

## 1950s Rural School Teacher - Part 2

In addition to the responsibilities of the rural teacher shared last week, the following were also part of her job.

I don't remember having less than a dozen students when I attended and sometimes there were about 30. When I started, there were three boys in my grade. By the time we graduated there were six of us. Many of the schools had similar fluctuations in enrollment, especially when renters moved out during March and were replaced by new renters. The teacher had to figure out whether each of the new students was ahead, behind, or even with "hers." This created a situation where she might now have a student in a grade that she didn't have before or not have a student left in one of the grades she had before. She might also have to do some extra work to catch up some of them or give enrichment work to others.

There were many other smaller jobs that the teacher had to do. Our school purchased a refrigerator from Phillips & Smith in 1956, so students were able to order cartons of milk for their lunch. Bob Trumpy, of Trumpy's Dairy, would periodically deliver milk to the school so students no longer had to bring milk in a thermos from the farm. Teachers, of course, had to keep track of how much money was owed by each family to pay Mr. Trumpy.

Some years we would sell Christmas Seals. The teacher then had to keep track of how many seals she gave to each student and make sure that she collected the proper amount of money so the donation could be made.

The teacher (not only in the rural schools) also had to distribute a goiter pill to each student every week. Some children loved the pills, but others didn't care for them. The teacher had to be careful that a student would not take a pill from another student as it might cause their heart to race.

The teacher also had to keep a small library in the school with books appropriate for each of the eight grades. It was her job to make sure that they were properly identified as property of the school district. She also had to keep track of which student checked the book out. Book reports had to be given by each student, so the teacher also had to evaluate those.

One of the largest single jobs for the teacher was presenting the Christmas program to which the entire community was invited. She first had to choose poems and plays so that each student in the school would be able to show off their skills. She would then rehearse the parts for weeks before the big evening. Not only that, but she and the students would have to hang the "stage curtain" near the front of the classroom and carry enough seating in for all of the guests who attended. It was the teacher's responsibility in the days after the program to undo all of the changes that had been made to the schoolroom.

The teachers also had many additional responsibilities in the spring of the year. The county superintendent sponsored a spelling bee. Each school, city and rural, had to choose a



The rural school teacher had many jobs in addition to teaching all subjects to all eight grades. One of those jobs was to present a Christmas program to the community. Shown here are unidentified students from Fairfield School in Jefferson Township about 1958.

participant by having a spell down. The teacher had to let the parents know where the speller needed to be so they could get the student there.

In the spring of the year, many of the schools would have an afternoon baseball game against one of the nearby schools. Since there was no bus, the teacher would have to get on the phone, if they had one, or write a note home asking the mothers if they could drive the students. She had to do the same if she wanted to take the students on a field trip.

Another activity each spring was for the teacher and the students to rake the entire school yard and burn the sticks, leaves, and dry grass. Even though the students were used to working on the farm, it had to be quite a task for the teacher to keep each of the students on task. The students were rewarded for their work with a wienie and marshmallow roast at the school or a nearby location. Our school trekked down the road to a place on the banks of Honey Creek where we had an open fire to do the roasting.

The biggest event of the spring was the year-end picnic where all of the community gathered to celebrate the students' accomplishments and the completion of another year. It was a social event with a potluck lunch followed by a baseball game with people of all ages invited to participate. I remember people bringing fruit jars with fresh squeezed lemon juice and sugar in it. It was added to cold water from the well, which was refreshing. The highlight for me was the Schwann's dixie cups that came in a green bag, kept cold with dry ice.

Some of the teachers were fortunate enough to have an active mothers club to help the teacher with many of the supplementary activities. The club might also help with decorating the classroom or earn money for something to help make the school a better place. The community members took pride in the school and its education because many of them had also attended the school.

The job of the teacher in the one-room schools of the past was definitely a rewarding, but challenging, job. They reinforced the values and work ethic that was instilled in the homes. I remember my father telling us that if we got in trouble with the teacher, we would be in twice as much trouble when we got home. I know of a few groups of former students who were still having reunions with their teachers before Covid hit. Teachers were highly regarded. I'm still in touch with my second grade teacher, the only of my four rural teachers who is still alive.