

Country Schools in South Dakota
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I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. My mother had taught in the country schools in the Beresford area for ten years before she went to Corson County in western South Dakota as a single woman homesteader. When she was able to claim her land, she went back to Beresford to marry my father and he joined her on the farm.

I was born in 1920, the second of their three children. We all attended the same country school. It was one of the finer of the country schools in the McIntosh district at the time. It was painted white and had a flagpole on the roof. We faithfully raised and lowered it every school day when the weather allowed it. Large windows on the east side provided the only light we had. It was heated with a large stove which needed many buckets of coal. The older boys carried the wood and coal. We had no janitor so all the cleaning was done by the children and the teacher.

As one entered the school there was a place for coats, caps, scarves, overshoes and lunch pails. On the other side was the water cooler and the tin cups which hung on designated hooks. The schoolroom had large framed pictures of Washington and Lincoln. The American flag hung on the wall. The blackboards were slate. The children's desks had an inkwell, a groove for pencils and a lid that lifted up to reveal the contents inside. Desks were bolted on a track to keep them in even rows. There were built-in bookcases at the rear and a "recitation bench" for individual classes. On the teacher's desk was a bell to summon us from the playground. There were maps which could be pulled down from a rack. The floors were kept dust free, but not clean, with sweeping compound.

Other buildings included the toilets, a coal shed and a barn for the horses some of the children rode to school. There was also a three-room cottage called the "teacherage" where the teacher lived. My teachers were Florence Willigan, Winifred DeVelde, and Frances Petik and I loved them all. Mrs. Willigan was strict, but fair. Mrs. DeVelde let me live with her in the cottage for the rest of the school year after my mother died when I was seven. Miss Petik was young and pretty and wore pretty clothes. I wanted to be just like her.

We had a Young Citizens League. We had monthly meetings where we conducted school business, set up committees and followed the Roberts Rules of Order. Spelling, essay and declamation contests were conducted at district, county and state levels.

A high school education was not to be taken for granted. We lived twenty miles from the nearest high school. Roads were poor and there were no school buses. In order for me to go, it was necessary to pay \$12 a month for board and room in town. That was quite a large sum of money during depression times. Help came from the school board, who took note of the problem and established a dormitory for boys and girls. The boys lived in a former parsonage and the girls were housed in an old hotel. Meals for both boys and girls were served in the girl's dorm. It was a big change in life style for a "country kid".

Somehow my parents found the money to send me to Northern State Teachers College in Aberdeen for the one year it took to become a qualified teacher in South Dakota. I packed my trunk and traveled to Aberdeen on the train. That was my mode of transportation for holidays at home. Few of the college kids had cars at that time. I did well enough on the tests we took at the beginning, so that I was among the top third in the class who were allowed to take practice teaching during the first quarter!

In the spring I went home for the summer. I had received a contract from the McIntosh School District to teach in one of the country schools. I would be paid \$630 for a nine month term. Every teacher in the district received the same amount although some had been teaching for years. One of the terms of my contract stated that if I should marry the contract was null and void. The clerk of the school board told me in all seriousness that if I changed my name it would not be possible for them to pay my salary.

Teaching in a one-room school was a challenge. The schools were much the same as the one I had attended. Very little had changed. I kept the fires going and the building clean with the help of my pupils. I had fourteen pupils in six different grades. I don't think I had been adequately prepared for this but I did my best. My own education in the country schools was sadly lacking in music.

Most families in the district did not have homes large enough to house a teacher, so the district provided cottages (called teacherages) for the teacher to live in. My school had an apartment at the rear for me.

After my first year of teaching I decided to go to summer school and enrolled at Black Hills Teachers College in Spearfish. I thought it would be fun and different to be in the Black Hills. That was where I met Ike Woodward. He was older, had been teaching a few years, knew everybody, was intelligent and personable, had a new car and played the saxophone in his own dance band. I was impressed.

I taught in the McIntosh district for two more years at the same salary. At the end of my third year of teaching, Ike and I decided we could afford to get married. He had been elected County Superintendent of Schools in Harding County and so our first home was in Buffalo. Marriage ended my teaching career since it was unacceptable for married women to also be teachers. I did not resume teaching for twelve years, when a shortage of teachers made it possible for me to enter the profession again.

My husband was a teacher, county superintendent, coach, high school superintendent and an elementary principal. In 1953 we moved to Watertown where I taught first grade and he was the principal at McKinley School. My first contract in Watertown stated that I would be replaced when single women were available. At that time male teachers with a family received an extra stipend of \$200 for the year. A female teacher who was also a single mother was not eligible for this benefit.

I taught in the Watertown schools for 28 years and retired in 1981.