Historic School Gazette

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Ozarks Country School Association

A program of University of Missouri Extension

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On the cover ...

David Burton’s grandfather, Orlis Farmer, attended Coleman School near Ash Grove. The photo on the cover shows students at that school in 1917 along with their male teacher (who earlier in the year won a fight with a male student to regain control of the classroom). You will find several references to this school, and to Orlis Farmer, in this book. In many ways, it was a typical rural school in Greene County. Orlis is wearing a jacket and holding the chalkboard in this photo.

Coleman #48 is located on the northeast corner of Farm Roads 53 and 76 east of Ash Grove. Stucco was added over wood siding after 1905. Discontinued classes in 1941. Reorganized as part of Ash Grove R-IV in 1949. As you can tell from these photos, weather and neglect have taken their toll on this building.
Word from the director …
A Mission 10 Years in the Making

A seed first planted 10 years ago is on the verge of blooming this fall when membership in the Ozarks Country School Association is opened to historic enthusiasts and owners of one-room schools in southwest Missouri.

My vision for this group started 10 years ago when I finished a book on historic schools in Greene County. The goal has always been to work with groups and owners to maintain these historic buildings and develop them as rural community centers.

This year, five of the one-room schools in Greene County either fell in or were torn down over the last 12 months. That makes the timing of this effort urgent.

My immediate goal is to get funds to do basic maintenance on the best one-room schools that are standing and then promote their use as rural community buildings. That has always been my vision and I learned at a national conference on one-room schools I attended in Oklahoma this summer that it is also a successful model other places in the U.S.

There is already some progress toward achieving that goal, as well as establishing a museum, moving a historic school inside Springfield and preserving it, and turning another former rural school into a community center. But, like many other things, volunteers and private donations are needed.

The public programs (at right) are perfect opportunities for members of the public to learn more about the historic rural schools in Greene County and how to join the Ozarks Country School Association.

SCHEDULE
I am available to bring a rural schools display and give a presentation to clubs and community groups."

To schedule a program or presentation (at a cost of $25 per session) contact me at the Greene County Extension Center, 417-862-9284 or via e-mail at burtond@missouri.edu.

JOIN US
Persons wanting to be notified of future programs or the annual rural schools workshop should submit their name and mailing address to me. Better yet, why not make a small annual commitment and become a member of the Ozarks Country School Association. I hope to hear from you soon.

FUNDRAISER
The 2011 OCSA calendar is also for sale for $25 with the proceeds going to the OCSA. The following one-room schools in Greene County are featured on the calendar: Locust Prairie, Rountree, Kelly Chapel, Northstar, Lindsey, Liberty, Willey, Flint Hill, One-Room School at MSU, Flatrock, Coleman and St. Elmo. Pre-ordering is encouraged and can be done in person at the Greene County Extension Center or by downloading an order form online.
On the morning of Feb. 7, 1949, my brother Cornelius Datema and I, Alice, his sister, started school at Mt. Pisgah. Our neighbors, the Arrowoods, who lived at Hickory Hills offered us a ride.

We didn’t know the English Language, as we had just entered the USA. Everything was new and different, but to think that we were going to a one-room school, where one teacher was in charge of all eight grades, was incomprehensible!

Getting us enrolled immediately was very important. We needed to learn English and continue our studies.

With Mr. Arrowood behind the wheel, Robert and Larry, his sons, Dad, Cornelius and myself took off over hills and curving gravel roads. Along the way we picked up two more boys.

Finally we came to a stop and we followed the other passengers out of the car.

We would not have known where we were except for the small white, two story lap board building with a bell on top. Above the porch entrance, painted on the siding, were the words, Mt. Pisgah School.

In front there was a flag pole holding high the American flag and a water pump, the kind with a long handle. We entered the little building and a rather young looking, friendly lady greeted us. Everybody called her Miss Julia and we immediately learned the word, “teacher”.

The room had blackboards on almost every wall. There was a large black warm, wood burning stove on the opposite end of the entrance with a long stove pipe that disappeared into a chimney. A box of firewood stood nearby.

About six rows of one person desks, ranging from smaller near the stove to larger near the entrance were neatly lined up with isles in between awaiting their assigned pupils. All desks faced in the same direction.

Using all kinds of gestures, Dad tried to explain that we should be put in the first grade because we couldn’t speak English. Dad handed us a Dutch-English translation dictionary then he and Mr. Arrowood had to leave and go back to work.

Miss Julia directed us to our desks. Ignoring Dad’s suggestion, she placed Cornelius with other second graders and me at a desk sort of in front and center of the room. I quickly figured out that I was the only fourth grader.

The dictionary was of some help but not always. The outdoor privy, which I was so relieved to find during our first recess, was hardly a, “W.C.”, appropriately translated “Water Closet“.

What helped most was that everyone was friendly and showed an interest in us. The more they talked, the more familiar the word sounds became.

We adapted ourselves to the routines of a school day and quickly learned many new things. After all, kids don’t like to be different.

Before lunch we all formed a
line to the pump so we could wash our hands. One of the pupils was in charge of pumping, another held a soap dish with a bar of soap and a towel.

At the command of the operator, the pump would belch a water over outstretched hands, one person at a time. Then the soap, one more burp from the pump, a wipe on the towel, and off to our lunch pails on the closet shelf inside the front door. We ate at our desks.

Valentines day was approaching, everyone seemed busy decorating shoe boxes. We didn’t understand what was going on but we participated. Then, one day, formal school ended early and we had a little party.

Almost everybody shared valentines and put them in the boxes. Cornelius and I were the exception!

Miss Julia said, “It’s Valentines Day, you don’t know about Valentines?” Totally embarrassed, we were not prepared to give anything in return. All we could say was, “Thank You”! We took our loot home and surprised our parents. They, too, were at a loss. To this day, we still owe all our school mates at Mt Pisgah, a Valentine.

The second floor of the school was not used much. Maybe, only, when the weather was bad. There was a record player up there and I sort of liked some of the music, but I got the impression that nobody else seemed to care for it.

Miss Julia allowed me to read a lot, and I copied a lot of words. I made frequent trips to the shelves to find projects. I found work books and she monitored my work. Arithmetic was my forte. Numbers didn’t need to be translated.

After school a lot of us walked in a group. Here and there schoolmates would leave us as they neared their homes. The rest walked through fields, climbed over, and crawled under fences, finally ending up at the golf course. Then, Cornelius and I, the only two left, continued toward the north fence. We climbed up one side of a ladder that Dad built for us, and down the other. Then we had to cross the two creeks over which he had built small bridges. Up one more hill, and then we too were home!

We did a lot of walking. One day we toured the Holsum Bread Bakery in Springfield. We walked, and walked. Miss Julia and her entire student body, of at least 30, walked to that bakery on Grant street and back! It was a long hike! The tour of Holsum, was something I never forgot!

Looking back we had a lot of fun, we were challenged, we met wonderful schoolmates, and we are forever thankful for Miss Julia’s patience and for Mr. Arrowood’s faithful and safe rides.

Now, we both reflect with appreciation for all we learned and experienced at Mt. Pisgah!

Oh yes, and after only four months, we learned to speak English quite well!

We had no choice!

Alice Datema
Wheat Ridge, Colorado

Submissions welcomed: Want to submit a letter of memories about an Ozarks one-room school for publication in this newsletter? Just send your text to David Burton via e-mail (burtond@missouri.edu) or mail it to the Greene County Extension center.

Mt. Pisgah school (shown above in August 2010) is now an abandoned home standing east of Springfield.
Stories from other one-room schools in the U.S. ...

Historic Missouri Schoolhouse Holds Open House

The following article appeared in the Oct. 21, 2009, edition of The Gasconade County Republican as written by Mark Schaeperkoetter who is a graduate of our Mt. Sterling, Missouri schoolhouse.

It was a Monday just like any other day over the past 46 years. The school bell in the old one-room country school was silent. No children were scattered across the playground, the carom board was against the wall in its box, a squirrel scurried around gathering walnuts where "fox and the geese" was once played, no coats hung on their hooks, no lunch buckets or pokes awaited lunch time, the school desks were empty, the organ sat in silence with its songbook open to the Star Spangled Banner and the doors to the bookshelf were shut.

The noise of a humming vacuum cleaner was the only sound as Terry and Jane Ragan swept the floors after a weekend school reunion and open house at the Mt. Sterling School.

Graduates and former students came from Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Ohio, Arkansas and all over Missouri, rekindled old acquaintances and memories, tried to guess who some of the people were and were startled at what they witnessed when they rounded the slight curve in Mt. Sterling Road.

An old county songwriter who attended a one-room school should write a song about the experience. The lyricist could talk about school when the hot lunch program was bringing soup in your thermos, a bathroom that worked because of gravity not water pressure, lunches shared and traded with other students without the threat of a lawsuit, "Teacher" not being afraid to use a hickory stick with the full support of the parents, drinking water from a collapsible cup not a fountain, eight years of grade school with boiling water and phosphorous when exposed to air being the extent of a science experiment.

The songwriter would write about how generations of families (1896 through 1963) within a three mile radius of Mt. Sterling received their education at a typical white frame building that was similar to ones that sprouted up within four to six miles of each other in rural counties all over Missouri. Gasconade County had more than 70.

In an era when attending school was more about learning the basics of the 3 Rs, probably less than half graduated from the eighth grade over the span of years mentioned above.

It was not unusual in the 1920's and 30's for a school year attendance book to show enrollments in the upper 30s. It would be difficult to imagine that many students inside such a small building but students 80 to 90 years ago were sort of like C&E (Christmas and Easter) churchgoers today, they attended only the important days!

The biggest drop in attendance was spurred on by the Depression when only seven students attended. After World War II, attendance increased slightly but attendance never did grow sufficiently to warrant a new school.

As the reunion got underway, the old school bell peeled loudly again but the excitement of seeing the building and the events of the afternoon began to turn throats lumpy as the schoolmates with whom we spent our formative years began to pull away. Reunions are that way, always filled with the question: "will I see them again?"
Book for Sale: The Rural Schools of Greene County, Mo.

The book, “A History of the Rural Schools in Greene County, Mo.,” has been updated by the author to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the book’s original release in 2000.

The book’s release accompanies a new array of online resources and YouTube videos created as part of the Ozarks Country School Association.

“The revised book has over 70 additions, more photos, and answers to some of the most common questions that I’ve been asked over the past 10 years,” said author David Burton, a civic communication specialist with University of Missouri Extension. “In the past this book has created interest elsewhere in saving one-room schools and I hope the trend continues.”

Over 1,000 copies of this book have been sold since 2000. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to MU Extension’s rural schools program.

The one-room school is the foundation of public education and a reflection of Missouri's spirit and character. This book captures that spirit, details the rise and fall of one-room schools in this county, and encourages this type of historical community development elsewhere.

Copies of the book are available for $20 (plus $2 shipping and handling) from the University of Missouri Extension Center in Greene County, 833 Boonville, Springfield, Mo. 65802.

Photos of the various rural schools in Greene County can be found and downloaded under the “Rural Schools of Greene County” tab at www.flickr.com/photos/MUExtension417.

1943: Performing for War Bonds at Bell Victory School

From the Springfield News-Leader April 25, 1943: “The Axis Busters,” C.C. Williford’s volunteer group of entertainers, are shown here in the midst of their show at Bell Victory School. Williford is at left. Next to him is miss Dorothy Hall, whistling “Listen to the Mocking Bird.” Members of the string trio (left to right) are Pvt. Frank Netzler of Fresno, CA, an O’Reilly solider; Louis Chambers, CAA chief here and Elmo Boswell, Chambers assistant. On the blackboard is the slogan: “They give their lives—lend your money.”
Mission & Vision

The Ozarks Country School Association is a community development effort under the direction of University of Missouri Extension and is coordinated about of the MU Extension office in Greene County, Springfield, Mo. The Ozarks Country School Association works with individuals and groups to research the rural schools that once operated in this region and then educate the public about the historic and community importance of these buildings. Once that importance is understood, the vision is to work with other individuals and groups to preserve and maintain existing one-room schools and put them to work serving the community.

Organizational news: memberships first

The Ozarks Country School Association was established by David Burton, civic communication specialist at the University of Missouri Extension office in Springfield, Mo., in the fall of 2010. It was the fulfillment of an idea that started in 2000 when he wrote the book, “A History of Rural Schools in Greene County, Mo.”

The mission of the OCSA is to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the one-room school experience in Ozarks. The goal of the organization is to work with historical and community groups as well as interested individuals and building owners to raise funds and awareness to maintain historic one-room school buildings left in southwest Missouri and to develop them as community centers.

The Ozarks Country School Association distributes a quarterly newsletter to members and hosts an annual conference (which members can attend at a discount). Members are able to vote on OCSA business and hold office. Additional special events come up from time to time as well as fundraising efforts and eventually, it is hoped that the group will be able to award grants to be used toward maintenance efforts on one-room schools in the Ozarks. Members will also have chances to help with educational programs dealing with one-room schools.

Membership fees cover costs associated with the local organization and educational events related to the OCSA. Donated funds are maintained in a separate account to be used toward work done on one-room schools in the Ozarks.

Membership forms are available online, at each of the rural school presentations or one can be mailed to you simply by calling (417) 862-9284. Membership is $35 per year and renewals will be $30 per year in order to cover program costs.

Pictured above is one of the outdoor toilets still standing by St. Elmo School (structure built in 1885) located north of Republic, Mo. Both the “boys” and “girls” are standing and they are both “two-holers.”