

1950s Rural School Teacher - Part 1

I decided when I was five years old, before I even started school, that I wanted to become a teacher in one of the local rural schools. Little did I know that almost all of the rural schools in Green County would be closed before I graduated from Monroe High School. It was probably a good thing for me because I, of course, had no idea at that time what all was entailed in the job of a rural school teacher. I shall share today some of those responsibilities.

Being the only employee in the school paid for daily responsibilities, it was the job of the teacher to unlock the school in the morning when she arrived and make sure that it was secured again before she left. It was also her responsibility to make sure that the building was kept warm and clean. That meant that during the winter months, the teacher had to make sure the oil burner was turned high enough to warm the entire room before students arrived, even though the building was probably poorly insulated.

In order for the school to be kept neat and tidy, the teacher made a list of duties for each student to carry out on a daily basis. They had to have water to drink and wash their hands, so one of the students would have to go out to the pump in the morning and carry a bucket of water in to pour into the crock with a spigot - except for the few schools that had running water in the building. Another student would take the flag out of the closet to raise up the flagpole in front of the school. The rest of the duties that I remember were performed at the end of the school day. A first grader might have to clap the erasers. An eighth grader, probably a male, would be given the duty of taking the trash out to the metal barrel at the edge of the property to burn - unless the teacher determined the wind was blowing too hard. Other duties included emptying the water from the crock and cleaning the crock and sink, erasing (and sometimes washing) the blackboards, sweeping the floors, and cleaning the outhouses. Of course, the flag had to be taken down and folded properly. It was the teacher's responsibility to supervise to be sure the tasks were performed properly.

I remember a student vomiting in the classroom one day; to clean it up was the teacher's responsibility. I was probably in fifth or sixth grade and had to leave the classroom and go to the cloak room. The teacher said to me, "I thought I told you to stay in your seat." I simply replied, "If I go back in there, you're going to have two messes to pick up." That was enough said; Dorothy Hartwig cleaned up the one mess and I reentered the classroom afterwards.

Another time some of the students were playing tag during recess. Audrey Beach tripped over a teeter-totter (seesaw) and her teeth went right through her lip. It was fortunate that we had a phone at school so her parents could be called to pick her up to go to the hospital for stitches. It was a good thing that I never had the opportunity to teach in a one-room school as I'm not sure how I would have reacted to these situations.

Of course, the main purpose of the teacher was to plan the lessons for all eight grades in all subjects and make sure each student had the necessary books. On a typical day, after greeting the students and taking attendance, she would call the first graders up to a table and teach the first subject of the day. After that, she would call up the second graders, then the third before the fourth. She would often combine the fifth and sixth graders followed by the seventh and eighth graders. For those older students, she would teach out of the book for the lower grade one year and the higher grade the next. Each level would be given work to do at their desk while she taught the others. Each class was about 15 minutes. Then there was recess, after which she would repeat the same procedure for the second subject.

By then it was lunchtime where the students and teacher would all eat at their desk before going outside for a longer recess - if weather permitted. If the students were unable to go outside after lunch, they would play inside games until it was time to follow the same process as the morning for two more subjects. The teacher had no breaks from students from the time the first arrived in the morning until the last one left in the afternoon. Art and music were often taught through the radio.

There was no copy (Xerox) machine available so the teacher might write a test/assignment on the blackboard and pull down one of the maps to cover it until it was time for it to

be revealed. She would be able to use carbon paper between pieces of paper, but would only be able to make a few more copies of that original.

Not only did the teacher have to do the lesson plans and teach all eight grades, but she was the official record keeper as well. Teachers were required to record attendance (present, absent, tardy) and academic grades. At the end of the school year, she would leave a note in the grade book about the students so that the next teacher would have a bit of information.

The teacher would also fill out report cards at the end of each quarter, send them home for a parent's signature, and store them for the next quarter. She then had to make the decision at the end of the year whether to pass or retain each student.

I'll continue next week with more of her responsibilities.



The rural school teacher had many jobs in addition to teaching all subjects to all eight grades. One of those jobs was to help the students clean the yard in the spring. The students were rewarded with a weinie roast. Shown here in an earlier photo from May 21, 1937 are students from Fairview School in Mount Pleasant Township.