

Rural Schools of Green County Endearred Many Students

Thousands of students in Green County attended one-room schools from the earliest settlers here until these schools were all closed in the 1960s. I'd like to share with you what my experiences were in the 1950s and then share ways in which the earlier schools were different.

Students who attended these schools were always neighbors and most lived either on a farm or in a cheese factory. Many had to walk or bike as much as two miles to get to school. We have all heard that it was uphill both ways to and from school. Of course that is impossible, but probably felt like it if they had a large hill in each direction. As I've traveled through the county to search for the locations of each of the schools, I've certainly thought how much more difficult (and maybe even dangerous) it was in the northern part of the county. It is much more steep with more rocks and curves.

If the first graders were fortunate, they'd have a sibling or close neighbor to walk with so it wouldn't be so scary and lonely. There was no kindergarten at that time so the children had to turn six by December 1 that year. When the children got to school, they were able to play outside until the teacher rang the bell to start the day.

One teacher taught all of the subjects to all eight grades. The younger students needed more instruction since everything was new to them, so the first graders were called to the front first to get instruction in reading. They were sent back to their seat after they were given work to do so the teacher could work with the other students. The same was done for the second, third, and fourth grades. The teacher would often teach the fifth and sixth grades and then the seventh and eight grades together. One year they would use the book for the lower grade and the next year from the higher grade. So it might happen that some students would work out of the sixth grade book and then the next year from the fifth grade book.



Students easily entertained themselves at recess. Shown here are students at the Ullom School; the building still stands at W7708 County B.

After reading was finished, the students would be released for a 15-minute recess. They would then come back inside for another similar round of language classes before being released for lunch. After an hour lunch period, there would be another set of social studies classes followed by recess and the final round of arithmetic classes. There was no need for physical education class because the children got their exercise from the trip to school, playing at recess, and from the work that most of them had to do when they got home. Music and art classes were given on the radio on WHA, the Wisconsin Public Radio station.

The students would eat lunch at their desks. Lunches were usually quite simple, a sandwich, a piece of fruit, a thermos of milk, and maybe a cookie for dessert. During the winter a student might bring a thermos of soup or put a raw potato wrapped in foil on top of the stove in the morning so that it would be baked by lunchtime. After they were done eating they would have the rest of the hour for recess. They might have a ballgame, play on the playground equipment, or play anti-i-over, duck duck goose, tag, catch, hide and seek, red rover, or go sleigh riding in the winter.

Many of the schools did not have any indoor plumbing, so it was necessary to carry a pail or two of water into the school in the morning. It was put in a crock with a spigot that bubbled the water up to be able to drink it. In our school, the excess water would go down into a sink through a hole in the wall and out onto the ground outside. Since there were no toilets inside, there was one outhouse for the boys and another for the girls.

Not only were students taught responsibility at home, but they were given duties to do at school. Except for pumping the water and carrying it inside and putting the flag up on the flagpole in the morning, most of the duties were done at the end of the day. The younger students were given an easy job such as clapping erasers. Other duties might have been to erase the blackboards daily and wash them on Friday, sweep the floor, collect the trash and take it out to the barrel and burn it, empty the water crock and clean the sink, clean the outhouses, and take the flag down and fold it properly.

After a full day of school, most of those students walked or rode their bikes back home only to have to do more chores. I remember that Dad always told us that “if you get in trouble at school, you will get in twice as much trouble at home.” I am guessing that most of the other students were told the same as I don’t remember the teacher having to discipline students for much more than whispering when they were to be quiet.

I don’t remember having less than a dozen students when I attended and sometimes there were about 30. When I started, we had three boys in my grade. By the time of graduation there were six of us. Many of the schools had similar fluctuations in enrollment, especially when the renters moved out in March and other renters moved in. Often times there might not be a child in every grade.

This column will be concluded next Saturday.