

## **Reminiscent Teacher Essay**

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**May, 2012**

“School days, school days,  
Dear old golden rule days  
Reading, ‘writing, and ‘rithmetic  
Taught to the tune of a hickory stick.”

People who remember those days of yore, probably have mixed emotions about them. Were they really that good?

I attended Brule Valley School 77 in Union County for eight years and later taught there for four years. Therefore I have experienced those “good ole days” in all its aspects.

Let’s see if the words of the song are true. The school I attended sat in a half acre of land. Besides the school building there were two outhouses, a building in which coal was stored and another where a supply of corncobs were kept as well as discarded or unused objects. The school building was small. There was an empty hall across the front where coats were hung, a supply of water in a pail with a dipper used by all, and a water basin where dirty hands could be cleansed. In the classroom stood a huge furnace, desks of various sizes, a teacher’s desk and chair, a single bookcase, and a table. The floor was wooden and kept oiled with sweeping compound. The walls were painted with calcimine. Black boards lined the lower levels along the front and sides. Pictures earned by selling magazines hung on the wall. These were a portrait of George Washington, The Horse Fair, and Sir Galahad. Of course a flag, too, had its place.

In this atmosphere much learning went on. Reading, writing and arithmetic were stressed, but history, geography, civics, language, hygiene and citizenship were also mastered. Late Friday afternoons were spent doing art and crafts. The pupils and teacher were like a family with the older ones looking out for the younger. All joined in games during recess and during the lunch hour. Games played were Pump, Pump Pull Away, Beckon, Ante-over, Shinney, and of course baseball or softball. In winter, a trip to skate on the frozen creek a half a mile away was a special outing. Many snow forts were built to protect ones self from flying snowballs.

Holidays were celebrated. On Halloween a party with treats was enjoyed as was the bobbing for apples from a tub of water. There was an exchange of Valentines on February 14. All were treated to homemade ice cream. Ice for this came from the nearby creek. Everyone looked forward to receiving a May basket on May Day.

The annual program was usually held just before Christmas vacation. Everyone became a star at that time. The program was performed on a stage built of lumber lent by

the local lumberyard. Curtains enclosed the stage that was divided by sheets, brought from home, into three areas, a performing part and a “dressing room” on both sides. Lamps lighted the crowded room. Seats, made of more borrowed lumber, were filled with parents and friends. Weeks of practice made each pupil a real star. After the performance, there was a basket social in which decorated baskets filled with goodies were auctioned off. If the teacher’s beau was there, there was much bidding on her basket. Some kept bidding against him so that basket brought the best price. Lunch was served to those who did not buy a basket.

Another big event was the county field day, a track meet. Students practiced diligently so they could win a ribbon in the competition. All kinds of skills were put to the test, running, jumping, pole vaulting, skipping rope, relays, and even a slipper kicking contest for teachers. Besides the field events, there were some agricultural skills tested such as identifying tools and seeds of various kinds.

Of course, there was always the end of year picnic when everyone in the district, old and young, came to enjoy a potluck dinner and ice cream furnished by the teacher.

Along with all those good times, there were still those days that were not so good. No heat from the furnace on weekends; all ink (no ball points then) was frozen. On the other hand once it began to heat up, crayons melted. There were no hot lunches unless someone brought some soup that could be heated atop the furnace. Most brought their sandwich, cookie or whatever in their “dinner pail” which usually was an empty syrup pail or lard pail. There was no janitor. The teacher applied sweeping compound and swept the floor. Students were often assigned small tasks such as dusting erasers, filling the coal bucket, pumping a supply of water from the well, cleaning blackboards, and even volunteering to sweep the floor. Pupils were allowed to slide their feet on the floor when the compound was in as this helped to bring out the oil so the floor absorbed more.

As for the hickory stick, I never saw one. Punishment for an infraction of the rules, was a recess “stay-in” or an afternoon “stay after”. The teachers were highly respected by pupils and the parents as well. If the student was known to misbehave at school, parents often added some punishment, too.

Seventh and eighth grade pupils were required to take a final test administered through the County Superintendent. Students were given these in a central location usually the local high school. Which was strange to most and supervised by a stranger amid many, many like themselves? Students in city schools were not required to take these tests. Teachers spent many after school hours preparing for them. Many country school scholars outshone their city counterparts in high school for those one-room schools served them well.

When I returned six years after completing eighth grade to teach, things had not changed much. There were the same buildings, same furniture, same furnace, same pictures on the wall, same books in the “library” with a few additions, same Christmas program (no basket social), same field day, same end of the year picnic. Tests for

seventh and eight graders were taken in a neighboring rural school perhaps where two or three schools' pupils were gathered. Brule Valley closed after my fourth year because the enrollment was so low. I was hired by two other rural schools after that. Each had a basement so there was no big furnace in the classroom. Otherwise, everything was much the same.

I learned much during my experience in the years spent in the little country one-room school. Yes, I consider the time spent there both as a scholar and a teacher, as the "good ole days". You be the judge. Do you long for the good old days?

I completed my fifty years in the teacher profession, in city schools and now consider them as part of the "good ole days". Even with all the many changes I experienced. Nothing stays the same, and some changes are good; some not so good. One must adapt to these, and enjoy some of those "good ole days".