John M Vallilee

2nd that said Vallilee take said
Money at its face
Allso to say whether said
J. M. Vallilee Should teach
out his time and the vote
being taken 5 to 5 So Said
school Stopped at . . . [illegible]
the term