

***We Mustn't Forget the
Country School...***
AMERICAN ICON



***The Country School Exhibit,
Heritage Hall Museum***

**One Room Schools Were Common
Throughout Rural Iowa in the Late
19th and Early 20th Centuries**

The rule was a school every 2 square miles so no child had far to walk. The children in each school were all neighbors or relatives. The featured Bloomfield and Liberty Schools taught future Slater High School students.



Liberty School Circa 1930

The children walked across the prairie to school. There was a wagon trail to the school, which curved as it crossed the creek at the lowest spot with some planks across.



In country schools all of the students met in one room, where one teacher taught the basics to all grade levels of elementary age children. The one room could hold 20 to 24 students. There was no running water or indoor toilets. Water was pumped from a well that was close to the school door.



“Two outhouses were out back beyond the playground. One was for the boys and one for the girls. Both outhouses had two holes and a new catalog was furnished for each at the beginning of the year. We were always excused when we needed to use it.”

Teachers in one room schools often arrived early during the winter months to get a fire started in the stove. The older students were sometimes given the responsibility of bringing in water, and carrying in coal or wood.



Madge Graham, Liberty School Teacher

The country school teacher was the music director, art teacher, athletic director, playground supervisor, school nurse and the janitor. She taught Reading, Spelling, Phonics, Arithmetic, Art, Penmanship, Geography, Language, U.S. History, Iowa Civics, Physiology, Music, and Physical Education. **Her salary was \$25 to \$30 each month.** She boarded with the farm families of students.



“School started at 9 a.m. when a student ran the flag up the flagpole and we all recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Recess was at ten for 15 minutes. School ended at 4. Some students

were assigned duties to do before leaving, such as washing the blackboards sweeping the floors, closing windows, and getting all equipment ready for the next day.”



“We always loved playing outdoors. Some of our games were Black Man, Tag, Hide and Seek, and games for younger kids like Ring-Around-the-Rosie. There were two swings, a teeter-totter, and plenty of room to play baseball, jump rope and have races. When weather was bad we played lots of indoor games. We also had spelling bees or sang our favorite songs together.”

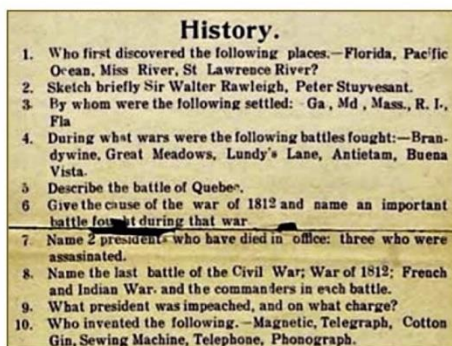


“We didn’t have notebooks for lessons, but used a big tablet. We flipped over the pages until it was totally used up. We used the blackboard at the front of the room. Six of us could use it at one time and have plenty of room.”

The country school library was a collection of books gathered from families. There was not access to a real library in the nearby small towns. A small bookcase at the back of the room held the collection. A new book was a treasure and many children read their favorite books over and over again.



“Everyone who attended a country school talked about **taking the eighth grade exams.**



A page from an eighth grade exam.

The kids had to prove that their country school education was equal to the town school in order to be allowed to enter high school. Preparation for the exams was hard for both the teacher and the students as there were no extra books to study, no extra help. The library consisted of books brought from home. The test would take two days and covered ten subjects.”



Liberty School, shown here, no longer exists. Bloomfield School closed its doors the spring of 1930. The building sat empty for many years until purchased by former pupil Ervin Weeks around 1955. He moved it to the north edge of Slater.

The closing of the one-room schoolhouses in rural Iowa started with the 1950’s legislation that stated that all public school districts in Iowa had to provide education from kindergarten to high school. By Iowa law, **all public rural schools would be closed by June 1966.**

Almost every historic country school in Iowa has been re-purposed. **Preservation Iowa** is dedicated to preserving the state’s country schools. See their website for information about our country school houses.



www.preservationiowa.org

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