

# Life in a one-room school

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Most of the one-room schools followed the practice of ringing the school bell at 8:30 a.m. followed by another ringing at 8:55 a.m. If the 8:30 a.m. bell failed to ring, there would be no school that day. The 8:55 bell gave students five minutes to get seated before the 9 a.m. starting time.

Nearby students soon became attuned to the times others who lived farther from school came by their houses and joined them for the walk to school, all arriving together.

The two one room schools that I attended were about the same in construction. I can't recall the dimensions exactly, but I would guess about 20 feet by 40 feet with three tall windows on each side. Both had a sheltered entrance area at the main door. In that area were hooks for hanging coats and hats and shelves for storing school lunches. Both schools were heated with furnaces which burned a combination of wood and coal. Both provided an older male student to clean the building and to build and keep the fire through the day. To do so the janitor had to come early and stay after the other students had gone home. For this service the school board paid five dollars a month. I looked forward to becoming old enough to apply for that job, but before I had become that "grown up" the school boards began allowing the teachers to do their own cleaning up and firing and drawing the five dollars pay for themselves. The teachers gained and the students lost the jobs.

In fair weather, we tried to get to school early so that we could have a short play time before school began.

In the school that I attended first, Little River, we played a type of baseball that we called "Scrub." The little kids had a sort of abbreviated diamond with only three bases: first, second (in the place of third) and home. When we reached school, we raced in to the entry and hung our coats, put up our lunches and rushed out to play "Scrub." We would bid for positions by calling "Scrub" and a number — "Scrub" 1 or 2 or 3 and so on. Most of the time the Scrub 1 and 2 were the starting batters. With only two batters we used only first base and home. If we had enough players we used all three bases. With just two batters, the Scrub 3 bidder was the catcher, the 4th the pitcher and the 5th on first base and so forth. If the first batter hit and didn't get back home, the second batter tried to hit and bat him in. If the first batter failed to get home on the second batter's hit, he was out and had to take the last place in the field and everyone moved up one place. The catcher became the batter and the pitcher became catcher, etc. If the first batter failed to hit safely, he was out and took the last place on the field and all players moved up one position. If the second batter failed to hit safely and struck out or flied out the runner on first held his place and the former catcher became the next batter. When the final bell rang, someone grabbed the bat and ball and all went inside.

The interior of those school buildings was plastered with what I think was sanded plaster and wainscoting on the lower three and a half feet. The plastered area above the wainscoting was painted. To the right of the entry door at the corner was a small table on which sat a pail

of water in which was a dipper. All persons drank from the dipper. The second teacher that I had at my first one room country school changed that. She bought each of the students a cup. The cups were enameled and different colors. She had a nail driven into the top border of the wainscot and wrote a student's name by each nail.

The desks were of the kind used at that time. The frames were cast iron with wood seats. The top and back were fastened to the cast iron with wood screws. There were three sizes. The small desks were on one side of the room. The middle size, then the larger on the other side. There were what was called recitation seats in front of the individual seats with their ends extending nearly to the wall on each side. There was a space equal to about two aisles of student seats between the inside ends of the recitation seats. Recitation seats used three of the regular desk frames with the backs removed. When the wood seat and back were attached to the cast iron frames, the result was somewhat like the seats used in church commonly referred to as pews.

The movement from desk to recitation seat was somewhat regimented. The order was like: Third grade arithmetic "Stand," after which that class stood; "Pass," and all of the class moved to the middle of the aisle, turned and walked to the front end of the aisle and upon reaching the front of the aisle turned again and stood facing the front of the building in front of the recitation seat; and, then, on the command of "Be Seated" sat down. If a student was called upon to recite he was expected to stand. When the class ended, the movement back to

the seats was the former movement in reverse.

There was a 15 minute recess at 10:30 a.m., an hour lunch period starting at noon and a 15 minute recess for the higher grades at 2:30 p.m. when the school day ended for the lower three grades when those students were sent home.

In addition to the ball playing at recess and lunch, they played "Anti-Over, Prisoners Goal, Run Sheep, Run and Stealing Sticks. Sometimes the boys brought their hoops to school and some competition developed. In bad weather the big kids square danced. The little kids often went outside and played — sometimes in the snow, sometimes in the woodshed. The same teacher who provided the cups, was quite generous in the winter. She would send four of the boys to the island in the lake and have us clean the snow from near the island for a place on which to skate. There were large logs that were placed just the right height to sit on, a sort of triangle facing the lake. We cleared the snow off the logs and from inside the triangle. On the open side toward the lake we would place wood for a fire. Then after dark we would gather and bring lanterns and our skates. The lanterns along with the fire would light the skating area and the triangle. The teacher would provide hot dogs and buns and tomato soup. She had a portable, hand-wound, spring-driven Victrola and records. We had music, a warm fire and warm food during breaks in our skating. About 10 p.m. we would break up and go home.

The teacher was not required to lead us in a night skating party. This was something she enjoyed. But, there were two affairs that were

mandatory if a teacher wanted to return the following year — a Last Day of School Program and a Christmas Program.

The Last Day of School Program would consist of demonstrations of the students learning. Spell-downs were common. Oral tests were conducted with older students giving the questions to younger ones. These questions consisted of material we had just been graded on. They didn't come from a prepared list. There were also foot races and sometimes a couple innings of baseball were played. Baseball was very important in the lives of rural people those days.

Writing was considered an important talent and good penmanship was desired. Examples of student hand writing was on display. A Maypole wind was on schedule after we received a flag and flag pole. A potluck dinner also was among the Last Day of School activities.

The Christmas Program was so important that work started on it just after Thanksgiving. Usually some man in the neighborhood would volunteer to supply a tree, quite likely a spruce. Sometimes the students would forgo recess or half of their lunch hour to make decorations for the tree. Chains of colored paper, strings of popcorn and red berries picked from the woods would be used as decorations. Popcorn balls were made with strings coming out of their insides so they could be tied onto the tree. Popcorn balls were often the result of two or more of the neighborhood women making them by the pail full. Most of them were made without strings. There were usually enough

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