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Lessons Learned While Speaking

Back in September of 2011, I was invited to speak to a group of Senior Adults about one-room schools at an evening event held at Sycamore Baptist Church in Springfield. My contact, former educator Pat Fortner Sims, promised it would be a fun and educational evening.

When I arrived, the room was decorated with all types of one-room school themed materials. Old school globes, McGuffey readers, old grade cards, marbles, school photos, grade cards and even lunch buckets. There had been a lot of effort go in to the evening.

Pat acted as master of ceremonies and ran the meeting on a schedule similar to a school day in the 1930s. Attendees shared memories of their school days the entire evening was a fun-filled event.

David Burton is available to speak for $35 per hour.

A Message to Parents

When trouble comes we turn to fundamentals. Home becomes dearer. Neighbors and friends mean more. We understand better the mission of the church. We appreciate the services of the school. If schools are a blessing in good times, they are an imperative necessity in bad times. They safeguard the health of the child; they fortify the home; they give hope and encouragement to citizens who are the victims of misfortune but who can take satisfaction that their children are cared for. The schools are ourselves working together in the education of our children. When times are hard we need to make that education better – to take more seriously our common task of preparing the young for life. Times which suggest retrenchment call for our increased safeguards for schools. Next to food, clothing and shelter, they stand between us and chaos. Let us preserve and improve our schools. Let us keep the children first.
Due to 90% Funding Decrease, Schools Group Could Face Changes

Future of OCSA

The Ozarks Country School Association was born two years ago out of work I had been doing for 15 years. My goal was to build a regional chapter of the Country Schools Association of America. Over these two years we have proven that it can be done with some hard work. I’ll be speaking at the national conference of CSAA this year on several topics and one is how to organize a regional group of one-room school enthusiasts.

However a complication has come up in keeping this regional group going. Interest in the group is high but cash is in short supply. One way I sought to get around that problem was to continue my work with the Ozarks School group as part of my community development work with University of Missouri Extension. That has worked for two years, thanks to dues paying members and program attendees.

This newsletter is also going to be printed in black and white to save money pending the approval of a grant. Otherwise, I’m not making drastic changes yet but I wanted to at least make members aware that changes may be needed in 2013.

National membership

I don’t want members to give up on the one-room school movement even if changes do come to the Greene County Extension office. I will continue to maintain a Facebook page (called the Ozark Country Schools Association) and I will also continue our email list for timely and relevant local information.

But, I also want to encourage local members to join the national group. The Country Schools Association of America hosts an annual conference, has an online newsletter, and gives out yearly grants and awards. I do plan to share details with members of the Ozarks Country School Association later this year. Right now I’m working with the national group to get our members a reduced membership for around $20. Members with emails will get regular communications from the group and those without email will get mailings twice a year — including copies of stories that appear on the organization’s online schools newsletter.

One-room School at Boone Village

The Historic Daniel Boone Home and Boonefield Village in Defiance, Mo., overlooks the Femme Osage Valley. This beautiful setting represents life in the early 1800’s from its adventures to its lifelong struggles. The Boone Home brings the legacy of Daniel Boone to life. The Boonefield Village is a simulated town comprised of over a dozen 19th century buildings. Each building has been moved to the site from within 50 miles of the local area. Buildings such as the general store, school house, and grist mill offer a peek into life on the Missouri frontier. The home and village is owned and operated by Lindenwood University.

Ebenezer School

Ebenezer School in the town of Ebenezer (north of Springfield) has been purchased by the Pinegar family and is being renovated for use as a community center. The building stands near Farm Road 56 and Farm Road 145 in Greene County. Renovation has been ongoing for over a year.

In 1849, “select schools” in Greene County were found in Springfield, at Ebenezer and elsewhere according to Holcomb’s History of Greene County (1883). The original wood school for Ebenezer was built around 1832. It burned several years later and a one-room building was erected. Ebenezer consolidated with Willard in 1923.
Instead of taking the school bus to and from school each day, Larry Hasz of rural Loomis rode his pony.

"I just had a long rope and I would tie him up in the road ditch," he said.

It's one of Hasz's many vivid memories from his elementary school days, spent at the rural Liberty School three miles west of Loomis. Hasz spent his days with students in various grades from kindergarten through eighth in a 20-by-24-foot, one-room structure.

"In the spring, we'd have a field day down at Hitchcock Park. There were softball games, we had potato sack races and three-legged races and just plain foot-races. And at Christmas, we always put on a Christmas program," he said.

The days of one-room country schoolhouses have faded, and there are only two dozen still operating in the state. Societal changes and financial woes have forced many to close.

According to South Dakota Department of Education records, during the 2009-2010 school year there were 24 one- and two-teacher schools in the state, excluding Hutterite colony schools. There are 152 school districts in the state.

"The country schools served a real need years ago. They were vital with a larger agriculture population," said Melody Schopp, South Dakota secretary of education. "As the population declined in rural areas, it became a financial issue."

South Dakota reached its peak with one-room schoolhouses in 1916, with 5,011 in operation, said Charles Woodard, co-author of the book "One-Room Country School." In the early 1930s, that number decreased to 4,731. In the mid-1940s, 3,599 were open. By the turn of the century, there were only 50 rural schoolhouses operating in South Dakota.

Although few are left, rural schools still serve a purpose in more spread-out school districts, Schopp said.

Witten and Wood, located in the Colome Consolidated School District, still operate rural schools. Witten, which is 15 miles east of Winner, has 14 students; while Wood, 65 miles west of Colome, educates 28 students. Students are in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The district does not bus students from those small communities to Colome, making it more difficult to transport students to the larger, public schools and creating a need for the smaller, rural school buildings.

Mary Elder, the elementary principal in the Colome district, said the country schools have offered positive opportunities for students.

"There's a better student-to-teacher ratio. They get to know the students and understand what their learning needs are," she said. "There's a lot of cooperation and a lot of communication between (them)."

It's those qualities, among others, that Hasz appreciated during his years at Liberty School.

"A lot of the older students helped the younger students. We didn't do their homework for them, but if they were reading or something and asked what a word was, we'd tell them," Hasz said.

When Hasz first began school in 1949, there were five students. They shared the same teacher. By the time he was in the eighth grade, there were 14 students.

His school day started with 15 minutes of music in the morning, followed by reading and arithmetic. A lunch break was held at noon. In the afternoon, they had language arts, history and geography, with recesses sprinkled in throughout the day.

"Sometimes I do wonder how those teachers did it, doing all eight grades at once," Hasz said.

But the method worked. And like Witten and Wood, the Cheyenne and Millersville schools in Haakon County have kept their rural schools thriving. Elementary principal for the two schools, Kevin Morehart, said the county had 13 rural schools at one point. Six years ago, four were still open, but two closed because of a lack of students.

"It's very similar in style to years ago. They still go put up the flag every morning. The teacher teaches different grade levels at different times," Morehart said.

Many of the positive qualities of rural schools are still alive and well in Haakon County. Older students still help the younger students, for example.

"They become strong, independent workers. They become self-motivated," Morehart said.
"They have to do their work."

The country schools in Haakon County incorporate new instruments of education, too. Both schools have computers, and this past year, Millersville installed a "smart board" — the same technology used in the Phillip Elementary School.

Cheyenne has five students enrolled from grades second through eighth. Millersville has 14 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through eighth.

More hart said with such a long distance to travel into Phillip — some students would have to commute 50 miles — keeping the rural schools open makes sense.

Meade County operates six rural schools. The classes are conducted in modular homes with one teacher and a teacher's aide.

The Meade School District is 2,500 square miles. To be transported into town each day, it would be 30 to 40 miles for some students.

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Enterprise School Still Enjoyed as Part of Saddlebrook

Enterprise School still exists and it is a beloved spot for landowners in the Saddlebrooke Development south of Springfield according to Tyler Lorance, a salesperson for Saddlebrooke, phone 417-443-6500. Owners use the school and the land around it to picnic, camp, and just generally enjoy. The pictures here show how the school looked during the fall of 2011.

One former school attendee, Bob Bilyeu, still has fond memories of Enterprise. “I went to school there through the fifth grade. My mother taught there three different times between children. There was a swinging bridge that crossed Bull Creek from the west side. Dr. Barry Farber now owns the land across the bridge from the school house.”

Enterprise School by Bertha Dye Larsen

Following is a list of the pupils attending Enterprise School on the ‘last day of school, February 21, 1908. This was the second school organized in Christian County, about 1850. It would be interesting to know what became of the group and to know the history of their families, generally old ones in the area.

We went to Oklahoma in 1908, returned in 1912. From then on I was away working and attending school. My sister, Madeline Dye, lives in Greenville, Texas and has for forty-five years. She never married. I live in Verona.

Jolly Mill Park Features Restored Chapman School (1884)

Jolly Mill Park (near Pierce City, Mo.) is a privately supported recreational and historical park. The purpose of the Park is to restore and preserve the history of the Capps Creek valley to be enjoyed by the people who live in the area and for those who have an interest in the valley.

The 1848 mill containing Isbell's Distillery and Jolly Mill has been a landmark in southwest Missouri for over 150 years, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Built with slave labor by Thomas Isbell and his son, John, the three floor structure still retains the original hand-hewn and pegged framing timbers and limestone slab foundations. A village named Jollification quickly developed around the distillery/mill to serve as a rest stop and re-supply point for wagon trains and stagecoaches. Because of new taxes on whiskey which owner George Isbell refused to pay, the distillery was closed in the 1870s. Isbell turned his attention to the milling of flour.

In 1983, a group of interested citizens organized a foundation to restore and preserve the Jolly Mill as a nucleus of public recreation park for picnicking and fishing. Mill restoration was completed in 1998 when the repaired water-powered machinery began grist milling demonstrations.

The mill building has been restored and the mill pond is again a beautiful and useful element and is stocked with rainbow trout. Other features at Jolly Mill Park include: Russell Cox Gazebo, Wooten Moore Bandstand, Chapman School (built 1884 and shown in the picture below), Shepherd Sawmill, a covered bridge, Cummins Bridge, Hawkins Bridge, a doll quilt collection, Rake playground and Haskins bridge.

Jolly Mill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The park is open from sunrise to sunset and is located at 11262 Jolly Mill Lane, Pierce City, Mo. For more information, call 417-476-2607.
Publicizing Your Next School Event with These Tips

To publicize an event first consider who you want to attend. If the potential audience is small, talk to each member personally, call or write a letter. You can't beat the personal approach.

If the potential audience is too big for the personal approach how do you let people know about the event? How do you get them to come?

First of all, the event has to be worthwhile. Nothing will hurt your credibility with your audience and the media more than a highly publicized event that just doesn't amount to much.

Assuming you have a large potential audience, and your event is well organized, you should plan your media campaign at least three months in advance if you want to use magazines as part of your publicity effort. Determine items and people you want featured. It's a good idea to follow through on one theme. For example, the same picture used on your flyer also could be used on posters and with a news release.

Publicity Checklist

Some media/methods to consider:
- An organizing committee whose members can talk about it personally.
- Advance news releases
- Fliers
- Posters
- Radio tapes and scripts
- Brochures or programs
- Direct mail or information or invitations
- Pictures
- Loudspeakers
- Caps, name tags and other identification
- Television (provide public service announcements and news clips)
- Follow-up news releases

General rules of publicity

Only publicize events that deserve publicity. Pomp without substance is not appealing to media people. And it won't do your credibility any good, either.

Put someone in charge. Publicity by committee is a mess. However, you should get help from others to personally spread the work to opinion leaders.

Make a plan. Decide what you want to publicize and how you plan to do it three months in advance.

Consider the media options you have and pick the most appropriate (not just one). If you have a small audience, you might just speak or write personally to each person.

Make a calendar. Plan well in advance a schedule of your publicity activities.

Be accurate. Clearly establish the 5 Ws and the H. (See news release brochure).

Be brief. Short, tightly written stories announcing an event have a greater chance of being used.

Use a local angle. Involve local people in planning your event. They can help make contacts with those you wish to have attend. Localize press releases.

Focus on the right audience. This may be the most important rule in communicating: know your audience and then write and talk to them. It is also helpful to study how to reach this target group.

Decide what is news. What makes your event newsworthy?

Tips for pitching story ideas to news reporters
1. Do your homework.
2. Find the reporter who covers your area.
3. Read their last few articles.
4. Refer to those articles when you pitch.
5. Be quick on your feet. Think of alternative ideas if they shoot down your first idea.
6. Offer three reasons why their readers would be interested in your story idea.
7. Don't be offended by a reporter with a brusque manner.
8. Don't be offended if they ask "so what?" They could be testing you to see if you have a deep story.
9. Reporters have to "sell" story ideas to their editors, just like you have to "sell" ideas to reporters. Give them the ammunition they need and they'll give you what you want.
Establish media contacts. Be open. Let them know who you are and what you have to publicize. Learn their deadlines and other expectations.

Be business-like in your dealings with the media. Editors and broadcasters have busy schedules, deadlines and profits to make. They consider themselves experts in their business. They don't like to be told "you have to run my story."

Don't cajole or beg. "Sell" your story on its own merit (that's why the first rule is so important: make sure you have something to sell in the first place).

Don't forget to say "thank you" to the media when they help you publicize an event. A letter to the editor, for example, from you or someone who attended the event, is nice.

Follow up. If an event was worth publicizing, it should be worth a follow-up story on what happened. This could be in the form of information called or delivered to the media before the event ends.

Start planning for the next event. Keep track of what happened and learn from your mistakes. Keep records or notes. Have a discussion immediately after the event with those involved to figure out what went right and how you might do better the next time.

Media calendar

- Plan the media effort. You should work directly with those in charge of the event.
- Send the first release announcing the event at least eight weeks in advance, or at least with enough to meet deadlines of magazines.
- Write and design a flyer announcing the event.
- Have posters printed for posting at the event and in areas frequented by the target audience.
- Take pictures two to four weeks ahead of the event and then distribute those to local newspapers. Past years' files can help.
- Conduct radio interviews with participants and/or give scripts to radio people for their radio services. Again, figure a two to three week lead time to allow time for editing and distribution.
- Send another more detailed advanced story to newspapers two weeks before the event. If possible, it should be accompanied by a photo.
- Write stories from information presented at the event. Do these in advance so they can be released the day of or the day following the event.
- Contact television stations one to two weeks before the event. Arrange for advance filming and/or coverage of the actual event. Prior to this, determine "highlights" and possible TV "stars" who are willing to be interviewed and filmed.
- Hold a "news conference" (optional) to give editors and broadcasters a "preview" and a chance to interview, take pictures and prepare stories. This usually is done the day before the event.
- Cover the event. Be available to help visiting editors and broadcasters cover it. Take pictures. Make radio tapes. Information gathered at the event can be used to write follow-up features (without a tie to the event) for magazines, to provide timeless interviews for Extension radio service, to document the event and to build picture file.

University of Missouri Extension has great learning resources available online for groups and individuals wanting to promote events and do better with media relations.

http://extension.missouri.edu
Greasy Creek School Update

Steve Yemm is hard at work restoring Greasy Creek School (Stephens School) in south central Missouri. His school was a focal point in the feature article, “Restoration or Rebuild” in last months newsletter. Steve recently sent an update as well as some photos about what he has done.

“The time I make available for restoring our one room school house is divided between historical research on the wet days and working on the building on the dry days,” said Steve.

To date, Steve has acquired an 80 percent complete list of teachers between 1871 and 1954 including some photographs. “We have several interesting stories about the school or activities at the school and we have the old deeds from the original property owner to the school district. We are enlarging this information to poster size, laminating both sides and pinning them up on the inside of the building. Most of the old students that I have found can barely walk now but their descendents can easily enter the building,” said Steve.

Based on the recommendations from members of the Ozarks Country School Association, Steve removed the leaning brick chimney (built in 1938 or '39). He also graded the surrounding earth so the water will drain away from the building. He attached supports to the leaning sides that will be used as jack poles (see photo below) to bring the building back to plumb later this summer. Once this is accomplished, he plans to restore the rotted away lower parts of the walls and floor. “Our plan is to restore the building to its 1903 state when it was first built, with a wood stove in the center. Hidden from view will be metal cross bracing, vermin proof insulated walls, ceiling and floor and concrete pillars under the hand poured concrete foundation. The building will then be free to use by any family, community organization or school field trips. Since all progress is based upon my timing, I cannot commit to a schedule,” said Steve.
Student has Found School Memories from Hannibal, Mo., Including Teacher’s Romance with an Eighth Grade Student

There must be a hundred things I remember about while living that old farm. But first and foremost in my memory was the school. It was called Beer School, named after an old farm family that must have donated the land where it was built, which happened to be over two miles from the farm. (This was in the Hannibal, Mo. area). It was a one room school house with eight grades, and it was the toughest school in all of Missouri. The teacher was a good looking girl of about 18 and was having an affair with one of boys from the eighth grade class. Sometimes they would run all us kids out of the school while they romanced.

Most of the older boys would bring their guns to school and go hunting. I remember once they trapped a skunk in a den and came and made all us little kids come and try to dig it out. We never got the skunk out, but we stunk so badly the teacher sent us home early.

During the winter time there was a fire in the furnace, and when the teacher went to the outhouse, the boys would put a poker in the stove and get it red hot and then run down to where the outhouse was and put the hot tip up against the back side of the outhouse until they finally burned a good sized peep hole. Afterwards they would go and sit on a bank close by to watch. There was also couple of girls at the school who would to get in a fight with the teacher almost every day. Sometimes they even took a hammer after her.

During the winter there was a large pond about a quarter of a mile from the school that froze over. This is where the big kids would go to ice skate. One noon hour, a mean kid came running back to the school and starting yelling to the teacher that three of kids had fallen through the ice and they were trying to find them. Well, we all ran to the pond, and sure enough there was a round hole in the ice where some kids were probing the water for bodies with long poles. All of us little kids and the teacher were mortified until we heard some giggles in the cattails near the edge of the pond. The three missing kids were hiding. It was a good ending after all.

Gene and I were not in school very long before they decided to lock us in the boy’s outhouse. I didn't know it until then, but I could run fast and they couldn't catch me, but they caught Gene and locked him in. I started crying and ran to the teacher telling her they had locked my brother in the outhouse.

They did that to Gene so many times it almost became a habit. Sometimes he would wrap his arms and legs around a tree and it would take six or eight boys to tear him loose. He would hold on so tight that he would almost de-bark it. And then I would run and tell the teacher what they were doing to my brother.

It was the last day of school, the oldest Kiser girl, Geraldine, had a Model A truck and was hauling a bunch of us kids down this gravel road when the toughest boy in the school he fell out the back. We were probably going thirty five mph so it really beat him up. He was one terrible looking mess, all scratched and bruised and bleeding.

But he instantly jumped up and said, "That didn't hurt. A little old thing like that can’t hurt me." He wouldn't let anyone touch him: not even to wipe the blood off him. Tough kids went to that school.

Russell Sinclair
Butte Falls, Oregon

The Daily Routine

In the fall of 1934, while the nation was struggling through the big depression, I began my first teaching job at $35 per month. Being fresh out of high school, with an extra year of teacher’s training (which was then a high school subject); the money was good pay and looked good at the time.

I still have in my possession the six inch brass bell which was used each morning at 9 a.m. for the 30 minute morning and afternoon recesses and at the noon hour. At the sound of the bell, the children would gather at the steps of the building. The flag would be raised on the flag pole and the allegiance repeated. They would line up in an orderly
fashion and march in to the school building.

Upon entering the building the children would hang their coats and caps on hooks in the back wall with a shelf above for their lunch pails. The opening exercises consisted of a Bible reading, recommended by the State Course of Study, followed most times by the Lord’s Prayer. To the delight of the children, I would then read 15 or 20 minutes from a book like Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, etc. By then we were ready to work. All eight grades were represented in the group. One class at a time would come forward to sit on the long wooden bench in front of the room near the much-used blackboard. While these lessons were given the rest of the pupils would study their assignments for when it came their turn.

At noon, someone would work the pump while the rest would take turns washing their hands for lunch. The teacher usually boarded with a family in the district, maybe for four or five dollars a week. And for sure, she was expected to stay at least one night each school year with each family.

In February of 1937, a tornado completely demolished the little school and all of its furnishings and the school year was finished in the basement of the country church nearby. They school as never rebuilt and the pupils were transported to the town. It wasn’t long afterward that all country schools were consolidated with the town school.

Lena Jump
Marshfield, Mo.

Kind Teacher Eases the Sting

Most teachers of country one room schools were real friends. They treated their students as family. I know that the one I had was more than a teacher. I attended Peninsula School back in 1928-29. It was one of the best times of my life, especially the tie Mrs. Kathryn took my friend Helen and I to her home to spend the night. We were going to help her grade test papers that night. That’s what we were supposed to do. But, our teacher took us for a walk instead in the wood, along the shore of a creek. We did enjoy this walk. Our teacher was like a big sister to us. When we got back to the house, Helen and I decided to get rid of some wasp nests that were clinging to the eaves of the house. We started throwing clods of dirt at the wasps’ nests. Boy, did we ever get those wasps riled up!

You guessed it, I was the one the wasps ganged up on. I got several stings and they sure hurt! But Mrs. Kathryn dabbed each sting with kerosene. I went ahead and enjoyed my overnight stay with the teacher and Helen and we even still found time to check those test papers. I learned a big lesson as well about leaving wasps alone.

Marjorie Burd McGowin
Jericho Springs, Mo.

Reciting at School Programs

About 50 years ago, the night of the programs at the one room country school was big event. The school I attended had a stage at the front of the room with heavy win colored curtains to be pulled by hand for the plays and pieces the children of the school would perform. Most of the parents came to watch the children. At this time the parents were all married and no step-parents. Some of the pieces the children said I remember. They one my little sister received I remember the best;

Thanksgiving is coming
The time is drawing near,
When mama bakes pies
And daddy hunts deer.
We will have turkey
And many things more,
I hope I don’t eat
Til my tummy gets sore.

On the last line my sister rubbed her tummy, rolled her eyes and ran off the stage with everyone clapping and laughing.

Betty Jane Atkinson
Fair Grove, Mo.

Submissions

Want to submit a letter of memories about a 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.

The Ozarks Country School Association is a program of University of Missouri Extension
Teacher Says “Love and Concern was Abundant”

Memories of the one-room school are pleasant and vivid in my mind. My first encounter with school was for eight years as a student in the one-room school. Later, I taught nine years in a one-room school. Life was simple and pleasant. I was visiting with a former schoolmate last evening and we agreed that we really received a good education in the old school. We cited how well we learned our math, reading and geography.

Also the successes for former students in later life. Many have become wealthy in worldly possessions. Many have become inventors, shown talents in our modern society. We see doctors, nurses, ministers, aviators and many useful positions in our world. We learned to become skaters, mud waders and athletes on our way to school. We received our physical education on our way to school by sliding, trudging through snow, mud and cold. We fell, picked ourselves up and learned to go on.

I remember seeing the sunrise in the Eastern sky in the morning and saw it set in the west from schoolroom when I taught. Once we had a terrible blizzard during the day. The snow was deep. One frail boy had to walk across the field over fences to his home. I was afraid he couldn’t find his way through the blowing snow so I took him by the hand and took him home before I went to my adobe.

Love and concern was abundant in those days.

Ida Marie Jones
Mountain View, Mo.

Repetition Works Well

I had six grades, not including forth or sixth, if I remember right and only 13 or 14 pupils. There was a recitation bench near the teacher’s desk so that she could call each class up to recite. There were only 5 to 7 minutes for each class depending on the number of grades. Some classes such as civics and physiology had to be divided in to twice a week and three times a week. On Friday’s, after the last recess, we would have a spelling bee or map hunt or ciphering match. On the map hunts, a young child would sit down with an older one and someone would write the name of a town, river or mountains on the board and the rest of the school would try to be the first to find it on the map and in the geography book.

If there were any exceptionally bright older children who had time, you could let them take a younger one aside to help him with his reading. Fourth and fifth-graders could drill first and second graders on flash cards. Crossword puzzles were good for older pupils after finishing lessons.

Often a bright child’s education was enhanced by attending a one-room school. The young ones, as they came up in grades, could get facts and ideas firmly entrenched in their minds by listening to the older classes recite and by watching them work math on the blackboard so that it came very easy to them when they reached the higher grades. The old principle of repetition worked very well here.

One class that I held two or three times a month was on diacritical markings. Many grown people say they never learned in school how to pronounce words from the markings used in a dictionary. I March I let the eighth graders know that I would expect a summary of each of their subjects to be written on several pages of notebook paper along with illustrations and finished with an attractive cover for display on a table to be turned in two weeks before the end of school. Their graduation depended on their good summaries and grades, of course

Crystal Bennett Edwards
Anderson, Mo.
Return to the Past at Star School

Museum at College of the Ozarks Near Branson Preserve this Jewel

For more information see the article, “Start School, New Setting” in the 1979 (July/August) issue of Ozarks Mountaineer.

Star School began in 1863 in Barry County, Missouri. A group of mothers in that area wanted to make sure their children had a proper education. Money was gathered for a log cabin to be built and a Captain from the Civil War Calvary was hired to teach the first term of school. A few years later, the cabin was torn down and replaced by a better structure which burned in 1899. A third building was built and that is the building on display today on the campus of College of the Ozarks. The Star School was used until 1936 with the last term of school having only three students.

In a one room schoolhouse, there were eight grades in one classroom and probably just a few students in each grade with only one teacher. The pictures on the back wall of the classroom are actually Star School classes and were taken between 1900 and 1935.

From these pictures you can see how many or how few students there were attending school at one time. You can also see the clothing that the students wore and how it is different from today. In the one-room schoolhouse days, all girls wore dresses, no pants of any kind. The boys wore overalls or blue jeans with a work shirt. No shorts for boys or girls.

The reason this building is called the Star Schoolhouse is be-
cause when the school was built, someone hung a carved start above the door on the outside. Schools were not necessarily named for a town. Sometimes they were named after the person who built the school or for a geographical reason such as Hill School or Spring School.

The school is set up very much like any one room school of the time. The desks are smaller in the front of the room and get bigger as you go back because the youngest children sat in the front of the room and the eight graders sat toward the back. The first row doesn’t have a desk, so the students assigned to these chairs would have to hold their books, slates, pencils in their lap. The desks were bolted to the floor, and the seat part raised up in order to clean between the desks. In schools today, many classrooms have tables instead of desks, and the ones with desks, you are able to move yours next to someone else to work on a project together. Group work didn’t happen in the one-room school.

In the center of the room is a stove. Either coal or wood and it was the responsibility of the teacher to arrive at school at least an hour early in the winter to get the fire going so the room would be warm by the time students arrived. The six windows at the side are the air conditioning. In the one room schoolhouse days, classes were not held from September through May like they are now. Sometimes, classes were held in the summertime as well, with longer breaks at other times of the year. This was due in part to the kids being needed at home to take care of the crops or the harvest.

At the front of the room is the teacher’s platform with her desk. Sometimes the raised platform ran the length of the front of the room and doubled as a stage, with bed sheets strung on wire for curtains. This way the kids could perform for the parents some evenings during the school year to show what they had learned. The chalkboard at the front of the

A video tour of Star School is available at YouTube.com. Just do a search for “Star School—Circa 1900”
The simple teacher’s desk (above) and the conservative teacher’s dress visible in the photo below both speak to the simple lifestyle expected of the one-room school teacher.

room is standard, however, the clock is not. The only person who needed to know the time was the teacher and she either had a pocket watch or a windup alarm clock on her desk. This clock is just a nice museum piece that was never taken out of the building.

To the left of the chalkboard is a map case, not standard equipment and to the right is the school library, also not standard equipment. In many schools, the parents were responsible for buying the text books for the students because there sometimes wasn’t enough money in the budget to provide books. At the back of the room, we have the water fountain, which is a wood bucket that was filled with fresh water each day. When the children were thirsty they would drink from the tin dipper. Later, when it was realized that germs were passed by sharing, cups were sometimes provided by the school.

The restroom, of course, an outhouse located several years away from the school. Another term for outhouse is privy and this was a more polite term to use in school. The cord hanging down by the door goes to the bell in the bell tower and this was how students were told school was ready to begin or to come in from recess. If school didn’t have a bell tower, the teacher used a hand ball and we have several examples by the chalkboard.

The class schedule on the school desks is from 1910 and was used in Star School. It shows what classes were taught throughout the day and how much time was spent on each subject. You can see that they learned the same things you learn now: geography, arithmetic, history, spelling and the classes listed as a reader were very similar to your English or language arts classes.

In a typical day, the teacher would call the classes she was trying to reach to the front of the room and have them sit on the benches which are called recitation benches. Now while the teacher was discussing their homework or assigning their next chapter, the rest of the students were quietly sitting at their desks studying. From the class schedule you will notice that the class day did not include some classes that you do every weekly Physical Education, music and art classes.
did not exist in the one-room school. The hour long recess at noon fulfilled the need for P.E. and music might have consisted of singing a couple of songs in the morning to begin the school day, without a piano or other musical instrument or course. Art classes would have been too expensive to do. Many schools could barely afford the necessary textbooks let alone anything extra such as paints or brushes.

The rules of the one-room were school were very strict. The students had to sit up straight in their chairs with both feet flat on the floor. They had to remain quiet all day long. They were not allowed to pass notes to each other, whisper, make faces at their neighbors or write on their slates except at a time when the teacher said it was okay. Students were supposed to know their homework and they were not to be late to class.

Any infraction of the classroom rules were punishable by the teacher. Some forms of punishment would include staying in at recess, standing in the corner, staying after school or having your hand slapped with a ruler. Another form of punishment was to stand on your tiptoes at the chalkboard with your nose in a circle, the teacher had drawn on the board. The most severe from of punishment, being whipped in front of the rest of the students with a hickory stick and was used only when nothing else would work. Girls were never whipped, only the boys, and if you were whipped at school, the parents would probably whip you twice as hard when you got home.

Going to school was a privilege and not all students got to finish the 8th grade, some had to drop out to work on the farm at a young age, such as 4th or 5th grade, so the parents wanted to make sure their children had every opportunity possible and that they shouldn’t be disruptive in class and not be able to learn all they could.

All of the students brought their lunch as there was no cafeteria down the hall. The students in the one-room schools would have been bringing lunches consisting of sandwiches made with leftovers from supper the night before or peanut butter and jelly or just butter and jelly or maybe sausage and biscuits left over from breakfast. They could have brought cold baked potatoes without butter and sour cream maybe just a little salt apples if
they were in season or carrots from the garden if they were ready. Homemade cookies were popular. Nothing needed to be heated or kept cold was brought. You drank water with lunch and when you were finished you went outside for recess.

Games would have included Drop the Hanky, shooting marbles, tag or duck-duck-goose. Shoes were an optional item when the weather was warm so you could also go wading at the creak. The only rule about recess was that you couldn’t be late coming back to class. When the teacher rang the bell to begin the class, you should be ready.

The teacher’s job was very hard. She had to prepare lessons for and teach eight different glades instead of just one. She also had to be her own janitor and sweep her schoolroom every day and also scrub the floor with hot soapy water once a week. She was also responsible for arriving to school at least an hour early in the winter to get the fire going in the stove so the room would be warm by the time the students arrived. She also had to be the school nurse if anyone got hurt out on the playground and she had to be her own principal because she had to administer all of the discipline to the students.

She also had restrictions on her outside of the classroom as well. In the early 1900s, she could not be married if she wanted to teach. She also had a curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. and was to be at home unless at a school or church function. She could not dye her hair, smoke cigarettes or dress in bright colors. Her dress could not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle and she could not leave the city limits of town unless she had the permission from the school board.

Star School at College of the Ozarks may be the finest school museum in the region. From the class photos shown on the back wall (top photo) to the water bucket (middle picture) and oil lamp on the wall (left photo) the museum has been careful to preserve all of the school details.
Historian has Used Oral Histories to Produce One-Room School Plays

Meredith Ludwig, a resident of Boonville, Mo., has worked with other one-room school groups to collect oral histories and turn those in to “school specific” plays. She would like to be able to do the same thing in southwest Missouri. She recently provided the Ozarks Country School Association with a copy of her script, “Step Back to Class” which has been used in central Missouri.

“The materials used for that script were taken from actual school books found in the schoolhouse. The audience loved the presentation and we have had requests to repeat the production. All the actors were community members and we used an autoharp to accompany the singing,” said Ludwig.

The play could easily be adapted for other schools by replacing the actual stories with ones collected for a specific school. “I also have a musical I wrote inspired by oral histories collected along the Missouri. I'm looking for a group who would like to produce it,” said Ludwig.

If you're curious, visit the website GumboBottomsMusical.com or contact Ludwig by telephone at 660-537-4139 or email at Gumbo-Bottoms@gmail.com.

Most recently, Ludwig wrote and directed “Snake County Stories” for McDonald County Chamber of Commerce, Pineville, Mo. It premiered April 28, 2011, and designed to tell the history of the county in story, sound and song.

She also compiled, wrote and directed, Osage County; a Story Quilt, for University of Missouri Extension conference, “Capitalizing on Your Community’s Heritage.” Participants performed the play; reading the parts, singing, playing instruments for the folk history based play.

She also compiled, wrote and directed, “Step Back to Class,” a folk history theatre presentation celebrating the 120 anniversary of New Lebanon School, a one-room school for the New Lebanon Preservation Society and Cooper County Historical Society with funding from the Missouri Humanities Council.

Here is a sampling from “Step Back to Class.”

DIRECTOR’S NOTE: The cast of children will be seated in the audience as if they are coming to see the play except for one student who is tardy. The readers will be seated on the recitation bench and will rise when they speak. Sounds will cue the students and teachers to “freeze” while the readers are speaking. The audience has a program at their desk that contains “primary reading” samples and lyrics to the songs.

SOUND — TABLE CHIME (3 CHIMES)

READER I: My name is Mabel Rothgeb Long and I was born on a farm near New Lebanon in 1907. I started to this very school when I was seven. The memory that stands out most for me happened when I was in the third grade. My Uncle Dan was the teacher. “I knew he was real strict and everything and I was so scared of him. I behaved myself all the time, but I still thought he was going to do something to me. When he called on me to recite, I just fainted. He picked me up, took me to one of the big seats in the back and poured a bucket of water on me. (She sits on the bench.)

SCHOOL BELL is rung again (Teacher enters from the back of the class dressed in 1920’s school teacher attire.)

TEACHER: Good morning class

CLASS: Good morning Miss Humphrey!

TEACHER: Let us all stand for the Pledge of Allegiance

EVERYONE: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

TEACHER: Please be seated. (Back door opens and Noah rushes in and takes his seat.)

TEACHER: Noah, the bell has rung and we have already said the pledge. Where were you?

NOAH: I’m sorry Miss Humphrey. The hogs got out this morning and they was rootin’ in the neighbor’s garden and I had to help my paw and I was already running late when my dad gum horse—...
Oral History Program Captures Stories from 14 Former One-Room School Teachers and Students and also Trains Others How to do Oral History Projects

Fourteen former students and teachers at one-room schools in the Ozarks shared their memories with Jeff Corrigan, oral historian at the State Historical Society of Missouri, and Dr. Virginia Lass, a trustee with the Society, at the Greene County Extension Center on March 22 and March 23.

Each person was interviewed for an hour about their one-room school experiences and the interviews were professionally recorded. The oral histories will be preserved at the State Historical Society in Columbia, Mo., and will be available to researchers.

The individuals formally interviewed over the two days were: Ruth Bone from Elkand; Lola Belle Underwood from Marshfield; Mary Sue Robertson and Bonita Pipkin from Republic; June Richter and Jackie Warfel from Bois D’Arc; and Olive Hampton, Mildred Kendrick, Virginia Snyder, Norma Tolbert, Mary Frances Freeman, Jacob Nave, Imogene Bennett, and Dr. Rebecca Burrell, all from Springfield.

The oral histories were captured in conjunction with MU Extension’s local project known as the Ozarks Country Schools Program. David Burton, civic communication specialist with University of Missouri Extension and county program director for Greene County Extension, helped to organize the day.

“I’d say over all it was a fantastic couple of days,” said Burton. “I heard some great stories, there was laughter, and some experiences were shared that are unique to the Ozarks. Those stories have now been saved for future generations. The best thing of the two days may be that we have now trained 32 other people on how to conduct oral history projects.”

TRAINING FOR OTHERS

Burton also taught a special first-time Greene County Extension class entitled, “Creating an Oral History Project” which was attended by 32 people.

Participants in the class learned how to organize and record a professional oral history project for family members or individuals with a shared experience. Materials on how to set up and plan and oral history as well as the MU Extension publication, “A
History of Me,” were used in the classroom portion of the program.

Participants also got to observe a professional quality oral history project being done with two former one-room school teachers.

“My hope is that those who attended the class and were trained will now turn around and do oral history projects in their own community or organizations and preserve the information for the long-term,” said Burton.

Materials from the program can be ordered using an order form available online at http://extension.missouri.edu/greene.
Pat Sims of Springfield contacted David Burton about giving his rural schools presentation to a group of senior adults at Seminole Baptist Church in Springfield. This wasn’t your typical evening gathering with food however. Pat made contact with former one-room students and teachers and found interesting items for center pieces. The entire agenda was set up similar to the schedule of a school day and the nearly 80 in attendance enjoyed Burton’s presentation on one-room schools (he is available for $35 plus travel expenses). The McGuffey readers above served as one of the table center pieces and were also fun conversation starters.