

The Sad Demise of Jessie Woelfing

In two columns that were previously printed this year about the early teachers in the rural schools, it was stated that some of those teachers had to rent a room in one of the homes in the neighborhood. That might mean that they would be eating meals in the home with some of their students. That could have been an awkward situation for either teacher or student. Many of those teachers would then travel to their parents' home for the weekend. Jessie Woelfing was a young teacher staying with the Louis Schneider family in Jordan township during the 1921-22 school year. Even though she was one of the youngest teachers at the time, she was one of the most successful and popular teachers of the county. Unfortunately, her life ended tragically on the evening of February 1, 1922.

When Miss Woelfing failed to reach the Schneider home in time for supper that evening, the family became concerned. Even though she often remained at the school to complete her work, she usually made it home for the evening meal. When she still hadn't arrived home after supper, the neighbors were called to form a search party. They found that the Prairie Valley school was locked, as usual, so 16 searchers with lanterns followed the mile and a quarter path that she would have taken toward the home.

They found a box containing a copying apparatus, a thin box about a foot and a half square, at a place where the stream came closest to the road. By the way it was positioned, they surmised that Miss Woelfing threw up her arms when she slipped to regain her balance and the box flew from her hand. Close examination of the spot revealed some scratches on the muddy, icy bank; the searchers then realized that the teacher had probably drowned because one could get out "only by the most terrible struggle."

The searchers continued along the stream until they found the body late that night. It had been carried about a quarter mile; it was deposited near the bridge by the shore where the narrowing of the stream formed a space out of the force of the current. The body was partially submerged and partially covered with mud; ice had begun to form around it. Mr. Shriner was contacted by phone before the body was moved to the schoolhouse and then to Shriners' undertaking parlor on the east side of the square in Monroe.

The searchers "believed that Miss Woelfing was picking her way carefully along the edge of the road, on the narrow strip that lies between the highway and the creek, trying to avoid the muddy places, and had accidentally slipped and fallen in the creek." Coroner Frank A. Shriner reached the same conclusion.

"When the body of Miss Woelfing was taken from the creek, the handbag was still looped over the arm, indicating that no thought had been given it when the fatal fall occurred, and perhaps also showing that the struggle in the icy current had not been long."

Miss Woelfing was born in Chicago on October 3, 1901. Her father passed away while she was a little girl, which left the mother to raise two girls. Jessie was schooled in both Monroe and Naperville, Illinois. She graduated from the Green County Training School and taught most of the time after that in the rural schools of the county. She taught one year each in the Blackford School (Jordan Township) Hardscrabble School (Sylvester) and the Legler School (New Glarus) before getting the job at Prairie Valley where she had taught since September.

According to county superintendent John N. Burns, "Jessie Woelfing was a splendid young woman, and an excellent, efficient and earnest teacher. She was devoted to her work and had a promising career before her. She was adored by the children and greatly admired by the people of her district. I am shocked and aggrieved by her most untimely death."

Another tidbit shared in the same paper attested to her popularity. "Miss Woelfing was most popular with the children and others who called at the school. It was a bit of a ceremony when the rural mail man called, for he sometimes got there when the teacher and happy company of children were



Jessie Woelfing was one of the most popular teachers in Green County before she tragically lost her life walking from the Prairie Valley school to the Louis Schneider home where she boarded in Jordan township in 1922.

cooking the simple hot lunch to supplement the cold food brought from the homes. Invariably at such time the teacher and children insisted on the mail man having a steaming bowl of soup with them.”

Jessie was a member of the Immanuel Church and their minister shared, “She lived at our house during part of the time she attended school in Monroe, and was a most pleasant person to have in the household. About three years ago she was baptized and joined the church. She was of a cheerful, happy disposition, and took a wholesome, earnest view of life.”

Years prior to her death, Jessie and her mother went west to take up claim and lived there until they had “proved up on the claim.” Her mother still lived in Portland, Oregon. In fact, a letter from her mother arrived the day after she drowned. Jessie had made her home with her mother’s brother, Edward H. Scharer, while in Monroe. She often visited him on the weekends. Her sister, Mrs. Arthur Klingbeil, lived on a farm two miles east of Monroe. Surviving aunts and uncles were John B. Scharer and Mrs. Spencer Bowen of Monroe, L. T. Scharer of Rib Lake, Wisconsin, and Mrs. J. B. Dalton and Mrs. S. D. Harris, both of Chicago.