

# **Schoolhouse Memories!**



## **Stories of Life in a One-Room Schoolhouse**

**On the occasion of the performance of  
*Schoolhouse* by Leanna Brodie**

**Compiled by the Burl-Oak Theatre Group  
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### **Blaine Adams, Burlington - My Remembrance of My One Room School**

My one- room school was NOT in a schoolhouse. The year was 1952 and we had moved from a small mining town in northern Québec to an even smaller one 60 miles away. The owners had built houses for management, a bunkhouse for workers and a staff house for those who did not have families. There was a large common room in the staff house which became a one room school for the English children. (In those days management was often English, foremen were bilingual and translated for the workers who spoke French.) I was in grade 5 and there were about 15 students. I don't remember much about the actual schooling except that the teacher, Mrs. Cameron, read us a story after lunch each day. I also remember the day she brought in a radio so we could listen to a coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

During the two years we spent in the staff room, a new larger school was being built in the village. A religious dynamic was at play because Mrs. Cameron was a Protestant. This did not please the parish priest who feared for the souls of those of us who were Catholic. When the new school was finished an English nun was imported to instruct us and we moved to the one room allotted to English students in the basement of the new school. We were now a Catholic school and I envied the Protestant children who were exempted from prayers and the occasional walk to the church for mass. I do remember collecting money for the "starving children" in India and being able to colour that country in on the map when our goal was reached. I have never felt that attending a one-room school was an educational liability for me.

### **Alaine Barrett Baines – Van Cortlandtville School**

Never a teacher; never a one-room school! However, my small rural VanCortlandtville School, District #2, brings to mind rather parallel experiences.

First, there was Mr. Frost the janitor who also manually operated the traffic light down the hill from our school, who reluctantly played an actor's role when our plays required an adult male character, and who also helped my mother assemble sandwiches for the many students who came a distance by bus from other communities such as Annsville, Continental Village, and two ranches.

Then there was the sad incident of Mr. Evans, the school principal, who died so unexpectedly when a furnace he tinkered with blew up his house and this in the week before the autumn term began. Mr. Taylor, who hurriedly replaced him, was fresh out of Normal School. He also taught several subjects at several levels and danced with me when I was too tall in dance class to find my own partner. In his second year, a disruptive Grade 8 student who had been suspended, rode up on a horse, stalked into Mr. Taylor's office and beat him up. Shortly after this with the coming of World War 2, Mr. Taylor left us, and found himself in charge of a PT boat in the Pacific; I don't think he had ever been on a boat of any sort! Then there was elderly Miss Caton who took no nonsense from anybody and locked misbehaving Freddie Oswald in the closet. There he remained for the entire period until we all went out at recess.

It was in 1937 when we saw the Hindenburg sail over our little VanCort school; we could hear the happy voices of passengers who never expected that they would all be dead within the hour.

Many, many years later when my youngest son applied to become an American citizen he required evidence that his mother had spent the first twenty years of her life as an American. Among other papers attesting to this fact, came all the records from little old VanCort for 1932 onward...my marks, my absences, etc. Uncle Sam keeps track of us! (Very much like the experiences of one-room schools in many areas.)

### **Emma Bradley – The Schoolhouse**

My first three years of teaching were in a rural school and such a wonderful experience it was! I taught the children and they taught me.

In 1945, as a city girl and graduate of the Hamilton Normal school, I was hired to teach at S.S. #7 Trafalgar for \$1200 a year. Board was \$8:00 a week at a farmhouse, a mile and a half from the school, with no hydro, no running water or inside facilities and no central heating. Quickly I had a complete change of life. Walking to and from school each day in all weather, kept me in good physical condition but preparing lessons at night by the light of a coal oil lamp was less than conducive to mental alertness.

The children were a lovely group--18 happy, healthy, polite individuals eager to learn and to take care of each other. We were like a big happy family.

Reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic received priority for formal teaching in each grade and for other subjects, social studies, health, nature, art, the classes were grouped together.

Twice a month the music teacher spent an hour with us. Once a month the secretary of the Board arrived with supplies and encouragement and twice a year the School Inspector checked up on us and our progress.

The school was the community centre. In off season for farmers, weekly euchre parties were held in the evenings and this was a great time to meet the parents and enjoy fellowship. And yes, I learned to play euchre.

The annual School Concert was the highlight of the Christmas season. Each child would have some part or parts in performing on the stage and the pride of the parents was so apparent.

After World War II changes were great in education. By 1958 all the rural schools in Trafalgar Township were closed and the children bused to large central schools, with individual classrooms and teachers. There was a need to equalize opportunity but these changes meant the loss of a beautiful way of life. My memories live on and no other teaching experience I have had can ever compare to that of teaching in the little old schoolhouse.

### **Jim Clemens – Burlington [for his mother Mary Elizabeth Victoria Clemens (McKnight)]**

My mother taught in a rural one-room schoolhouse at Port Royal, Ontario on Lake Erie between Port Rowan and Port Burwell in the late 1930s. She told me that each year around the beginning of June, the Public School Inspector, Jonah Cook, would send a letter to each teacher proclaiming that, "school will

end of the last working day of June.” Apparently then Mr. Cook would spend the afternoon on that day driving up and down the rural concessions ensuring that his directive was being obeyed. Woe betides the teacher whose school was closed as he drove by!

One day, at the same school, my mother was teaching a science lesson. She asked one of her pupils to name the types of cows. “Holstein, Jersey, Guernsey, Canners and Cutters,” the boy replied. My mother, being a town girl and not knowing a great deal about farming, wrote the names on the black board for the whole class. Imagine her mortification that evening at the dinner table, as she was proudly telling the story of her day, when the farmer explained that “canners” and “cutters” were not the names of a breed of cow but those cows selected to be sent off to the slaughterhouse.

### **Rita Duff – School Days**

School Section #7 Dalhousie was the one-room school where my siblings and I were taught from Kindergarten to Grade 6. I enjoyed school. My older sister taught me Kindergarten lessons at home, so I started going to school in Grade 1.

This was during the “Dirty Thirties.” The teachers we had were usually only there for a one year term. Who could blame them--it was a rural setting, cold in winter, hot in summer, with gravel roads, and 20—30 pupils per term.

During severe winter weather, my family kept me home. During one such occasion, my class was taught “long division” as it was then known. At my first class back, it was evident I needed to catch up! I was sent to a separate black board near the teacher’s desk and he taught me in his spare time. There were no “after school” detentions since we had a one hour walk to get home and then we had chores. Homework was done after dinner.

Prior to my last year, no teacher had been hired by mid-August. There had been a dust-up among the trustees and maybe none had applied. My Dad was a trustee but had not been part of the dispute. He recalled a young man who had just graduated from Normal School. Dad spoke to him regarding the job opening and he accepted and was duly hired to everyone’s relief.

At Christmas we usually had a tree, a short concert of school plays and monologues and one of the school trustees would act as Santa. A whole week off from school at Christmas was a real bonus. At the end of the school year we had a picnic, games, races, etc.

The final Grade VIII exams were written in the local village school but the teacher came to our house to deliver the final results. I had one mark short of honours and I later became a successful steno.

The school, S.S #7 was located in Lanark County in Eastern Ontario. It has long since been demolished and the land put to other uses.

## **Pamela Fonck – A Guest in the Remote Region of Bella Bella**

Bella Bella is remote. I went there to teach a methods course for the UBC N.I.T.E.P (Native Indian Teacher Education Program). I found myself in a one-room schoolroom, a guest in a remote region, where many amenities which are often taken for granted, are noticeable by their absence. It is a land of salmon and seaplanes, and I travelled to work by sea-bus. A great deal of planning precedes teaching a course several hundred miles away from home base – and very little time was spent in packing personal belongings. As a result, I spent most of my time there wearing a borrowed oilskin jacket, sporting a large borrowed umbrella and wearing open-toed sandals. Hardly anyone commented on my bizarre appearance, except one small child, who looked at my wet toes with great interest and asked if I minded getting my feet wet. I replied that I didn't mind too much because the rain was quite warm, and anyway, I didn't have anything else to wear. At this the little girl smiled compassionately, nodded knowingly, and skipped away.

My unusual rainwear was not a subject of much concern in Bella Bella, but what did cause some consternation was the fact that at mealtimes, in the inn where I was staying, I often jotted down teaching notes as I ate. Apparently, this caused some consternation among the itinerant locals. Eventually, a huge, bearded linesman ventured to ask what I was so busy writing. I explained my assignment, and after a long pause, a slow smile of unmistakable relief. "For a while", he said, "we thought you were an anthropologist or a health visitor." I correctly deduced that neither were particularly welcome there, and for much of the same reasons.

Supplies arrived weekly at the island by freighter. A bank teller flew in by seaplane on Tuesdays. The Indian Band Council ran the only store in town, and they also determined their own school policies. Transportation was mainly by foot, and a few trucks bounced their way along narrow stone roadways. RCMP helicopters dropped in for short and somewhat spectacular sojourns -- right outside the schoolroom.

The same cannot be said of the birds. This rocky, rain-swept environment supported hundreds of garrulous seagulls, copious numbers of ravens, and a considerable population of bald eagles. Both the raven and the eagle were represented in tribal crests, together with the wolf and the salmon. During my teaching sojourn, I was invited to a naming potlatch in honour of large murals depicting these crests on the external walls of recently acquired school portables.

My route to the schoolroom took me past these portables every day. Regularly, I met an old Indian woman on the steep, rocky incline. She usually prefaced our conversations by saying that since I was here in Bella Bella, I should learn the language. I agreed that this was an excellent plan and obediently tried to repeat the Heiltsuk phrases. These generally took the form of some concern about the weather or fishing. The lessons were of somewhat short duration, confined to the distance between sea-bus and schoolroom.

I enjoyed wonderful experiences during this teaching assignment and was left with a myriad of memories. A check with reality came when, in talking with the principal of the elementary school, I asked if he were from these parts. "Oh no," he replied. "You've never heard of where I come from." "Try me!" I said. He answered, "I'm from Acton, Ontario." "Snap! I'm from Limehouse."

### **Carl Loewith - Lynden - Challenges of a One-Room Schoolhouse Teacher**

In the fall of 1938, my mother, Minna Loewith, was part of a group of thirty-nine Czechoslovakian refugees who immigrated to Canada. They were forced to flee Europe in advance of the Nazi threat. That first winter in Ontario, the entire group lived in a farmhouse outside Caledonia, Ontario. Fourteen children from that group, including my mother, headed out for their first day of school. It was a typical one room building that served eight grades taught by one teacher.

Sixty years later, at a family reunion of that group and their extended families, the teacher of that one room schoolhouse, told her story. She was eighteen years old at the time and this was her very first teaching assignment. She recalled that cold, winter day when she looked out her frosted schoolhouse window and saw fourteen immigrant children, walking up the road towards her school. Not one of them spoke a word of English! Talk about trial by fire!

### **Bernice C. McColl - My One Room School Experience**

My first teaching post in 1947/48 was in a one room school in Runnymede, Saskatchewan. At this time there was a severe shortage of teachers so the Normal School (Teachers College) provided 2 options; one, to train for 6 weeks and then go out to teach until February, then return to complete the training (which left students without teachers until October) or two, take 6 months training and then relieve a teacher who needed to return to complete their training. I opted for the 6 month program so was assigned a post mid school year, in mid winter.

The School Board Chairman arranged for my transport to my assignment in a closed cutter with a man and his two teenage boys. My transportation arrangements included an overnight stay at their home, where I was provided with a private room and breakfast from a woman who spoke no English.

I soon learned that my first assignment as a 19 year old teacher was a one room school with 47 students in Grades 1 to 7, some of whom were bigger than me. There was little time for one-on-one instruction, mostly to the younger Grades 1 and 2. The older students did independent assignments and were provided with help when needed, if there was time. There was one boy in Grade 9 who was taking high school courses by correspondence. I was expected to assist him with his lessons as well, and noted that while explaining something on the board to him, the entire class listened in rapt attention. The students were eager to learn and there were few discipline issues.

The school was 23 miles from the nearest town. Most students walked to school, some from as far as 2 ½ miles away. They were mostly Ukrainian, Polish and German whose English was poor. I insisted they speak English at school and noted that as I approached them they would quickly switch to English.

We had a ball team and played against another school but walked 3 to 4 miles there and back to play. In the spring I took the entire class to the nearest town for a Field day. I hired a grain truck and we went the 23 miles, with all 47 students riding in the back (couldn't do that today). We picked up another class of 12 students and their teacher and gave them a ride too.

We put on a Christmas concert, with the school board putting up the stage and curtains. The children spent weeks practicing songs to records and with the help of one student who played the violin. We sewed costumes, borrowed clothes and made some items, such as hats, out of crepe paper. We did the

song "Alice Blue Gown" and luckily the seven girls in the number were able to borrow 7 blue bridesmaids dresses which circulated in the local community, one of which I had worn at my own sisters' wedding.

A big event for me was in the spring, when the weather improved and the School Superintendent and his assistant could conduct an inspection. While I dreaded the inspection they did provide some good advice to make things easier for me, such as having students read aloud so that they could be grouped according to their skill levels thus allowing me to teach a few students at a time rather than each individually, which was nearly impossible given the numbers.

I chose Runnymede because I was able to board with a family who lived nearby, providing me security, meals and companionship where other locations had private accommodation, called a teacherage. My accommodation was the upstairs loft of a one room house with an outhouse out the back. I had to light the wood stoves if the caretaker was away and once nearly burned the house down when I started the stove at home early and went across to the school to light its stove, returning home to find the house's stovepipe glowing red hot. I nearly burned the house down! I spent 1 ½ yrs there with only a trip home at Christmas in 1948 and a month at home in the summer, as school started early to accommodate teacher training and shortages.

### **Janet Nikolov - Both Sides of the Blackboard**

I received my education from grades one to eight at SS #7 Southwold Public School. This school was built in 1832, and closed in 1969. Fond memories include taking turns stoking the coal stove, working the "jelly ditto", and reading "See Spot Run" aloud to another grade eight student. We had reading buddies before it was even called this! We even had a Bible teacher who came by the school each week. We were a community of learners, and it was especially exciting to have the attention of the older kids.

Outdoor skating rinks, leaf huts complete with a collapsing roof, and arbour day hikes through the neighbour's woods without parent helpers, just the students, and the teacher were exciting times. One cannot forget getting stuck in the mud by the pond and rescued by a grade eight boy! Not so fond memories include getting the strap for talking too much! If you got into trouble, the entire community including parents knew about it, and the parents supported the teacher!

As a student teacher, I returned on placement to S.S. #7. At the brave age of 18, I had to teach my former classmates, who insisted on calling me Janet, just to make me laugh. I gained a new respect for my former teacher, Miss McCallum, who now became my mentor and advisor in a new role. In spite of my best attempt, I kept missing a grade or two, even when I tried to combine groups. This may have been the longest week of my life!

The education I received at this little school served as a great foundation because the expectations were high. From then on, I made the honour role for the rest of my school career, including London Teacher's college. My friends went on to great careers as nurses, teachers, lawyers and doctors, all from these humble beginnings.



The opportunities for leadership, the sense of community one developed, along with a genuine hard work ethic and a love of learning, are traits I carry forward today, along with the close friendships from this little one room schoolhouse.

### **Joanne Paas – Schoolhouse**

It was an early Monday morning in the sixties when I drove along Highway 3 looking for the round barn, the landmark on the road to my first student teaching placement. Before long a little bell tower beckoned me to the one room schoolhouse.

Mrs. Wilson welcomed me to her domain by having me copy assignments onto the chalkboard in coloured chalk, one per grade. Keeping the chalk colours in order was the least of my worries as thirty-eight children filed in quietly and settled into their bolted down rows of desks. After singing, “God Save the Queen” the children engaged themselves, as their teacher worked with a group here or there, falling into a seamless routine of calm and learning. It looked charming!

But that night as I planned my lessons there wasn’t enough room for cues and props as I tried to fit the day in eight columns going across two pages. How did she do it? What had I missed? Each night I planned till two in the morning only to rise early to the confusion of another day in the one room schoolhouse. Two weeks was not long enough to learn this magic. I have recently retired from teaching and still hold memories of my first teaching experience in a one room schoolhouse juggling eight difference grades.

### **Glenn Powell- The Stone School**

My one room school was S.S.1-A Brant, the Stone School, west of Paris, on Hwy #2. It was the typical rural school of the day (1950’s), grades 1 to 8, about 25-30 students and one teacher.

The educational benefit of the one room school was to be found in listening to, and often taking part in, a lesson to another grade. When a lesson for your own class was boring, or you had to do something like hand-writing circles within the lines, there was always a lesson to another grade that had a more interesting twist to it.

Blackboards were rough slate for the first few years of my term at the Stone School but during one summer break new blackboards were installed that were smooth, polished slate. They were much easier to write on and much easier to get a high-pitched squeak if you held the chalk “just right” ... and enough squeak to draw a stern reprimand from the teacher.

Student desks were a mixture of shapes and sizes – some older models attached in groups of four or six to runners, and some individual “newer” models with a drawer for books and pencils underneath the seat. When the teacher wasn’t watching, the individual models could be slid across the floor to new positions in the classroom. Ink wells were a feature of all desks, although about this time ball point pens were making their mark and fountain pens were on their way out.

Geography was taught with the aid of pull-down maps, between two blackboards, at the front of the classroom. The maps obviously came with the support of the Neilson company as they had a large logo promoting Nielson's Jersey Milk chocolate bars. (No one worried about corporate advertising twisting young, innocent minds in those days.) The world map was primarily red, depicting the expanse and global influence of the British Empire – the empire on which the sun never set, or at least so we were taught.

Canadian geography – provinces, capitals and major rivers were the focus of the second map, which with a tug would pull down to reveal the provinces as they were some years earlier. Manitoba, for example, was about half of its current north-south dimension. But that's the way we "learned" our provinces.

Entry to the single classroom was through a big, centre door with a weight on a pulley that served as the automated closing device – no electronics here! The big door opened to a small 'anteroom' and on either side of the anteroom were toilets – the one on the left for the girls, the one on the right for the boys. Flushing was accomplished with a daily pail of water pumped from the shallow well just outside the school and dumped down the toilet.

Running water was a luxury we did not enjoy. Drinking water was from either a porcelain cup hanging from a hook at the hand pump outside or a common dipper in a pail at the back of the one room. Individual paper cups were not an item in our school – and maybe they hadn't been invented yet.

Heating was a coal-fired furnace in the basement and it was the responsibility of a nearby farmer, Miles Bibby, to keep the furnace stoked. And then modernization took over with the installation of an oil burning furnace in the basement and a thermostat in the classroom. On more than one occasion the thermostat would be 'mysteriously' turned down to the point that the school would be closed for the day – too cold and all students were sent home. Almost without exception it just happened that school closings coincided with a good ice day on one of the nearby ponds, and in no-time flat the boys had organized a pick-up hockey tournament.

Christmas season brought the annual pageant – Joseph, Mary, the Wise Men, the whole bit, a short play or two and individual recitations by some of the brighter kids in the school. It was a theatrical challenge that occupied most of our school hours for the three or four weeks prior to production night. This annual highlight of the school year also included a visit from Santa, and all of the mothers and most of the fathers in attendance.

Of course what would a Christmas concert be without a Christmas tree? And so each year the "bigger" boys would pick a day to head off 'en masse' to cut down or top a tree in a nearby woodlot. This was a project that inevitably took most of a day to complete – and often with one, or more, of the boys falling out of a tree at some point in the heroic Paul Bunyan-type event. But the adventure always achieved its purpose and the tree would have its spot in the class room, stage left, in front of the blue curtains and decorated for the concert.

Winter time also brought hockey on a pond located over the hill and out of sight of the school – and also out of earshot of the mill factory whistle in Paris that was supposed to serve as our signal to head back to the school at the end of the lunch hour. The wind was always blowing the wrong way and "we didn't

hear the whistle” was the explanation as we returned to the classroom. Tired, with cold feet, cold hands, a few bruises, and often late by at least an hour or two, we made our way back to the school but we were hockey players not students!

It was an era when ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ prevailed. In the teacher’s desk was the feared ‘strap’ – a stiff piece of leather belting about 18” long and 3” wide, and much longer and much wider in the eyes of the younger students. The after-class line up for the strap was almost a daily ritual for misdemeanors which might include serious offences such as chewing gum, talking in class or sharpening a pencil without permission. Boys in the upper grades were usually the guilty ones to be punished and for some of them it was at times a ‘tough guy’ challenge to see who could receive the most straps in a day – each strap being three whacks, or less if the teacher’s arm got tired. Those on the list for more than one round of punishment had to wait their turn for seconds or thirds, and sometimes ‘write lines’ while waiting for the next encounter with the strap.

And that raised another challenge for the boys. Any sign of a tired teacher was considered victory.

One new graduate from teachers’ college or normal school as it was called in those days (which raises the question, why was it called ‘normal’ school? Was there an abnormal school for other professions?) Anyhow, this particular young pedagogue wore her emotions on her sleeve and to get her “in tears” became another favourite project of the bigger boys. I don’t think she lasted more than one year at the one room Stone School. \*\*\*\*\*

And the stories of life at a one room school could go on and on. Today, with some reflection, I think it was a great education for students with average or better capabilities – for those with learning difficulties it was probably an emotional ‘hell’ most days.

### **Joan Price S.S. #3 Conger, Sugar Bay Schools**

During the sixties, I taught at a little schoolhouse on Moon Island south of Parry Sound near San Souci. The children arrived by a school boat and in the winter, by snowmobile. Christmas and Easter breaks were a little longer while we waited for either the bay to freeze or thaw.

There were surprises. On day at recess a student was leading a porcupine by a string around its neck. On another day I was presented proudly with a live four foot snake. Both were returned to the freedom of their natural homes.

On bright sunny warm Friday afternoon we would take paper and pencils up the hill at the back of the school and draw trees, and flowers. The children were curious and eager so teaching was a joy. I can still hear the hand rung bell calling the start of lessons. Since we only had a two way radio for communication, this is XM411142 Sugar Bay School signing off!

### **Verna Purcell – Schoolhouse in Saskatchewan**

I grew up on a farm four miles north of a small town in Saskatchewan. Sometimes in the winter, my Dad would put on his skis and pull me in a sleigh to a neighbor’s place two miles away who had a team of

horses and larger sleigh to take me and other kids to school. I remember having so many clothes on, I could barely stand up.

There were only two of us in the grade from Grade 1 to Grade 8. There was fierce competition through the years to see who would come in first or second in the class!

There was a large grate in the floor where we would put our wet boots and parkas to dry in the winter.

We were taught the times tables by the teacher drawing a circle on the cement floor with the numbers from 1 to 12, and changing the number in the centre as we progressed. Also, at recess, we would play hopscotch downstairs. We brought our lunch in our lunch pails.

In comparison to school days today, we lived a very simple, uncomplicated life.

### **Marie Schaefer – An Inspirational Former Student**

The one room schoolhouse that I attended, S.S. #4 Proton Township in Grey County, is of special significance. As an inspiration to all of us young students, a picture of a former student, Agnes Macphail, hung on the wall. She was the first woman to be elected to the Canadian Parliament. I was the second generation in my family to attend this school.



We began our day by singing “God Save the Queen, and saying the Lord’s Prayer. About sixteen students of various ages sat in straight rows of desks which were solidly attached to the floor. The desks were quite worn and our books were well used. We had spelling bees, math drills and listened to the CBC news at lunch hour. After, we were quizzed on the facts presented in the broadcast. If a problem arose that the teacher couldn’t solve someone had to run to the nearest farm. There was no phone at the school!

We put on plays and sang songs at a Christmas concert which was performed in the evening for proud parents. I remember that very warm school room with a wine curtain strung across the raised platform when my four year old sister and I (five years old) sang, “Found a Peanut.”

Occasionally a visitor came to the school such as a minister from a local church who would tell us a Bible story. I loved when the itinerant music teacher came so much so that I put on a sweater to cover up the fact that was sick with a fever and a red rash. Alas, I was discovered and the older girl whose knee I had been sitting on screamed because I was so hot. I remember hot lunches of tinned vegetables or hot chocolate that older students would prepare to augment our lunches during the cold winter months.

Recesses were spent playing tag, Red Rover, baseball or taking turns on the one piece of equipment that we had , a teeter totter. In the winter we skated on a frozen corner of a farmer's field.

We had trouble keeping teachers at our school. Some older boys even locked one male teacher we had in the basement one morning when he went to check the furnace. The best teacher at the school was a local lady that my Dad hired once he became a trustee. I also remember getting some new book cases and wonderful new readers thanks to my Dad's position! I think he was trying to ensure that I passed my entrance exam to high school!

In Grade seven and eight, we got a taste of high school as a bus came once a week to drive us twelve miles to take Home Economics or Shop classes.

I'm sure that Agnes Macphail would have had fond memories of that orange brick one room school house, too, and whose image by the way is posted on her website.

### **Ann Stolys – The School Christmas Concert**

The chalk boards bloom with candles and pine boughs. The windows silhouette Jack Frost filigree. The real tree touches the ceiling, filling the air with an aroma that lasts in the memory until next year. The branches twinkle with small soldiers, plaited paper wreaths and tiny wrapped parcels swing in the air touching the painted and sprayed pine cones. The wood stove is stocked and the temperature must be in the neighbourhood of 85 degrees. The stage is set!

Families arrive and the cold air busts into the room as the energy, excitement and scrubbed fresh faces enter the scene. Each has their important job to do and music sheets are distributed and costumes made ready. Red and green parcels with licked on seals are reverently place under the tree, thirty- two for the teacher and two for every pupil. Candy bags with oranges and popcorn are crowded under the tree for later.

The families chat in good friendship and young children play on the floor. The hand bell stills the crowd just as the hand of Moses parts the water and clear voices of angelic quality break forth on the still snowy night echoing across the Chippewa to join the choruses of the world. Each choral reading and recitation is met with thunderous applause as families vie for the spotlight. The plays practiced many times show glimpses of true genius and in some cases true guts.

The drills set to music are as thrilling in their intricacies and timing as any of those of Rockette fame. The red plastic and cheesecloth costumes lovingly sewn are masterpieces of ingenuity and patience.

From six year old to eighteen year old, each child is spotlighted according to his ability, a skilled organizational feat by the untiring teacher and dedicated educator. Equality for all before equality was buzz word.

Excitement crescendos as pillowed and plumped Santa arrives with candy canes and Merry Wishes. The tree is stripped parcel by parcel and the grade eight students help to hand the gifts for Santa who reads the name of each blushing recipient.

All too soon Santa leaves and his sleigh bells fade across the glistening snow as his cutter and horse head north never to be seen again until the next CHRISTMAS CONCERT.

### **Peter Yarema**

For the most part, my memories of my years in a one-room schoolhouse are of caring, nurturing, dedicated teachers working under harsh conditions. But for one year in 1940, I had a rather different experience with an unusual schoolmaster. From the moment he darkened our classroom door, in his pajamas no less, we knew we were in for quite a ride! This man was not a morning person ... he got up just as we arrived at school and came in his pajama bottoms every day, through rain, shine and snow! After getting us started in our morning lesson, he'd then return to the teacherage, the house he lived in beside the school, to dress.

There were only about 20 of us, with several students in each grade. A friend of mine was the only student in his particular grade level so the teacher moved him down a grade so that he wouldn't have to make up separate plans just for him. The poor guy spent the year thinking he was slow because he was now in the same grade as his little brother.

We spent many an afternoon out in the fields instead of at our lessons, searching through bales of hay for spare twine because our teacher wanted to weave a makeshift volleyball net.

Winter mornings found us shivering in our boots because the woodstove was cold till our teacher came in. Our inkwells were frozen solid and had to thaw out before we could write.

The highlight of this year was the day the teacher accidentally burned down the teacherage. To this day, I still don't know how he did it.! His legacy lives on in my memories, which never fails to draw a smile and a snicker.

### **Sylvia Yarema – My Memorable Adventures and Misadventure in a One-Room Schoolhouse.**

Entering the schoolroom on my first day of my teaching career in 1951, I found myself facing about two dozen eager faces ranging in ages from six to twelve. I frantically assumed the facade of confidence, assurance, and mastery, even though I was very nervous inside.

The days and weeks which followed were both a teaching and learning experience for all of us. The pupils eagerly explained that the Library could be transformed into a Science Lab room. They also informed me that I would be the sole caretaker, and so I quickly discovered the storeroom with the essential supplies. Freshwater had to be supplied every day from the nearby well ... my duty! Very soon, the pupils showed enthusiasm in assisting with some of these jobs. This included cleaning the blackboards and brushes, helping with the preparations of cocoa drinks at lunchtime, and checking that the outdoor toilets were stocked with toilet paper.

It was difficult to obtain a comfortable room temperature. During the summer, the room was stifling hot with little solace from the few open windows. Sometimes there was a little reprieve in working outside in the shade of the school. In winter, I tried to have the coal stove burning early. The older ones eagerly volunteered to carry buckets of coal from the barn.

Spring arrived with a visit from the school inspector. The inspector's written report, delivered to me via the trustee, was favourable. The following day I was definitely walking with a lighter step. The class had worked diligently and I was pleased with their achievements. We had done well despite working under difficult conditions more often than not. I was proud of this class, my first class of 1951-52!

