

## Dayton and the Rural Schools

Many people have asked if I get much feedback from the school photographs that I put in *The Monroe Times*. I always tell them that it depends on the photo; I obviously get more feedback on the ones from the more recent years than I do from those that are 90 or more years old. Sometimes there will be one contact; other times there are several. Sometimes it takes some time to hear from people because they send the photographs across the miles to someone else who might be in the photo so they can then converse about who is who before they get back to me. For the Elmer School photo that appeared in the January 18 paper, I had two calls – both of them on the following Thursday. One was from a man who only wanted to know what year the photo was taken since three of his siblings were in the photo. The other was from Kathleen Sulzer who started at Elmer School the following year so we were able to date the photo and she was able to name most of the people in it.



Rosemary Watkins Hare is shown inside the East Dayton School during the 1936-37 school year. She is the leftmost person with both hands on the back of the desk.

The *Post Messenger Recorder* printed an article about my school project with two photos of the groups of students at schools in that area of the county for whom I wanted identifications on October 17. I never did hear from anyone who could identify any of the students, but did receive a phone message from Rosemary Watkins Hare more than a month later. I returned the call to her and found out that she had a photo of the students inside the East Dayton School in the 1936-37 school year. I made the trip to her Belleville home after the holidays to pick up the photo to scan it. Unfortunately, Rosemary has very poor eyesight and did not have identifications for all of the people written on the photo; she had to rely on her memory for who was seated where. When I scanned the photo, I used a very high resolution and took the digital version on my laptop

back to her for identification. She ended up being able to identify all of the students. Rosemary did very well to remember the names of the people from 83 years ago!

While I was at Rosemary's home, she also shared memories from her days growing up near Dayton, an unincorporated community in Exeter Township. She remembered going to the general store run by Herman and Mae Buchholtz, who lived above the store with their children Mildred, Rodney, and Bessie, as well as Mae's mother. She remembered them as very kind people who invited her to their apartment many times. She also remembered that she would go to the store whenever she received a penny, but not to buy candy! They had a board where one could slide a penny down between some nails, which would make the penny zigzag down the board and land in the bottom where it would tell you how many pennies you "won" - unless you landed on a zero! What a lucky child to get two or three pennies for the single penny that they earned or that someone gave him. She also remembered that people would bring eggs and chickens to trade for merchandise, which was common for the time. Another thing that intrigued Rosemary was their large red coffee grinder that was cranked with a big wheel.

There really wasn't much else in Dayton at that time since the railroad chose to go through Belleville instead of Dayton. She remembered that there was a tavern run by the Rupp family. She had heard that it stayed open during prohibition to sell candy bars and sodas and maybe even some alcohol in the basement. There was also a two-story village hall where the village meetings were held on the main floor and Sunday School and 4-H met on the second floor. There was a dance hall called the French Attic above either a granary or a harness shop.

There had previously been a gristmill there, which burned in 1914. A former hotel burned in 1896. There had also been a post office and a livery stable. As with so many of the early settlements, buildings and businesses disappeared as time passed and travel became easier. Rosemary had several picture postcards of Dayton, but gave them away in her later years. Watch future columns for more information on this community.

As a final footnote, the Rodney Buchholtz mentioned in the third paragraph is the same Rodney Buchholtz who worked as a custodian at Monroe High School in the 1960s and early 1970s.