



Miss Hessel, the county health nurse and the person with the black coat and hat at left, is pictured with students and William Manning, the county school commissioner, in a photo taken Feb. 7, 1938 at the "last log school house in Mecosta County." (Pioneer file photo)

Life: A look back at one-room schools

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to add some decor, but mostly they were for the children who were too young to take part in the activities.

In the "Little River" school there was an ancient pump organ for music and a more modern piano. Many of the attending students learned to play chords. Some were good enough to accompany others who sang Christmas carols, which, along with Christmas plays and recitations were performed to the satisfaction of those attending the affair. It was seldom that every family with children was not represented at the program.

After the performances were over, presents from the Christmas tree were distributed. Some neighborhood man would act as Santa. The students had drawn names, purchased, wrapped and placed the gifts under the tree. The beautiful gifts added to the decor of the tree. The teacher always

gave a small sack of goodies for each student. In the sack it was common to find hard candy, an orange and some nuts.

Before the custom of strings of popcorn, berries and paper chains was adopted, candles were used. After the one occasion when Santa's beard was ignited from a candle on the tree, candles were forbidden.

The two events, the Last Day of School and Christmas programs, were very important to a community when radio, refrigerators, electricity, indoor plumbing, video games, air conditioning, automatic heat and telephones were mostly non-existent. Neighbors talked for days about the kid who won the spell-down, or the long ball hit or the long jump by someone's child at the Last Day of School competition. Also how someone's child spoke or sang or acted at the Christmas Program. Maybe even how ridiculous or old so and so looked when he played Santa.

