

Historically Speaking

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School Days, School Days, Dear Old Golden Rule Days, Readin' and Writin' and 'Rithmetic, Taught to the Tune of a Hickory Stick

By Julie Spilinek

Karen Siefering of Arizona suggested I write about the country schools of Howard County and here is the result

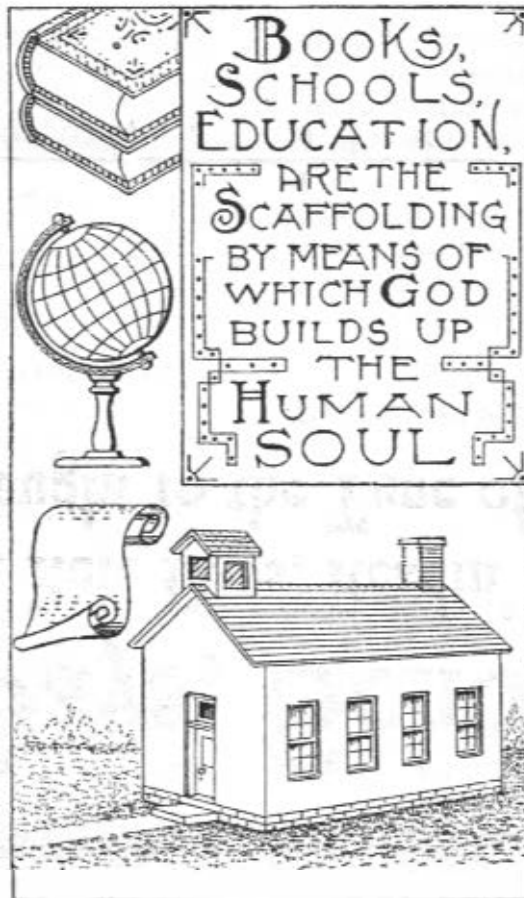
One could actually write a book on the subject; however, this will only cover a chapter. As I researched information on the country schools, the school bells were ringing for the county's present students, but most of them will not hear that wooden handled brass bell that called generations of students into the classroom. Instead, they will respond to electronically controlled devices. Numerous changes have occurred in the educational system from the late 1800's to the present.

Let's start with the buildings themselves. At one time over 80 one room structures dotted the landscape. The earliest buildings were constructed of sod or logs. Later these were replaced by wood frame buildings painted white with large windows along each side. Most of them featured an entryway where coats were hung, lunch pails lined up and the water container placed. This container was a large crock with a spigot or simply a bucket with a dipper. Each student would have his or her own cup—or tin can to drink from. The main room featured rows of wooden desks with the teacher's desk in front or perhaps to the side. A large blackboard graced the front with a cork bulletin board above it.

This was used to display various art work. An alphabet chart was visible above this. The American flag, and sometimes the Nebraska flag, were displayed on the wall or in a

corner in a wooden stand. Most schools had pictures of George Washington and/or Abraham Lincoln on the wall. Maps were usually hung from a roller above the blackboard and pulled down when needed.

Students sat in wooden desks arranged in rows. Some of these accommodated two or three children side by side. The ink well was a standard feature on most desks and numerous pranks were executed as a result of these—either accidentally or on purpose. Ellen Campbell, who often writes for the *Silver Salute*, told me she was a victim of the ink well. Heat was usually provided by burning coal or cobs in a pot belly stove placed in the center of the room. A patron of the district would make sure there was a supply of coal and/or cobs but the teacher was responsible for starting the fire in the morning and keeping it going during the day. The cooling system on hot days involved opening the windows. The teacher was also the daily janitor—



From a 1916-17 souvenir booklet,
Theda McCann, teacher; District 19

sweeping the floors, dusting, etc.

Every one of these stately buildings was accompanied by a much smaller structure, sometimes two, one for

A Message From the President

Gary Peterson

The summer season is over and the Historical Village will be closed until spring except by special request for a tour.

I want to thank everyone that volunteered their time for sitting and giving tours of the village. This includes board members and members and friends of HCHS. We had a good summer and hope to see more people visit next year.

We continue to have a lot of out of town and state visitors and have helped some with genealogy. We have all kinds of information to share and show to people.

females. one for males. until indoor plumbing replaced them. These outhouses were also a source of mischief. The playground equipment varied with one or more of the following: a slide, a merry-go-round, a set of swings. Balls of various size and shape might be available along with a wooden bat. Games, such as pump, pump, pull-a-way, Andy-I-Over, Red Rover, Red Rover; and of course, Hide and Seek, were an integral part of the playground experience. Fox and Geese was a favorite winter game after a snowfall along with building snowmen, snow angels and snow forts.

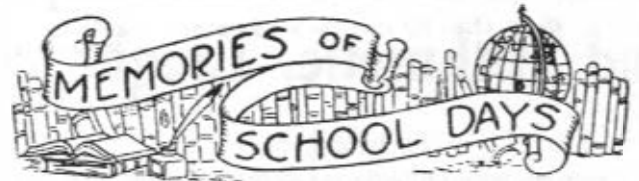
In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, subjects

3	Sept	23	1938	59.78	Mary Pett	Teaching
4	Sept	29	1938	3.00	Janet Throck	Teaching
5	Oct	21	1938	60.70	Mary Pett	Teaching
6	Nov	18	1938	55.68	Mary Pett	Teaching
7	Dec	16	1938	55.24	Mary Pett	
8	Jan	20	1939	55.00	Mary Pett	
9	Feb	18	1939	56.94	Mary Pett	
10	Mar	17	1939	57.03	Mary Pett	
11	April	14	1939	55.00	Mary Pett	
12	May	12	1939	52.88	Mary Pett	
13	May	28	1939	34.60	Midway Supply Co	Coal
14	July	22	1939	23.83	Lincoln Supply Co	Coal
15	May	25	1939	4.10	Pete Nawak	Harding Coal
16	May	25	1939	9.50	J. Harvick	Ice Cream
17	May	28	1939	15.00	John Flaming	Salary
18	May	28	1939	6.00	Edw. Watson	Salary
19	May	28	1939	6.80	Pete Nawak	Salary of Supply
				621.74	Total Expenses	
				58.70		

This is a sample of expenses for District #8 for 1938-1939.

included penmanship, geography, grammar, composition, physiology, history, civics, bookkeeping, drawing, algebra, geometry, botany and orthography which includes writing and word study. The students were given a grade in deportment in addition to the subjects they were taking. Deportment referred to the students' behavior in school as they were expected to be attentive and respectful. Various means were used to accomplish this end. Offenders were often made to stand in a corner, write down their offense numerous times, and of course, stay after school. Most students avoided these if possible.

Prior to 1940 a high school student could take a course called normal training and become a teacher in a rural



Should old acquaintance be forgot,
And scenes we left behind;
No, wheresoever be our lot,
We keep them still in mind.
The scenes mid which we often roved,
In childhood's early morn,
The old red schoolhouse on the hill,
The cot where we were born.



On friends, by many ties held dear,
Fond memory loves to dwell,
It cost a sigh, perhaps a tear,
To bid them all farewell.
But distance never can efface,
The lines of friendship dear,
Nor time's destructive hand erase,
Impressions strong and clear.



The woodland path we often trod,
Along our way to school;
The hook and line and fishing rod,
The brook and emerald pool;
The boys and girls with whom we played,
Who answered to our call,
Are comrades still, live where they may,
We love them one and all.

*From a 1916-17 souvenir booklet,
Theda McCann, teacher, District 19*

FORM 55-1810-113-TEACHER'S CK.

MILBURN & SCOTT CO., INC., COUNTY SUPPLIES, BEATRICE, NEBR.

A district board cannot make a legal contract—one that will bind the district—with a teacher who does not hold a valid certificate, and members of the board will be personally liable to the district for money paid to a teacher who is not legally qualified. 13 Nebr. 52.

TEACHER'S CONTRACT

THIS AGREEMENT, Entered into this 16 day of May, 1934 between School District No 13, Howard County, Nebraska and Leona Jepson a teacher of above said county, to-wit:

WITNESSETH: That said Leona Jepson deposes that she is a lawfully qualified teacher holding a 2nd Certificate now in force and valid in said county beyond the term of this contract, and agrees

to teach the school of above said district in an efficient and faithful manner for a term of 9 months of twenty days each, commencing on the day of 1934, to keep self qualified, and in all things observe the rules and regulations of the district board as provided by law.

IT IS AGREED that the school shall not be dismissed (closed) during the term of ("be" or "not be")

(Name the holidays or any special reasons)

day and that the teacher shall be paid the usual salary in full for these days ("be" or "not be")

IN CONSIDERATION WHEREOF, said school district agrees to pay to said teacher the total sum of \$ 495.00 at the rate of \$ 55 per month, payable monthly for said services and agrees to keep the schoolhouse in good repair, to provide the necessary fuel, text books and school supplies, and

PROVIDED: That in case said Leona Jepson shall be discharged for sufficient cause or shall have her certificate annulled she shall not be entitled to compensation from and after such dismissal or annulment.

IT IS ALSO PROVIDED, That in case the certificate of said Leona Jepson was not registered in the office of the county superintendent of schools in said county on or before the date of this contract, the above said teacher shall not recover any moneys for service while teaching, during the time that this contract and certificate are invalid.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, We have hereunto subscribed our names this 16 day of March, 1934

Do not sign this contract until the teacher exhibits a valid certificate registered in the office of the County Superintendent.

APPROVED:

C. Stewart Moderator or Pres. Arch W. Boster Director or Sec.
D. Blake Treasurer Leona Jepson Teacher
All contracts must be made in duplicate, one for the School District and one for the Teacher

When Leona Jepson signed her teaching contract with School District 13 on May 16, 1934 she was paid a total of \$495 for the school year, payable at \$55 per month.

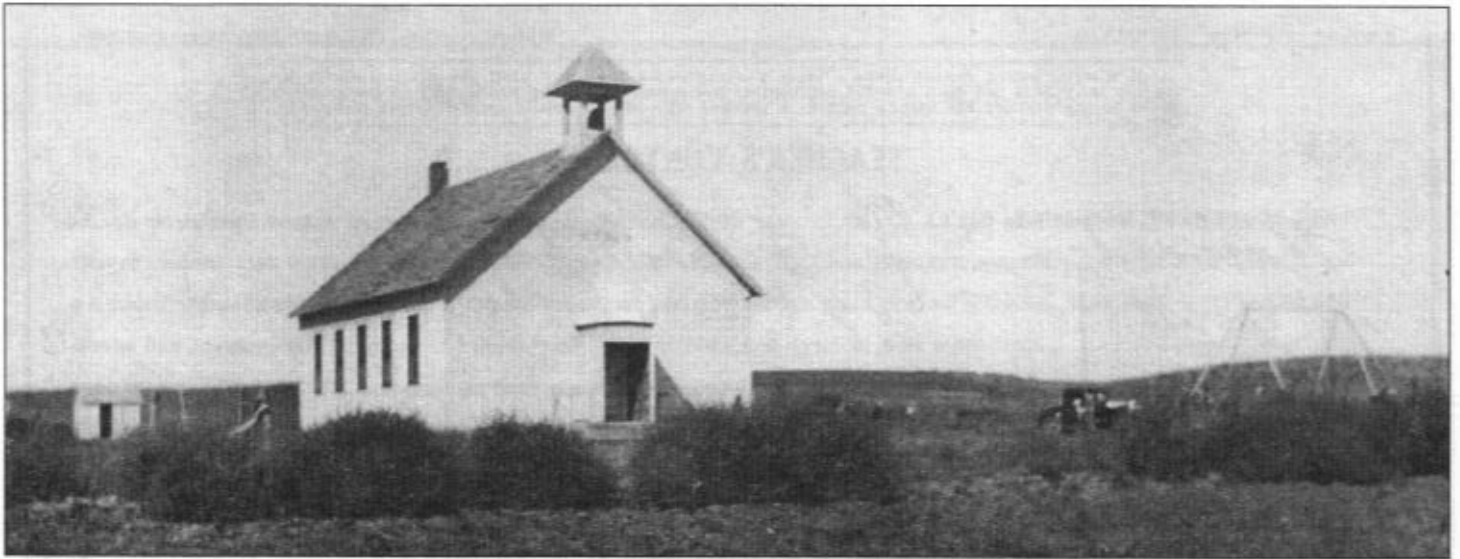
school. According to a bit of information in the Historical Society files, a Margie Ann Jepson Bartlett graduated from District 42, then St. Paul High School in 1938 and started



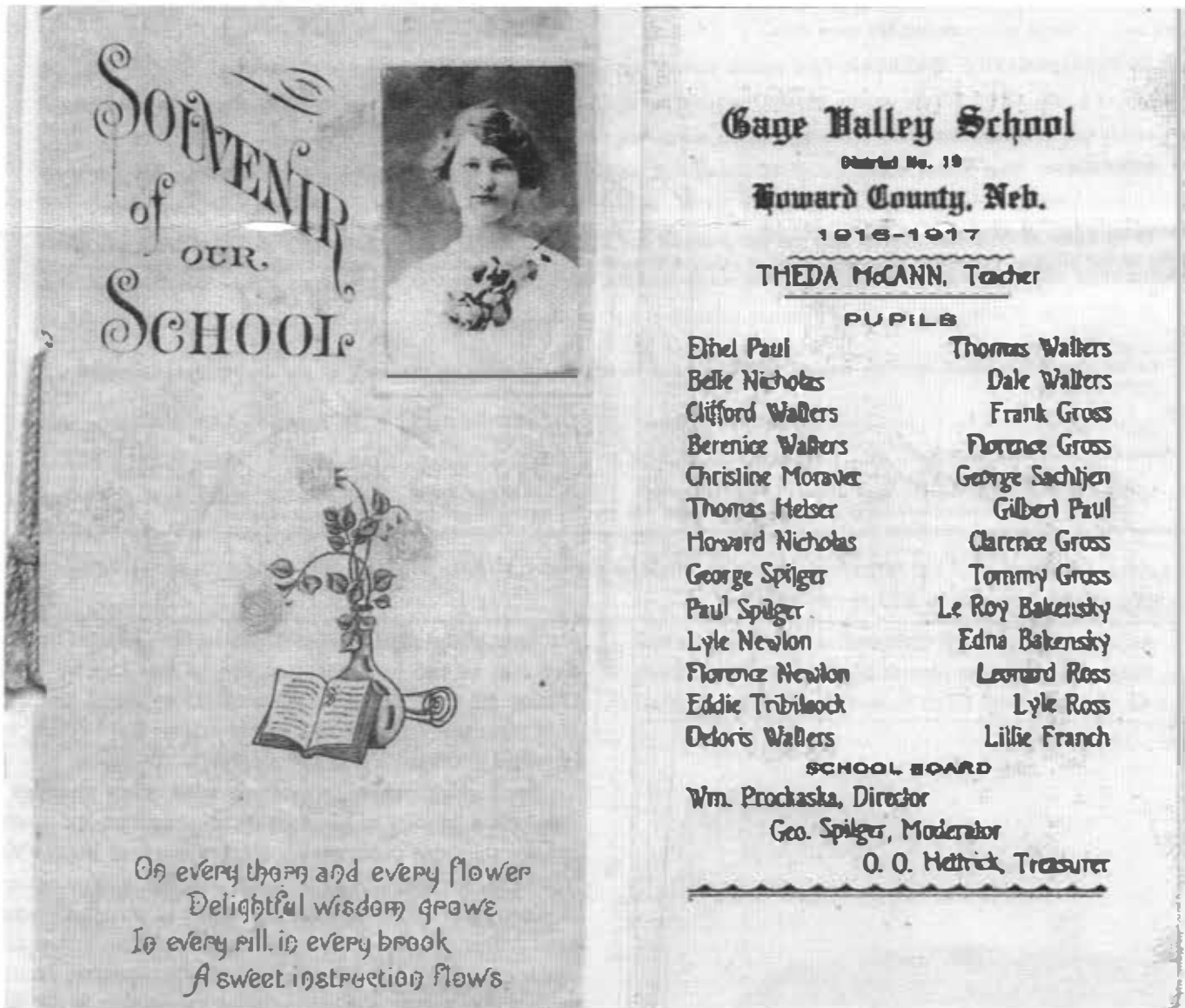
District #78 in the Spring of 1939.

teaching at the age of 16 and was in the Guinness Book of Records as the youngest teacher in the United States. During the 1940's it became necessary to attend college at least two years before one could teach. By 1970 it was required to obtain a graduate degree in education.

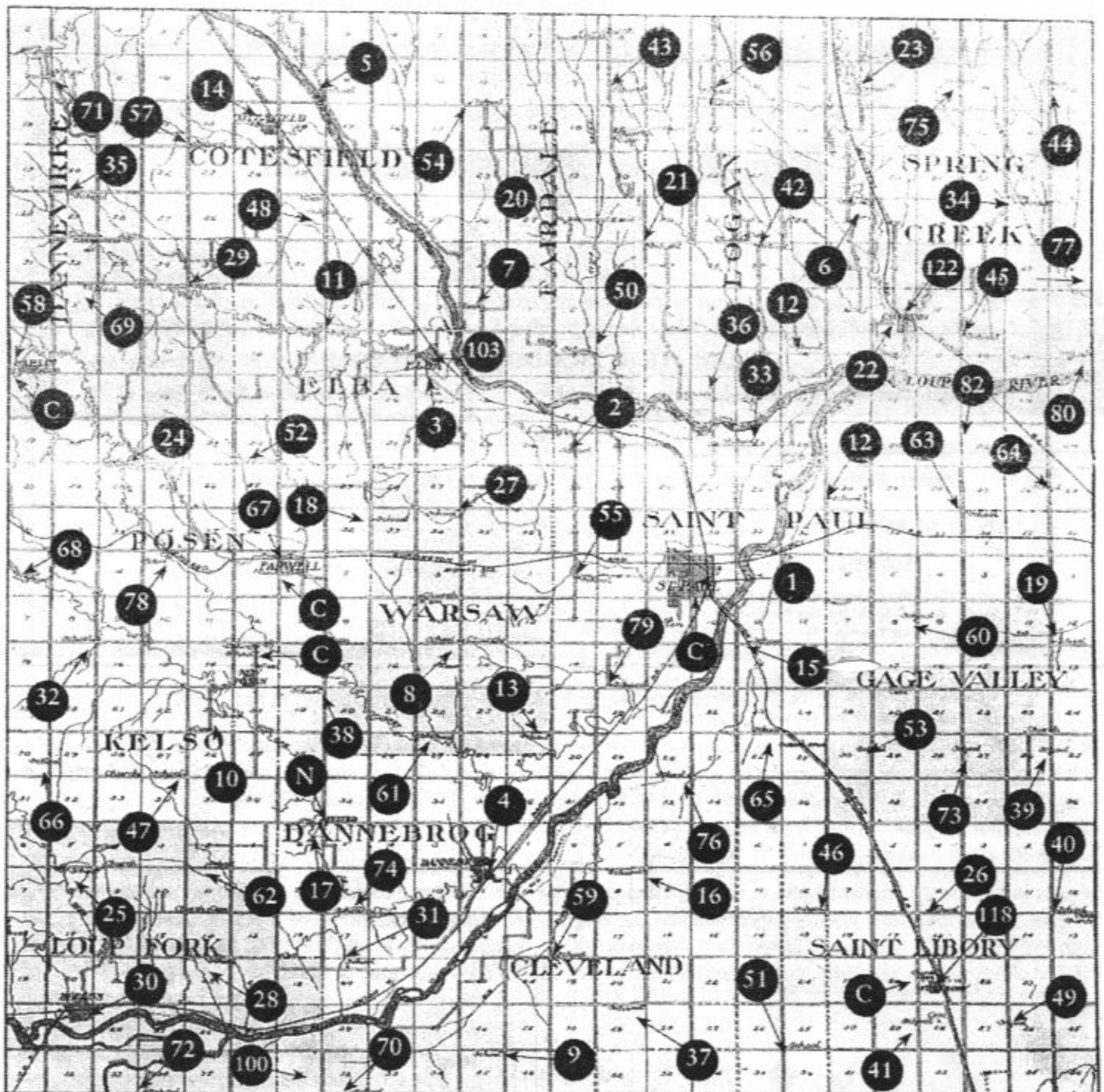
I asked numerous individuals who either attended or taught in a country school about their experiences; several comments were common to the majority of them "Our field trips were usually a walk around the section once or twice a year" "We carried our lunch in an empty syrup can." "Our teacher read to us from a classic novel after lunch every day." Several mentioned the opening exercises each day which always included the Pledge to the flag. Spell downs, memorizing poetry, singing from a little yel-



School District 13—Leona Jepson Day



A sample of souvenir booklets given to students.



The map of the School Districts of Howard County is from an article in the September 15, 2005, *Silver Salute*, written by Ron W. Sack and Marilyn Nelson.

low book, the annual Christmas program, and end of year picnic were also fond memories. Most of those I spoke with thought they had good teachers. A few expressed poor teaching or "She was mean." Most teachers were single young women; in the earliest years she was required to quit if she married. Occasionally a man occupied the teacher's desk.

The salary of teachers in the early 1900's was signifi-

cantly less than today but living expenses were also less. Leona Jepson (see contract) received a salary of \$495 at the rate of \$55 per month. Along with instructing the students and doing janitorial tasks, the teacher was required to make monthly reports to the director, a member of the district school board at the end of three months, or term. The director approved them before forwarding them to the county superintendent who had jurisdiction over all the

Howard County, Nebraska No. 52

High School Admission Certificate

This Certifies, That Anna Lang a resident pupil of District No. 62 of said County, Nebraska, has completed the Course of Study below the 8th Grade, as prescribed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and is unable to secure 9th Grade work in the above-named public school district. Said pupil is therefore entitled to

FREE HIGH SCHOOL PRIVILEGES

in any approved High School in this State for the grade of work above named, at the expense of the above-named School District, for the school year, so long as the above-named pupil's parents or guardian are legal residents of said District at the time the application was made.

Given Under My Hand, in the above-named County, this 1st day of August, 1923

NAME OF PARENT Paul Lang
 ADDRESS Boehms

IMPORTANT—This Certificate is good only for the school year July, 1923, to July, 1924. Present this High School Admission Certificate to the City Superintendent on the first day you enter school. This Certificate is good for this school year only.

Alice Vogt
COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT.

S-237—THE K-B PRINTING COMPANY, OMAHA

In 1923, once a student successfully completed his or her eighth grade education, they could attend any approved high school in the state at the expense of their eighth grade country school district in what was termed "free high school privileges". The county superintendent signed the high school admission certificate, along with the student's parent, who was certifying that the family was a legal resident of the district. The above certificate was for Anna Lang and School District 62 was the rural school.

schools in the county Richard Nielsen, who still resides in St. Paul, was a long time county superintendent, serving from 1958 until 1987. He was followed for a short time by Doug Ackles who is presently the superintendent of St.

Paul Public School. The last county superintendent was Kayleen Lukasiewicz of Farwell. Names from former years include Lena Deininger, Maggie Christensen and a Mrs. Pfrehm. One of the duties of the county superintendent was to visit the schools in the county once or twice a year. Of course, the teachers wanted their rooms to be neat and tidy and the students to be on their best behavior when



District 65 (Bunker Hill) students with the float they entered in the Howard County Fair Parade were, left, Fern (Silk) Kunze, Jerry Lanka, Norbert Matousek, Loretta Lacy and Maxine Fredricksen.



School District #8.



District 68, 1913-1914, Emma Holechek was the teacher.

he or she arrived; the visits were usually unannounced. Once the superintendent left, the teacher could relax as it would be some time before another visit.

If the teacher did not live in the neighborhood where she or he was teaching, she or he would board with families of the district. This arrangement was sometimes for the entire year or sometimes with a different family each month or quarter. The female students thought it was fun to have the teacher in their home; the boys usually had a different opinion.

Despite the hardships such as walking to and from school in all kinds of weather, most people, students and teachers, look back at the experience with fond memories.

Eighth Grade Exams And Graduation

By Evelyn Dvorak

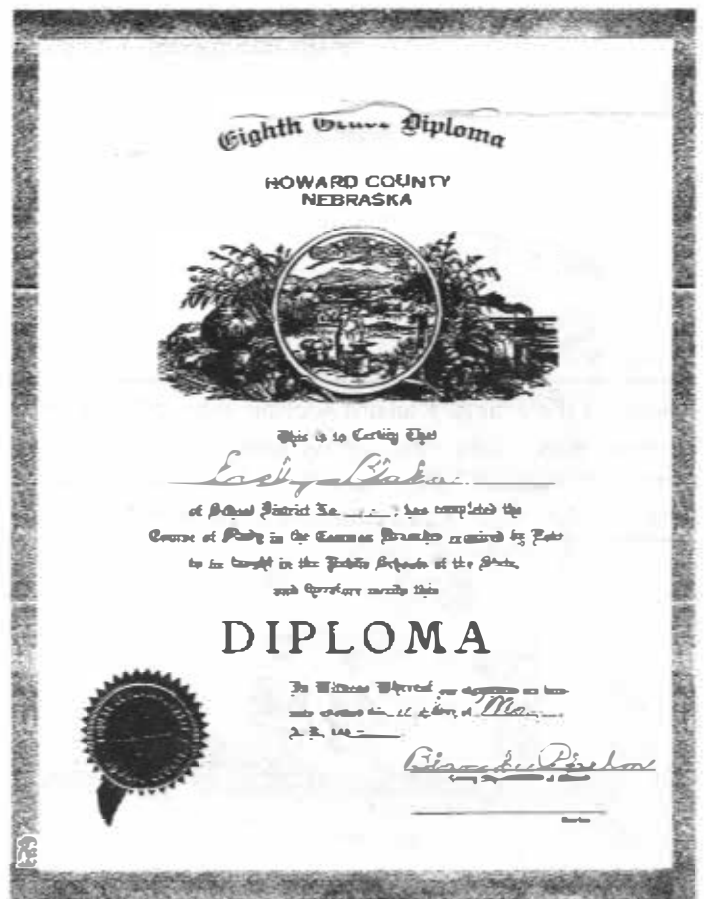
Country school pupils were required to take exams in their seventh and eighth grade years. In the seventh grade I believe only four subjects were tested, but if these weren't passed, the student retook them the following year. Pupils in the St. Paul area took exams in the St. Paul grade school. It was an anxious time for the students as they were entering a school that was new to them. Also, they usually did not know anyone else there. The exams were also offered in other town schools such as Dannebrog and Farwell for pupils in those areas.

Those pupils who did not pass in all the subjects were able to take the failed ones a second time. Students who did not eventually pass in all subjects did not advance to the ninth grade. This was also a stressful time for the teachers as well because if the students did well, it reflected on

the teacher's ability to teach. They were as relieved as the student when notified he or she had passed. My brother, Leo, remembers when his teacher was notified that he and his classmates had passed, they left for home immediately, ending their grade school days. I don't know when this eighth grade competition was discontinued.

On a Saturday, later in May, country eighth grade graduation was held. There was a picnic dinner held at the courthouse for teachers, pupils and their families. A program was held at the Legion auditorium at 2:00. In 1940 the stage was decorated with flags as the program centered around patriotism. Pupils from some of the country schools took part in the program which included songs, recitations, short skits, piano solos and music by the rhythm band. How well I remember the rhythm band, keeping time with music with blocks and sticks, triangles, cymbals and clappers.

Following the program, diplomas were presented by Mrs. Blanche Pfrehm, who was the county superintendent of schools for many years. In 1940 there were 144 eighth grade graduates with 43 of these having an average grade of 90% or more.



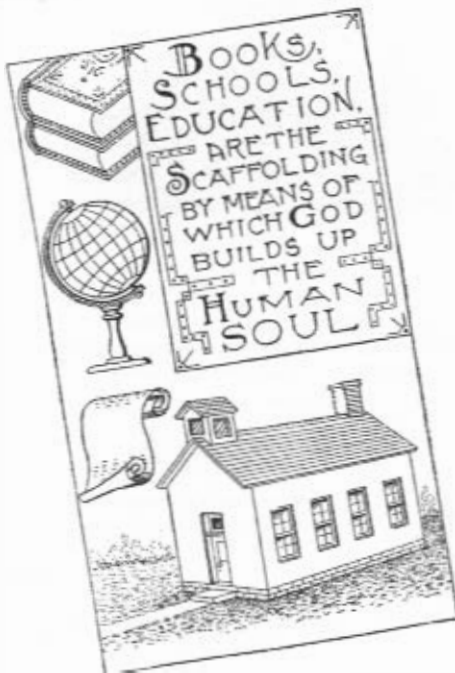
In 1940 Evelyn (Blaha) Dvorak of St. Paul was an eighth grade graduate of District 13, which was located between Dannebrog and St. Paul. Her diploma was signed by Blanche Pfrehm, Howard County Superintendent.



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INSIDE: This issue of *Historically Speaking* is entitled "School Days, School Days" and was researched and written by Julie Spilinek.

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