

The “Schooldays” exhibit at the Switzerland County Historical Museum will never be complete. As stories are read and pictures are shared, more people are coming forward to reminisce of their fondly remembered times attending the one and two room schools throughout Switzerland County. We hope the following excerpts from a story by Helen Parks, who became a devoted teacher herself, will encourage others to be part of this growing documentation of this nostalgic part of the county’s past.

I started attending Mount Sterling School in January of 1948 as a second grader. Mrs. Lillian Bosaw was my teacher. Mrs. Bosaw was a very patient person who taught grades 1, 2, 3, and 4. We knew we were in trouble if she snapped her fingers and she could snap her fingers very loudly. Since the school building had no electricity, when it got dark outside and we could not see very well she would read to us on those dark afternoons. Mrs. Bosaw always wore pretty pins on her dresses. For Christmas Mrs. Bosaw always received several boxes of pretty handkerchiefs which she wore pinned to her dress, a different one each day. At recess she would always turn rope for us to jump.

As I said Mrs. Bosaw had a lot of patience. Every month as part of the book rental we were given a brand new “Golden Rod” tablet. Mrs. Bosaw has passed out our tablets and was busy teaching when she looked over and saw small piles of yellow paper all over Harvey’s desk. Very calmly she walked over and asked, “Harvey, what are you doing?”

Harvey replied, “I am making hay stacks.” From then on Harvey got his paper one sheet at a time.

The building had running water. You took the bucket and ran around the corner of the building to the cistern, pumped the bucket full of water, and ran back. Each of us had a folding cup which we kept in our desks.

Our playground was the hill in back of the school and a triangle in front of the school. We played softball most of the time and Miss Martha Cole, our teacher was the umpire. She always stood behind the pitcher.

Since there were not enough boys for a team, some of the girls got to play. I loved to play softball and being on the team. Sometimes when the weather was nice, Miss Martha’s husband, Bill Cole, would bring his Ford tractor and a wagon and we would go to Plum Creek School and play ball. It was a big day for us but we usually got beat. It was fun. Jim Curry could hit a ball over the school house from home plate which was a considerable distance.

Miss Martha’s husband was Bill Cole. He was a farmer and our bus driver. At that time, big yellow buses only ran on the state roads and the children living on the country roads were picked up by people driving station wagons. They would pick up seven or eight children. Bill Cole was our bus driver. He always liked to tease the boys because we farmed with John Deere tractors and he used Ford tractors. So from second grade through high school I rode Bill Cole’s bus. When he ordered his station wagon, he always ordered a luggage rack on top. When it snowed, Bill would load our sleds on top of the station wagon and take them to school so we could go sled riding at recess. After school, he again would load up our sleds and took them and us home.

Miss Martha after each recess would stand to one side of the door and as we filed past, we had to say excuse me or pardon me as we passed her. Boys had to also remove their hats and caps.

One grading period Miss Martha and I worked hard on Math and I got a B. I was so proud. When I took my report card home Mom looked it over and didn't make any comment about my Math grade. Miss Martha asked what my mother said about my good Math grade and I said, she didn't say anything. The next Sunday Miss Martha told my mother how hard we worked and how proud she should be of my grade. From then on Mother noticed my good Math grades.

Someone brought golf balls to school, and at recess we decided to see what was inside the ball. The boys had cut the covering off the ball and there were rubber bands inside which we began to pull out. When recess was over Jim Cole and Jim Curry took the ball inside school and continued to pull out rubber bands. Then they decided to stab the ball to see what was in the center. When they stabbed it, the liquid center exploded. They wrapped the ball in paper and threw it in the metal trash can. The ball continued to explode rocking the trash can and shooting stuff to the ceiling. Miss Martha asked what was going on and Jim Cole said it's explosive. They had to take it outside and clean up the mess but we then knew what was in the center of golf balls.

Miss Martha and Mrs. Bosaw were wonderful teachers who truly loved us and we knew it.

To read Helen's story in its entirety, stop by the museum and read hers as well as the other "Schooldays" tales. We also could use some help in identifying some of the individuals in the school group pictures. While admission is generally \$3, anyone who has attended a Switzerland County school is free. The museum is open daily from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Come see us!

Martha Bladen