

January 2020

DES MOINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

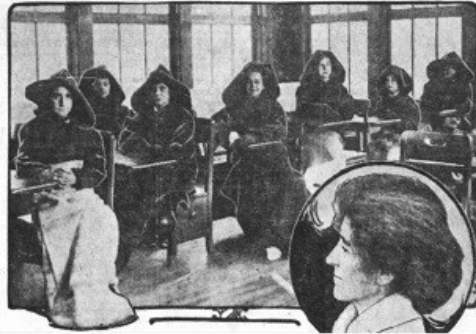
HISTORYGRAM

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An Open Air School

At the Iowa State Fair in 1912 Dr. A. E. Kepford, state lecturer on tuberculosis exhibited an open air school model. This was thought to show everything that they knew of which would make conditions healthful for school children, those "underweight or physically subnormal". The Doctor said the time to fight disease is when the children are young, build up their bodies to resist disease and the problem in a large measure would be solved.

With the idea of helping a number of children who they said could "be aided to health and happiness if there was a room equipped on top a school building for such purposes", in the Spring of 1914 the Superintendent was asked to look into the cost of establishing an open air school.



The open air school did not open on top of a school building, but in a small cottage owned by the school district south of the first North High school building at 1528 Seventh Street. After the walls were replaced by canvas and Miss Jewel Cutler was selected as the teacher, classes started November 2, 1914, with the windows wide open.

It was a prevocational school, grades third through seventh, where printing and manual training and other useful arts were taught. Over their winter clothing, a heavy woolen blanket coat, reaching to the floor, with adjustable hood, and felt boots were worn provided by the school. The teacher also wore the "Eskimo" suit. Each noon hot nourishing soup, rice, or cream of wheat was made in the school to eat with the lunch each child brought. The building had three rooms. The middle room was kept warm for students to go to when they became cold. One student said when he gets "awful cold we go into a warm room to thaw out." Any child could take a nap anytime he got sleepy.

By March 5, 1915 there was a waiting list of ten students. A student is quoted as saying "everybody is afraid of getting fat and well so they will have to leave, and I am with the rest of them on that."

By 1929 the open air school had moved to the West Junior High building at 15th and Center. Because handicapped children were a part of the attendees, all classes evolved into Smouse Opportunity School which was dedicated in 1931.