

The One Room School

Memories of District #5

by Alice Groombridge Griffith ('40)¹

My parents, Ernest and Mary Groombridge, came to the USA and Lake Luzerne from Canada in 1922. They purchased "Pure Spring Farm" on the River Road from Ai Ives, and were living there when I was born in 1924. Not long after that the Power Company bought the farm for the proposed dam. We then moved about a mile north on the River Road. The second farm was purchased from (Howell?) Thomas. A part of this purchase arrangement was that Mr. Thomas got the Pure Spring Farm house which he had dismantled. He used the lumber to build a home on Ramsey Place in the village. Meanwhile our "new" farm was adjacent to District #5 school. At some point my father gave some land to the district so that there could be a playground behind the school.

District #5 school was located at the junction of River Road and Scofield Road. Since Scofield Road branched to the left for south bound traffic, and to the north for north bound traffic, a triangular area was formed across from the school. This area served as a playground much more frequently than the designated playground behind the school.

Looking at the school from the front, there was a flagpole on the left and a lilac bush and a woodshed on the right. At the back of the woodshed were separate toilet facilities for boys and girls. I think the school had two windows on each side, (except the entrance side) originally, but sometime along the way, a bank of six windows was installed on the south side so that students had light coming over their left shoulders. This was a state regulation, as I recall. Later (when I was no longer a student), an addition was built on the north side to provide indoor bathrooms. Later still, after the school closed, the building was renovated as a residence, as it is today.

When one entered the school, one was actually at the back of the classroom. The teacher's desk was at the front, as were a globe and small recitation benches to accommodate students of various ages. In the back were items such as a coat rack, a water pail and dipper and a bookcase. The water pail was replaced by an earthenware cooler after a time. The book case contained the school's library including books such as:

The Sunbonnet Babies

The Eskimo Twins (and other twins in the series)

Beatrix Potter's little books

Trail of the Sand Hill Stag

Large plates in volumns tied with ribbons depicting wildflowers and birds of New York State

¹ Alice Groombridge Griffith (Class of 1940), June 2000

At one time I volunteered to be the librarian. I made up a card for each book so that it could be checked out. I don't know what eventually happened to the books, but the Sunbonnet Babies is a collector's item today.

In the center of the room was a wood stove, rectangular in shape, with two griddles. The rest of the room contained students' desks.

When I was five years old, my father took me to school for my first day of classes. I believe the janitor was the only person at the school when we arrived. Since Leroy Ives (age 9) was the janitor and I already knew him, I felt quite at home. Eva LaMoy (later Mrs. Reynolds) was the teacher. Under her guidance I completed both first and second grades the first year. There was no kindergarten. The teacher gave us little booklets as keepsakes at the end of the year. Our names were printed in the booklets.

Constance Ives (now Mrs. Baish) was my teacher for the third and fourth grades. At the end of each year she had snapshots taken of the students, group pictures beside the school house.

For the last four grades, my teacher was Gertrude White (Mrs. Kenneth White). All of us were very fond of Mrs. White. We were greatly saddened when she was involved in a very serious automobile accident. Carl Scofield asked me to visit the students at home to collect money with which to buy a fruit basket for her. I did as he asked, but I suspect that Carl paid for the biggest share of the fruit. When Mrs. White came home after a lengthy stay in the hospital, I had the "honor" of delivering the basket. During Mrs. White's absence we had a substitute who I think was Miss Murphy. She cut a large rabbit out of cardboard, on which we glued pussy willow "blossoms". It took a long time to complete but the finished article looked like a real gray, furry rabbit. The students sent this to Mrs. White at Easter during her convalescence.

Students at District #5 included Harold and Shirley Ogburn (later Mrs. Gazaille), Henry Howe, Harlen and Augustus Ramsey and Leroy Ives. Other joined us, the Dingman boys, William, Loren and Robert, the Caldwells, James, Addie and Dorothy, and for a short time the Reeds, Bertha and Beatrice who lived in Howe's tenant house. When I was in first grade, there was a little boy, Clyde Howe who shared my desk with me. His family lived in the house later occupied by the Dingmans, but moved after or during Clyde's first year at District #5. As they reached school age other students included Eunice and Emerson Howe, Ashley and Ida Ramsey and Mildred Dingman.

In those days Lynn F. Perkins was the Superintendent of Schools. He made occasional visits, and once found me "teaching" a second grade reading class while the teacher was away for a short time on an errand. Dr. Thompson also used to come to the school to give us our annual physicals.

The school day, as I recall, was from 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. with both morning and afternoon recesses and of course a lunch hour. Some of my younger friends today cannot imagine the activities in a one room school. But when one class met with the teacher at the front of the

room, the other students studied or worked at their desks. It really wasn't confusing. Sometimes there were activities that involved all the students such as a drawing class or a singing lesson. Sometimes the teacher read a book to us, one chapter a day. I especially remember *A Boy Scout With Byrd* by Paul Siple and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

During recess we played games such as softball in the triangular sandy area across from the school: hide and seek, and "Tilly over the Woodshed". In this game the students were divided into two teams one on either side of the woodshed. A ball was rolled over the roof with the cry, "Tilly over the Woodshed". The person on the other side who caught the ball then proceeded to catch a member of the opposing team, somewhat like tag. Each team took turns and eventually changed sides. In the winter there was sledding and a game in the snow called "Fox and Geese". In rainy weather we stayed inside to play Fruit Basket Upset, London Bridge, etc.

Lunch hour also provided time for recreation. Since I lived so near the school I walked home every day for lunch. All of the other students brought their lunches. On a few rare occasions, my parents were away at noon, and I took my lunch. That was a big treat! One of the favorite places to eat lunch in good weather was atop a large rock not far from the school. The rock had a more or less flat top. A shallow cavity on the face of the rock served as a step. Incised on the side of the rock were the initials "PWI" (Paul W. Ives). Bread crusts and bits of lunch not consumed by the students were placed on the lilac bush for the birds. Some of the students had their bread spread with oleo. At that time oleo was white, looking somewhat like cream cheese. I longed to taste the oleo since I had had only yellow butter at home! After lunch the activities of recess were resumed.

During cold weather, students took turns bringing a dish that could be reheated on the stove and shared with everybody. The menu included soup, macaroni and tomatoes, creamed vegetables, etc. Occasionally, someone would forget to bring his or her hot dish. Then I'd rush home to have my mother prepare something. Since we had a store of home canned beef, my mother usually made stew. I would deliver this and then stay to eat lunch with the rest of the students.

The first house on the left going toward the village was owned by Mrs. Homes (later Mrs. Craig). In the area across from the school on the left branch of Scofield Road, there was a three foot high bank that was composed of clay-like soil. Here the boys built a road for their toy trucks and other vehicles. The soil was especially good for making mud pies. Shirley Ogburn had a special ingredient or technique that made her pies different from anybody else's. One morning when we came to school all the toys had vanished. Mud pie production had to cease. Mr. Craig had removed, destroyed or buried all the trucks and spoons. We thought he was a very mean man. Maybe he was just teaching us to pick up our toys, but actually, I think he didn't want the school children on his property.

We had some special activities at the school such as the annual Arbor Day ceremony, Valentines Day party and making of decorations for various other holidays such as Washington's Birthday and Thanksgiving Day. One year we had a March weather calendar. The

teacher put a March calendar on the blackboard. In the square for each day we placed a rabbit chasing his hat if it was windy, carrying an umbrella if it was rainy, enjoying the sun if it was sunny, etc.

But the most exciting time was Christmas. It was then that we had a tree and entertainment in the evening for students, parents and all the residents of the District. The school was lit with lamps and lanterns (there was no electricity) which made a festive atmosphere. Not only students but adults exchanged gifts. One year Grandpa Scofield put a handkerchief on the tree for each child. Another year my father had a maple sugar Santa Claus for each one. The students were busy before Christmas making gifts for their mothers. The entertainment included songs and recitations by the younger children. The main attraction was the three act play we older children presented. We began rehearsing the play right after Thanksgiving. Later sheets were hung on wires to serve as curtains and props were brought in. The play I remember most vividly was "Henry's Mail Order Wife". Harold Ogburn and Henry Howe played the parts of lonely ranchers. I was Henry's mother, so on opening night I had my hair powdered so I would look older and grayer. With a wig, make up and girls clothes, William Dingman was a lovely mail order bride-to-be. In due course, Henry discovers that he is the butt of a practical joke.

A couple of other school events were memorable, including a school-community picnic at the end of the school year. It was held in a grove of pines on Carl Scofield's farm. The other was the formation of a band. Each student had a "Song-o-phone" a toy like musical instrument shaped like "the real thing". The music was produced by humming into the mouthpiece. This caused a thin paper "reed" to vibrate. We practiced with these instruments planning to enter an amateur contest. The contest was held on stage at the Odd Fellows Hall on Main Street. When the votes were in, we took second place, missing first place by two votes.

The years went by, and it was soon time to go to the high school in the village to take Regents Exams. Later we joined others who had completed 8th grade in other district schools to attend the graduation ceremony. Our graduation was coupled with high school commencement in the Rockwell Falls Presbyterian Church. In the fall of 1936 I entered high school, ready to explore another world of learning.