

This article is about the days when one-room schoolhouses dotted the landscape of Ohio.

The school board's most important job was deciding who to hire to teach all of the students who would attend the one-room school house. If their choice was good, the school was likely to be a good one. Right after the Civil War, the school board wanted male teachers when older boys attended school. By the 1880's it became hard to find male teachers, and farmers thought the female teachers were better. They were also cheaper to pay, and by the 1890's rural school teaching (in a one-room school house) had become "women's work". The school board promised to give the fuel for the stove, keep up with the repairs of the schoolhouse, and pay her salary, which for years was usually no more than \$30.00 per month.

In return, Midwestern farmers expected a lot from their teachers. They wanted the teacher to light the schoolhouse fire on cold mornings, clean the schoolroom, keep records, and govern the school gently. She was expected to not let children smoke or swear on school grounds. In addition to teaching reading, writing, and math, the teacher was expected to teach history, grammar, speaking, spelling, geography, hygiene, and agriculture. She modeled cleanliness, and it helped if she taught Sunday school. The teacher was usually in her late teens or early twenties. She may or may not have gone to high school. This doesn't mean she wasn't prepared to teach. Rural teachers attended teacher institutes, or teacher schools, for four or five weeks in the summer instead of going to college. They learned how to be a teacher there. They also had to pass an exam, or test, to become a real teacher. It was not easy.

After the Civil War (late 1860s), rural school children did not receive grades. No record was kept on how they were doing such as a grade book. Therefore, when they began a new "term," they repeated a lot of what they had already done in the past. That is why people in the Midwest used to say, "no one ever finishes a one-room school."

Beginning in the 1880's, the rural school teacher started to group her students based on their level of learning (by what they could and couldn't do). The teacher also started to follow a course of study that was created by the rural superintendent or the state. She also started to keep records (like grades) of how her students were doing. The teacher started making lesson plans so that each student was busy every minute of the day. The teacher spent her day making assignments and meeting with each group of students for about ten minutes at a time. A lot of her time was spent listening to the younger children read. They had them read aloud as they stood in a line in front of her. She helped them to sound out words and corrected them if they were wrong. It was embarrassing for some of the students! The teacher also set aside time to teach morals. This helped the students to know the difference between right and wrong. The school day was often opened with a bible reading, a hymn, or song, or some type of passage.

The school room was often decorated with portraits, or pictures, of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. There was also usually an American flag hanging somewhere in the room. There was a blackboard on which the teacher wrote, and books in the library.

The students often put on holiday programs at Christmas and Thanksgiving. The farmers judged the teacher on how good the programs were. Many times, the entire community would show up for the programs. If the program was successful, then the teacher looked very good. If not, the teacher would look bad to the community.

By the time of WWI (1914-1918), most schools had been divided into eight grades. The rural children still had one teacher and one classroom for all the students. Before a student could graduate, they had to pass the county exam, or test. Not everyone passed. If a student did graduate, they got together with all of the other students from the other one-room schools houses in the county and held a graduation. The county superintendent handed out the diplomas, or papers that showed the students graduated.

The one-room school house helped many children to read and write. The teacher knew the students and the parents very well. She usually lived close to where she taught, and she was a highly respected member of the community. It was like she was her own principal.

The most important part of rural schools was that they had a close relationship with the community. The school was not only a school, it was a community center for many programs and meetings. It may have been a church on Sunday, or a place to go vote on election day. No school in the American experience has ever been so close to the people.

Glossary:

Course of Study- all of the information that the students are required to learn in each subject

Govern- to have authority or rule

Rural- characteristic of the country or country living

School board- a committee in charge of public education

Superintendent- the person in charge of the entire school district (for example, Mr. McVey is in charge of Hilliard City Schools)

Questions to think about:

What if the school board chose a bad teacher?

Did the one-room or rural school have custodians? How do you know?

Would you have liked to attend a one-room school house? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast a one-room school house to schools today. What are some similarities? What are some differences?

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