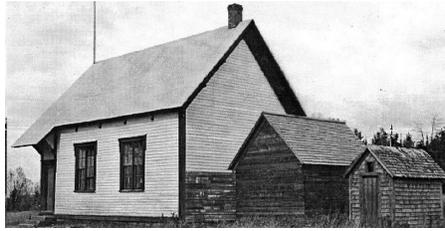


TAKE ME BACK TO YESTERDAY

by Kaye Lister



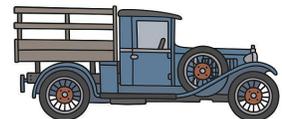
Did you ever attend a one-room school? We're at an age that if you didn't, you no doubt know of someone who could tell of their experience in that tiny place of learning.



It is difficult to imagine a school day where the teacher would need to arrive early in the morning to start a fire in the pot-bellied stove or to make certain that a hired lad had already done the chore. When the older students arrived, they were responsible for carrying in armloads of wood from the woodshed to feed the stove. An additional chore was to bring a bucket of fresh water drawn from a neighbour's well and to place it on a shelf along with a dipper that was used by everyone!

Imagine sharing a classroom with your sisters, brothers and cousins and having the same teacher year after year! Often a teacher's home was in a far-off community and therefore he/she had to find room and board in one of the rural homes. There would be mixed feelings for a student when a mother and dad announced, "Your teacher is coming to live with us!"

Before the day of the big yellow school bus, the students either walked to school or maybe piled into the back of a farm truck that happened to be driving past the little schoolhouse. A student fortunate enough to own a bicycle could bike to school in the fall and spring months.



On the teacher's desk sat the wooden handled school bell. When students heard the clang, clang outside the school house door, it was the signal to either come in to begin their day's studies or a warning that the recess fun was over.

If a student lived quite a distance from the schoolhouse, a lunch had to be brought from home to eat when morning classes were over. A thrifty mother always saved empty lard pails to serve as lunch buckets for her children. On a bitterly cold winter day the teacher might prepare a hot lunch for the students on the top of the pot-bellied stove. A bowl of hot stew or soup would really hit the spot!



The "plumbing" was an outdoor toilet, usually one for the girls and one for the boys. A trip to the outhouse would be a cold run on a winter's day!

Hiding in the drawer of the teacher's desk was the dreaded strap. Before its use was banned in later years, it helped to establish and sustain order in the classroom. Resting beside it in the drawer was the school register used for morning roll call each day.

The blackboards were actually black. Over some were hung large maps of New Brunswick and Canada that rolled up and down like window blinds. These were often courtesy maps from the Neilson Chocolate Company. They often served for covering the teacher's handwritten tests or other exercises that were saved for an appropriate moment. A photo of King George and Queen Elizabeth hung on the wall.

Friday afternoons were usually reserved for the recitation of verses, sometimes original ones composed by the students themselves. Red Cross programs on those afternoons during the war years often saw students preparing bandages for the overseas battlefield hospitals or raising pennies to help with relief causes. To do their part, the 6 graders in an Albert County one-room school sold tickets on a box of chocolates to the community residents!



The little schoolhouse often had more than the one function. Since there were few large buildings in these rural communities, the school would be used on various evenings or on week-ends for community events. There the rural folk saw many a school concert, a community meeting, or they danced the waltz, polka and square dance to the tunes of the fiddle and mouth organ. A popular fund-raising event was the basket social. To prepare for the fun, each lady decorated her basket in secret, packed it full of home baking and took it to the gathering that evening to be auctioned off to the highest bidder.



Some of our one-room schools have survived to this day, having been converted into private homes, community centres or even storage sheds. Some have been retained as museum pieces so that visitors can experience first hand what one-room schoolhouse life was truly like. The members of the Society of Retired Teachers of New Brunswick, in their desire to preserve items relating to the history of public education, have established a museum in several rooms of the former NB Teachers College. Visitors there will find countless artefacts on display once used in our rural schools and they will enjoy a visit to the replica of an actual one-room school atmosphere. Unfortunately, visitation to the museum has had to be discontinued during the Covid-19 epidemic.



The role of the teacher in the one-room school was quite different from today. However, the prerequisites of the teacher have changed very little: excellent organizational and multi-tasking skills, the desire to feed knowledge to open minds, and endless patience!

