In the memory of those of us who are parents today, we cannot remember a time when we didn't have a P.T.A. In 1909 the land for the school was purchased, and building began in 1910. The school was opened in the middle of the school year of 1911, started its P.T.A. in 1912, and each year has seen an increase in membership. Its first principal was Miss Addie Thrall, and she was there 2 1/2 years. One of its first teachers was Miss Agnes Coveny, who today is living in North Mpls. Willard was an 8 room building then, but only 6 rooms were used for classes, 4 downstairs, and 2 upstairs. Miss Coveny recalls most of all the mud surrounding the school – there were no sidewalks from Penn to James.

Willard's second principal was Miss Maria Porcher. It's third principal, Miss Katherine Geater, was at Willard for 5 years, and it was during that time that the land where the lower playground now is was acquired, in 1916. In 1918 the addition to the school building was started, and this was completed in 1920.

Those early days held a sameness of activities that we have today - the P.T.A. busied itself with money-raising events so that they could do things for Willard - they gave dinners, sold tickets to the movies on which the theatre turned over the entire proceeds, and gave talent shows. There were so many things to do for this new school, built in a wilderness of wooded tracts, with homes dotted sparsely in the surrounding area - the lawn was planted from P.T.A. funds – shrubberies put in, a flagpole purchased, candelers hauled in to fill up mud holes, and the crowning purchase of glory - the day P.T.A. scraped up $35.00 to buy their first piano, and Miss Gladys Sanders had it placed in the hall so that the children could march in and out at recess times to tuneful marching music that she played.

The kindergarten at Willard School was begun in Oct. 1915, and first was held in the gymnasium. Miss Woods School furnished helpers for the kindergarten
teachers, and this practise continued until two years ago, when this school was taken over by Macalaster College.

One of F.T.A's Vice-Presidents in 1918 was Mrs. DeMille, and no matter what difficulties arose, she had the answer to the problem. Mrs. DeMille vividly remembers the day one of the teachers came to school minus a petticoat, and of course the Vice-President came to the rescue and supplied her with one.

In those long ago days, when winter set in, the school had to be dismissed if a snowstorm came up. The parents took it for granted that school would close if the elements got too rough, and when the heavy snows came, fathers would call for their children at school in bob sleds. All the teachers would remain at school until every child had been called for. All the factories in town would blow their whistles, signifying school closing, and then, because there were so few houses in the neighborhood and no sidewalks, the teachers would wrap their legs in manilla paper and struggle thru the snow to the streetcar line.

For a time, there was an Opportunity Room on the second floor of the school where overgrown boys who could not readily adjust to schedules were assimilated into school routine with an understanding of their problems.

During the early years of the period when Miss Gealer was principal, a gang of boys held sway every night, cooking up mischief. Known as THE 19TH AVE. N. GANG, they frequented the school on the nights activities were scheduled, nailing up the doors so that no one could get out, and generally making nuisances of themselves. There was a P.T.A. meeting to be held one chilly night, and the teachers stayed on after school, had their supper there, and waited in trepidation for what the evening would bring. As soon as darkness fell, Miss Gealer looked outside. Milling around the door was THE 19TH AVE. GANG. "Come inside", Miss Gealer invited -"it's cold out there". Taken by
surprise, the boys filed in. "How about going into the gymn to play a while?" Miss Coaler suggested. Sheepishly, the boys followed her into the gymn, and in a few minutes were playing and laughing. When the janitor came in to set up the chairs for the P.T.A. meeting, the boys helped him. That night marked the end of the 19TH AVE. N. GANG.

With a minimum of class rooms to work with, a plan used in the schools of Gary, Indiana, was put into effect. The auditorium was used to group hand craft, painting, folk dancing, and numerous art activities in mass groups.

When Willard had 8 grades, and an enrollment of 69 pupils, the cooking and Manual Training classes were sent over to Grant School. After the annex was built, Domestic Science and Manual Training Classes were held at Willard. The teachers were served lunch from the food made in the cooking class, and the gastronomical results must have been terrific, because Miss Coaler and Miss Sanders still boast of it.

When, after the first World War, the flu epidemic broke out over the city, Willard School was closed for a month. The students who were to graduate finished the remaining term at Grant School.

Miss Maria Lynch was Willard's 4th principal; coming in the of 1920, she stayed on for 24 years, leaving in the spring of 1944.

Just prior to Miss Lynch's arrival, the Farmers Mechanics Banking System was installed at Willard School. Under her guidance, the children banked religiously and led the city on school deposits. The Superintendent of Schools called to congratulate Miss Lynch on this fact, particularly in view of the temptation close by on 17th & Queen of a candy store. Miss Lynch tells us that she had trouble with a few pupils who would "sneak off" at recess time to spend their coppers at this store.
Now there were 29 rooms at Willard, and the school was heaping academic honors. They won citywide spelling contests, 2 English contests, and were commended highly. They had a drum and bugle corps that played at different functions. They organized a basketball team, which aroused such interest in North Mpls. that the Alumni at North High School contributed money to pay for a coach for the team. As money-raising activity, the P.T.A. experimented with operettas, and one of their star performers was Vincent Pelletier, who today is a radio announcer on a national hook-up. A cantata, THE LAND OF NOD, was presented, which proved to be so fine it was repeated at North and Central High Schools by request. Many principals from the Board of Education came to view a school program, THE MELTING POT, with the children dressed in the costumes of the different nations. One day, set aside for Boys Day, a parade of schools was held on Nicollet Ave., and Willard was awarded 1st prize on marching. Miss Sanderson tells us that when the children lined up by rooms to enter the school, they were so quiet and in such perfect order that they looked like regimented soldiers, and the room that was lined up the best was given the privilege to march in with the flag.

The P.T.A. worked diligently on the Board of Education to put up the wire fencing around the boys playground. The Board of Education, however, could not see its way clear to put up the entire retaining wall on Russell Ave., and P.T.A. spent $350.00 of its funds to assist on this project. The P.T.A. was always generous and cooperative. Because of their purchases, Willard was the only school in the city at one time to have so many encyclopedias. Among their money-raising functions were Card Parties, a Hard Time Party, and a program called DISTRICT SCHOOL. Miss Mae Riley took the part of the Schoolmaster in this classic, and Mrs. Ray Eward and Miss Lois Zickefoose sang "You Can't Skide Down my Rainbarrel".

At one time a poor family moved into the district, and they had 6 children. Miss Lynch told about their circumstances one night at a P.T.A/ meeting, someone
passed a hat, and a collection was taken up for them. It was also decided to hold a pound party for their benefit, and 4 truckloads of food was sent to the school, which Miss Lynch apportioned out to the family as she felt they needed it.

The 7th and 8th grades had been dropped from Willard in the fall of 1923. However, in 1934 there was such a huge enrollment at North High, that they sent their 10th grades over to Lincoln Jr. and the 7th and 8th grades were returned to Willard and held there for 5 years, when the situation returned to normal.

For the large money-raising events, Lincoln Jr. always offered their auditorium facilities. A huge Red Cross pageant was staged there, which enriched the P.T.A. greatly. From proceeds of card parties held at Willard, the P.T.A. bought all the card tables that we use at the present time.

When athletic events and tournaments were held in the city, Willard always participated, and one year won the highest award in the city. Many of the plaques and trophies that were awarded for achievements are now missing from the school, but some have been located and are on display here tonight.

One year a lawn social was held on the playground, and for several years, a neighborhood picnic was held at North Commons on the last night of school, with all of the parents, children, and teachers participating. Doughnut and candy sales were popular events for money raising at school.

Little tragedies crept in, too, like the night a graduating class spent long hours decorating the Lunch Room for their class party the next day. They were at school so late hanging up decorative streamers, that when the janitor came along and saw all the trimmings, he took it for granted that the party had already been held. The next morning when the class arrived to view their handiwork prior to the party, they found that all their trimmings had been taken down and burned.

All present day parents are familiar with the trips their first grade children make to Ewald Creamery. This field trip originated 25 years ago and has been a feature of the first grade classes ever since.
6. The Bwald Singing Quartette had its inception from Willard School. During the time your narrator was P.T.A. President, there was a dirth of entertainment to be secured for P.T.A. programs. At that time, the Wonder Baker Boys were very popular, and the idea of an Bwald Quartette stemmed from that.

For many years, as a Decoration Day program, the Blue and Grey veterans from the Old Soldiers Home came to Willard, and the children looked forward to seeing these old heroes. One year the P.T.A. put on a circus program. It ran two nights, one night for children, the next night for adults. The rooms were converted into tents, there was a House of Fun, a Fortune Telling Booth, and popcorn and peanuts were sold. Star attraction of the circus was Hy Juster, Mpls. attorney, who performed in a cage as the Wild Man From Borneo.

From the proceeds of this money-raising event, a radio phonograph was purchased for the school.

Mrs. A. Lebowska, who was a P.T.A. President in 1944, tells us that they staged A DAY IN SCHOOL, with parents dressed as children sitting on the stage. This must have been a forerunner of the Kindergarten Act our President P.T.A. put on at our last two Variety Shows. It was during Mrs. Lebowska's presidency that Miss Lynch retired, and she was presented with a gold watch by the P.T.A.

During World War II, the Food Rationing Program was administered from Willard School.

In 1944 Miss Alfreda Voight came to Willard as Principal, and remained for 3 years.

It was during this time that the P.T.A. started to build the Willard Library collection through Literary Guild subscriptions for books. In 1945 also the P.T.A. purchased 12 radios and 2 record players. In 1946 the P.T.A. redecorated the teachers rest room, furnishing the lamp, lounge chair, davenport, drapes, and a large picture. They also purchased the coffee urn and lace tablecloth we use at meetings.

Miss Doris Blunt came to us as Principal in the fall of 1947, and it was that year, under the P.T.A. Presidency of Mr. Ronald Harrison, that the P.T.A. solicited the Board of Education for permission to install new lighting equipment in the Willard classrooms. The P.T.A. spent almost $200 for Music Appreciation and Rhythm Records. In 1948, under the Presidency of Mr. John Guptil, new lights were installed in 18 classrooms and a new brightness dawned in Willard. A card party was the chief means of money-raising that year.
In 1949 the P.T.A. became very ambitious again and presented a Variety Show at Lincoln Jr High School. Teachers and parents alike participated in this new entertainment, and the P.T.A. President, Dr. Maurice Gilbert, dropped his professional dignity to become a Spanish dancer. An Ad book was sold for this show, and the money poured into the P.T.A. Treasury. A large transcription player and 2 small record players were bought for the school with the profits from this affair.

In 1950-51 a second Variety Show was given at Lincoln Jr. High and it financially profited the school by the purchase of a film strip projector, $200.00 worth of film strips, 4 record players, drums for the orchestra, and horizontal bars for the playground. Mrs. Robert Mauer was the P.T.A. President that year.

This past week (Apr. 29, 1952) has seen the presentation of Willard's most spectacular production to date, the musical operetta, THE TOREADORS, with a cast of parents and teachers. Prior to this, the P.T.A. had already presented a check of $600.00 to Miss Blunt for the purchase of 2 record players, film strips, a shuffle board, and an opaque projector.

With visual education the keynote, the parents and teachers, working together in harmony and friendship, are bringing our children at Willard the finest equipment a modern school can desire - an achievement begun 41 years ago that is reaping dividends in community spirit.