

Memories and History of Rural Schools is Important

Some of you may wonder why I have such an interest in the rural schools of Green County. I attended Enterprise School, which was converted into a comfortable home years ago at W6791 County B, with my three brothers and three cousins. In addition to that, another cousin, my father and his three siblings, and their aunt and uncle all attended the same school. It was common in the country schools to have several generations of different families attend the same school since the next generation would often purchase the farm from their parents.

These rural schools were a gathering place for much of the community, even if the neighbors didn't have children in the school. There were Christmas programs where the younger students would recite short poems that they had memorized and the older students put on fun plays with a holiday theme. That helped to build the confidence of the students and helped them to work as a team. Our school used to have card parties in the evening where the adults (and this child of 12) would play 500 while the children would play together outside on the playground.



Matt Figi once attended Enterprise School, which sparked his interest in looking into the history of all the rural Green County schools. This is a photo of the students with their teacher taken in the fall of 1915.

The highlight was always the community picnic at the end of the school year. There would be lemonade made from real lemons and sugar (not a mix) and a potluck picnic. Some of the men and older students might have a ballgame while the women and others would sit and visit. Many of those adults had also attended that school. Later in the day, if we were lucky, someone would show up with small dixie cups of ice cream that were devoured quickly.

It was at the community picnic at the end of the year at Enterprise School that I decided that I wanted to be a teacher. I was five years old and hadn't even started school yet. I was standing next to Mom who was visiting with my brother's teacher, Mrs. Ritzman, and knew that teaching was what I wanted to do. I never changed my mind and have no regrets. However, things did change. I expected that I would also teach in one of the one-room schools, but most of those in Green County were closed before I even graduated from high school.

I compiled a book about the Enterprise School in 1996, which is available at the Monroe Public Library. It contains a list of the teachers from 1867 through 1964, a list of about 500 students who attended, about 20 photographs of the groups of students, and a map of the district with a list of the families who lived on most of the farms during those years. While I was researching the school history, it was discovered that five generations of one of the families had attended the school. Their surnames were Bast, Potter, and Anderson. I am sure there are many schools in the area that have a similar situation.

The youngest "children" who attended these one-room schools are now in their sixties – or approaching that age. If we do not record this history now, it will be lost to future generations. I have been collecting photographs of the groups of students of each of the rural schools for fifteen years. With the help of many people, we are putting as many names to faces as possible. I have also been trying to write a history of each of the schools and collecting names of as many teachers with the districts and terms where they taught. The best place to get this information is from the original clerk/treasurer records. Of course, newspaper articles are also a great source.

I am making progress on this project, but, unfortunately, do not have enough contacts in the northern part of the county. If you can put me in contact with someone from one or more of the rural schools in another area of the county, it would be greatly appreciated.

The sense of community, my many positive memories, the education I received, the responsibility that I learned, and the fact that these schools have disappeared have all motivated me to make this project a priority to preserve as much information about all of the schools that I can. The people who I visit with who also attended the one-room schools seem to have the same wonderful memories from them. These memories need to be preserved.