



**Historic School  
The Country School experience**

**Orientation and Opening Exercises**

**Nothing is so new as what has been long forgotten.**

## Historic School

### The Country School Experience

#### Orientation and Opening Exercises

Time: 20 minutes

#### Objectives:

1. Students will be oriented to Flowerfield School and be able to assume the roles, dress, and appropriate behaviors of students of the late 1800's.
2. Students will participate in and understand the background of patriotic exercises.
3. Students will relate school architecture to function, use of available materials, and community resources.

#### Background Information:

As pioneers and settlers moved westward, the one-room school played an important role in settling the plains. From 1870 until 1940, rural America was raised in a country school. The values and traditions which made up our combined heritage were taught by teachers in isolated communities across the vast, open land.

A community with a school was a community with a future. Unlike the East where the settlers built churches first, the first priority of the Western pioneer was erecting a community school. Providing for the future of a community meant organizing a school. There was little tax money available and the settlers were not happy about paying taxes. The first schools were often a "subscription" school run by a teacher who collected a tuition charge for each child.

A school would generally be built when the businessmen in town decided that a school would be good for the town's image. White people were few in number prior to 1854 because of federal restrictions, but a school had been established at Fort Atkinson (military post and first Nebraska town) as early as 1820, and the first school outside the fort was opened at Bellevue in 1849. Other schools were set up here and there throughout the sparsely settled country in cabins and dugouts.

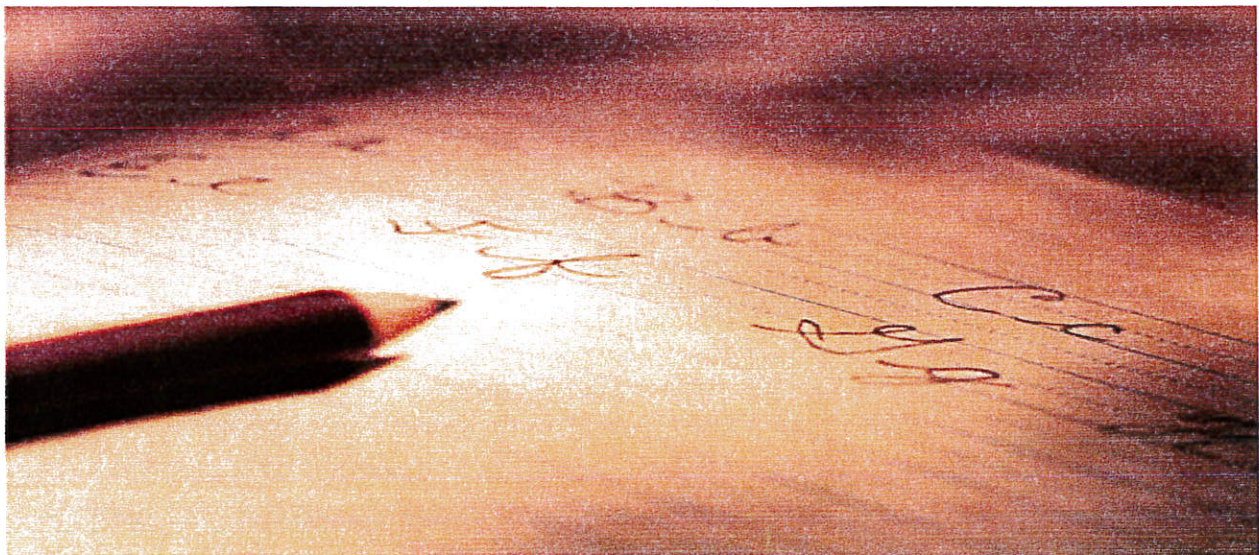


Education and founding of free schools were the first subjects of the first territorial legislature. In 1855 they enacted a free school law, providing for school districts and school boards. In 1864, the Enabling Act, passed by the National Congress, carried provisions for liberal grants of the sixteenth and thirty-sixth sections in every township for the support of common schools, and seventy-two sections for the use and support of a state university. Five per cent of the proceeds from all sales by the National Government of land within the state was set aside to defray the expenses of common schools. Approximately 1,600,000 acres of this school land still remains and are now owned by the State. Its sale is prohibited by state law enacted in 1897, except for school, church, and cemetery purposes.

The first State Legislature in 1867 made Lincoln the capital of Nebraska and authorized the establishment of a State University in that city. In 1875 schools were being erected in Nebraska at a rate of approximately one each day. And, at the turn of the century, a new schoolhouse was still being erected every two days. In 1891, Nebraska's first compulsory school act was passed. It provided that all children from eight to fourteen years of age must attend school not less than twelve weeks per year. This was followed six years later by a law concerning child labor.

Immigrants of all nationalities were moving into the area, finding it difficult to adapt to the new country. Aside from the turmoils of homesteading, there were language, tradition and religious barriers. But these faded and the immigrants were pulled together in the "community" school. Within each community, children of all nationalities went to the same one-room school, had the same teacher and learned the same language. Children learned quickly and taught their parents to speak English. American characteristics were passed on, and the communities were pulled together with common bonds. Americanization was taking place through the country schools.

The one-room school building also served as a community center. Spelling Bees, Christmas programs, and the recitation programs were attended by the entire community. The school building provided a place for community dances, quilting bees, elections, religious services, and even an occasional wedding or funeral. The one-room school was an important cornerstone in each community.



## Country School Architecture

The first free schools were not very pretentious, but wherever there were children, schools were held. It was not uncommon for the first school to be taught in a log cabin home, by the mother, with the children sitting on benches split out of trees. An average "regular" school building was about 22x32 feet and 12 feet high and cost, including furniture, \$1000. They were made of rough logs, and had sod roofs. Since they were used for all public gatherings, they were built larger than necessary for school purposes.

In the beginning, the structure of the country school varied according to what materials were available. In Scotts Bluff county in 1886, there was a school made of baled straw with a sod roof and a dirt floor. Structures of wood, stone, logs, adobe brick, or sod dotted the landscape. The interior was often cold and dark. A potbelly stove scorched the students near it and those unlucky enough to be further away sometimes frosted their toes. The source of light usually depended on windows which could create eyestrain. Fleas, snakes, and other undesirable guests often made themselves at home in the sod roofs. The furnishings were crude and sparse. Certainly, teaching and learning conditions were far from ideal. The United States had over 200,000 one-room schools at the turn of the century. By the second decade of the Twentieth Century, standardization of school houses was being established.

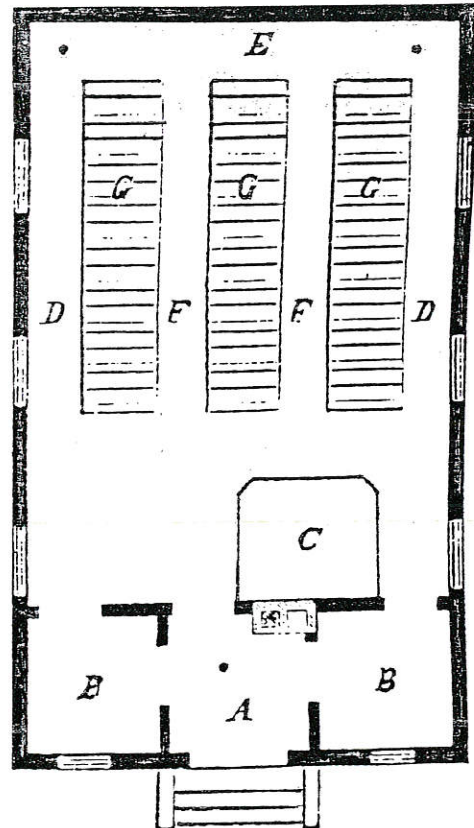
### Country School Houses

We have already elsewhere discussed the subject of schoolhouses in general. We have introduced a cut for a country school house, which has been kindly furnished by the American Journal of Education, believing it will be of value to those who contemplate the erection of such a building. This house should be 28x40 on the ground, height of ceiling at least 15 feet. The school room will then be 28x32; the two wardrobes each 8x9; the entry 8x10. The partitions and walls will, of course, lessen these dimensions to the extent of their thickness. This house will accommodate fifty pupils. For a very small district the building may be 24x32. Teachers' platform 6x10, 8 or 10 inches high. Wainscoting should extend entirely around the rooms and entry. Black boards of liquid slating entirely around the school room in width *not less* than 4 ½ feet; 5 feet is still better. The uppermost foot and a half is very useful for permanent copies in writing and drawing; and for other uses. The windows should be so constructed that they may be let down from the top. The heating should be by furnace, or by a ventilating stove. John Grossius, 389 Main Street, Cincinnati, manufactures a school stove for fifty dollars, which is economical, and efficient; by it, pure air is taken from the outside, heated and introduced into the school room, thus affording complete ventilation. Even country districts can well afford this luxury. Indeed they cannot afford to do without it. We should be glad to see every country district in Colorado build as good a school house as is represented in the cut; and as much better as can be afforded.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Horace Hale

Superintendent of Public Instruction



### **Pioneer School Teachers**

The stereotyped role of the country school teacher is the single female schoolmarm. However, male teachers were preferred in the early school because of tradition and because it was believed they could control the large farm boys who attended school only in winter. Women were originally employed to teach in the spring when smaller children were in school. However, there were usually more women than men available to teach in many areas.

In some early schools, prior to any or few laws and regulations, the teacher was a young girl, barely older than her oldest pupils. Although the county superintendent could certify teachers as he/she saw fit, it was customary to have school teachers examined by the local school board for proficiency in spelling, reading, writing, geography, history of the United States, and English grammar. These examinations were oral. There was little money to pay the teacher. The average monthly salary of a man was about \$30.00 and that of a woman about \$26.00. For this reason, the teacher often "boarded around" the district. Many of the teachers were men who were preferred to do "the licking as well as the learning."

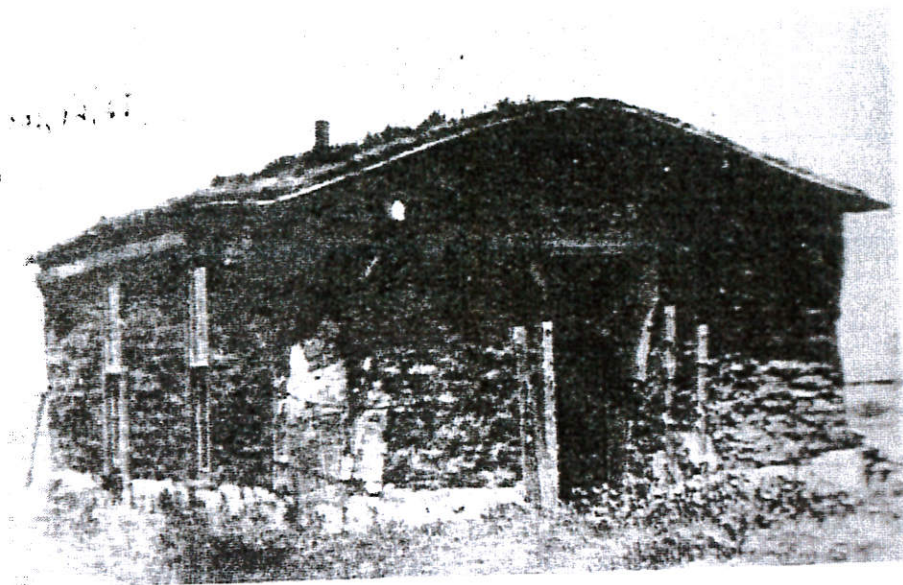
Pay was very low and included room and board, meaning the teacher was shuttled from home to home and stayed longest with the families that had the most children in school.

The teacher was expected to be the source of all knowledge, and to be creative and innovative as there were often very few materials with which to work. Sometimes children were required to bring whatever books their families had as the only available reading materials. Other roles filled by the teacher were counselor, mediator, nurse, judge, jury, disciplinarian, and jack-of-all-trades from scrubbing the school house floor to killing the occasional rattlesnake.

### **Rules for Teachers 1880's**

1. Teachers each day will fill lamps and clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.
3. Make the pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents a pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity, and honesty,
9. The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves.

***The past cannot be changed; the future is still in your power.***



**Genius without education is like silver in the mine.**

County \_\_\_\_\_

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEBRASKA**

TEACHER'S SECOND GRADE CERTIFICATE

Office of County Superintendent

1885

**This Certifies**, that I believe \_\_\_\_\_ to be a person of good moral character, and that \_\_\_\_\_ has passed a satisfactory examination in all the branches required by law and the regulations of the State Superintendent to entitle \_\_\_\_\_ to a SECOND GRADE CERTIFICATE. \_\_\_\_\_ is therefore deemed qualified to teach in any District in this County, for one year from this date, unless this Certificate be sooner revoked.

Arithmetic \_\_\_\_\_ Grammar \_\_\_\_\_ History \_\_\_\_\_ Theory and Art of Teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Orthography \_\_\_\_\_ English Composition \_\_\_\_\_ Penmanship \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_

Spelling \_\_\_\_\_ Natural Philosophy \_\_\_\_\_

County Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_

The validity of this Certificate will only be null and void if the County Superintendent when first issued, or any other officer of the State, was the holder of the same.

## Pioneer School Students

Students were motivated to learn academics and to pass the eighth grade examinations. The important values of friendship, cooperation and compromise were also learned in the country school. Students received individual personal attention from the teacher and older students.

Children worked independently and progressed at their own pace. Many times there were only one or two students per grade, so the pressure for competition was minimal. Students would also be "skipped" a grade, if possible, to make it convenient for the teacher. Memorized lessons were used frequently and the child was responsible to recite the lesson for the teacher at the recitation bench and to answer all the questions. Students learned from one another as they heard others recite lessons from year to year. Students excelled at mental arithmetic.

Pupils ranged in age from five to twenty-one. It wasn't uncommon for a student to be as old or older than the teacher. Books were very scarce until 1891 when a law was passed whereby the school board was required to furnish textbooks.

A description of the early pioneer schoolhouse would not be complete without an explanation of the discipline used during this period.



The frontier, famous for its democracy and adventure, seemed to view school doctrine with a different sense of values and rules. The teacher was in charge and she or he was expected to enforce the rules and standards of the time. The teacher was also expected to have a flawless character with no blemishing social life.

Children were made to stand in line and to march from class to class. Pupils had to stand in line in front of the teacher to recite; and in some classes they could not even smile or turn their heads. The children were told to "toe the mark: which meant to come to the front of the room, put your toes on the line of the boards, and with a bow, recite.

If a student broke one of the rules, there were several forms of punishment.

Flowerfield will not utilize the extreme forms of discipline used in early days. However, the teacher will maintain a strict classroom.

## Punishment

- A) A ferula, which was a rod or ruler 15 to 18 inches long, was used by the teacher on children who misbehaved. If they giggled, were inattentive, or recited poorly, they received three or four light blows on the meaty part of the palm. Bad behavior was punished by sharp raps across the back and shoulders. Usually, it was the older boys who received the whippings.
- B) Girls were made to sit in the corner on a one-legged stool called a "uniped."
- C) Children were also sent to the cloakroom, a small room at the back of the building where coats and lunches were kept.
- D) Children who did not recite well were given the dunce cap.
- E) Tardy students lost a recess.
- F) A pupil had to clean the floor if he littered or spit.
- G) Writing sentences such as "I will not...." was a punishment.
- H) Students could be made to stand with their nose inside a circle on the chalkboard.
- I) Worst of all, a boy could be made to sit by a girl if he misbehaved.

# Silence Is Golden.

### Rules for Students-1887

1. Students will not speak unless spoken to.
2. When speaking, proper language will be used at all times. (Ma'am, May I please ...)
3. All will abide by the Golden Rule, "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*"
4. Female students will conduct themselves as ladies, and males as gentlemen. Good manners will be expected.
5. Male students will remove all head gear before entering any building.
6. Good posture will be assumed by all students.
7. When a student wishes to speak, he must raise his hand, wait to be recognized, and then stand at his seat before speaking.



## Patriotic Exercises

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892. Most state laws direct that pupils in schools shall pledge allegiance to the Flag. The Pledge at Flowerfield School will be rendered in the original manner as described by older teachers in our area and by the Collier's Encyclopedia. Students will stand at attention with the right hand over the heart. On repeating the words "to the flag," the right hand should be extended, palm upward, toward the flag.

Flowerfield students will omit the words "under God" when saying the Pledge.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."



To act is easy, to think is hard.

## Mode of Dress

Pioneer dress will help make the day at Flowerfield School more fun and memorable. The costumes should be kept simple. The teacher could wear a full skirt, blouse, and apron. Little girls often wore a plain, shift type dress with an apron or pinafore. A big ribbon in the hair can suffice for ornament, but a bonnet or straw hat is also acceptable.

Boys of the prairie were busy helping with the farm work so their clothing was functional as well comfortable. A long sleeve work shirt, jeans and suspenders, work shoes or boots, and a cap or western style hat would be appropriate. Pants can be rolled up to look like knickers, with long socks. The male school teacher could wear a boxy type suit jacket with a starched white shirt.

In the pioneer days, dress was not necessarily a mark of distinction. Most wore clothing which had come west with them on covered wagon or sooty railroad. After the grasshopper and drought years, with their barrels of relief from benevolent organizations in the East, dress was even more irregular and unconventional. Sacks, which had brought relief flour, were used to patch old dresses, and if a prairie zephyr should happen to lift a skirt there might be revealed a petticoat bearing the words "Pillsbury's Best."

On occasion, a newcomer would unpack some finery from the bottom of a trunk and come out dressed in real style for a social event. The belle of the evening at one Fourth of July celebration was fortunate enough to have a silk dress, but had to wear her sunbonnet and cowhide shoes as accessories.

The mother often made the boys' shirts and the girls' clothing. They could be quite detailed, but were most often very plain. More elaborate clothing could be made to order by the local tailor or dressmaker. Included in this guide are illustrations of clothing available from the 1908 Sears Catalog.

By the early 1900's, the catalog had made its appearance on the western scene. People who moved West came from the sophisticated East and had heard of electricity! With railroads nearby for their cash crops, they did not have to subsist entirely on the land. Catalog trade enabled them to have many luxuries from the East. Besides the catalog, magazines kept the area aware of fashion trends. One school teacher covered her classroom walls with fashion illustrations, figuring some brightness was needed in the classroom!



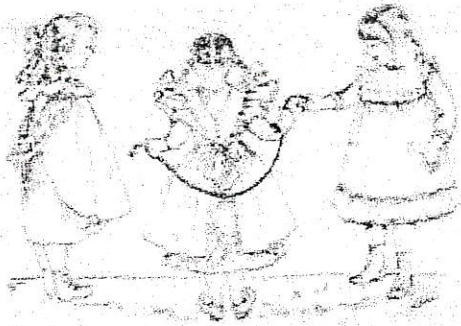
### The Apron

The simple apron deserves recognition in America's long trek West. Aboard the covered wagon train, the apron served far beyond the original task of protecting the under dress. The apron snuggled a barefoot babe in his mother's lap. On a chilly day, the full skirt gave warmth to the arms of the wearer.

In the days of early settlement, the lady of the house would don a white apron accented with alternating rows of narrow and wide tucks edged in lace. Thus attired, she could preside over a dining table laden with delicious food.

With a well-timed scream and a waving apron, the busy housewife frightened away chicken hawks. And it served to flag hungry men to dinner.

A vintage advertisement for children's clothing. At the top, it reads "WONDERFUL VALUES IN CHILDREN'S BROWNIE OVERALLS." Below this, there is a small illustration of a young child wearing a hat and overalls, standing next to a dog. The text is dense and includes phrases like "No Parents Need to Worry About Their Children's Clothing" and "There is nothing that will give the mother and father a greater pleasure than to see their children in Brownie Overalls." The price "23c" is prominently displayed. At the bottom, it says "33c THE BEST BROWNIE OVERALLS. ALL SIZES." The overall design is characteristic of early 20th-century newspaper or catalog advertisements.



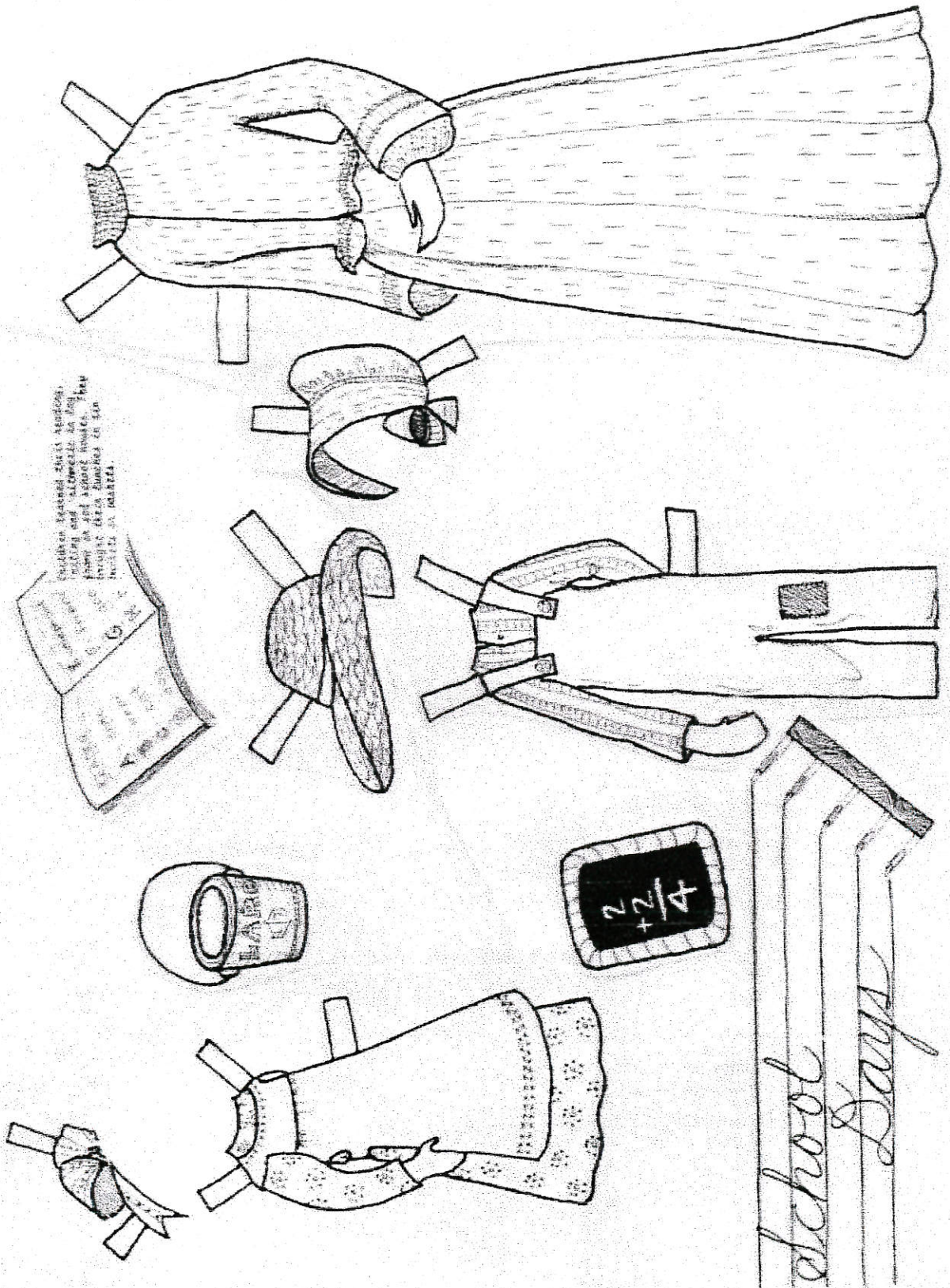
An apron was a very versatile garment! With a few quick movements, it became a tote bag. On returning to the house, the apron would yield corncobs to kindle a fire, a dozen eggs, a mess of greens, or even berries, if she had strolled by a ripe bush.

Even little girls wore aprons. Theirs were the pinafore type with a full skirt gathered onto a waistband and buttoned in the back. At the front was a bib ruffled on either side for shoulder straps. Shudder to think of ironing these stiffly starched creations pressed with heavy sad irons heated on a hot kitchen stove!

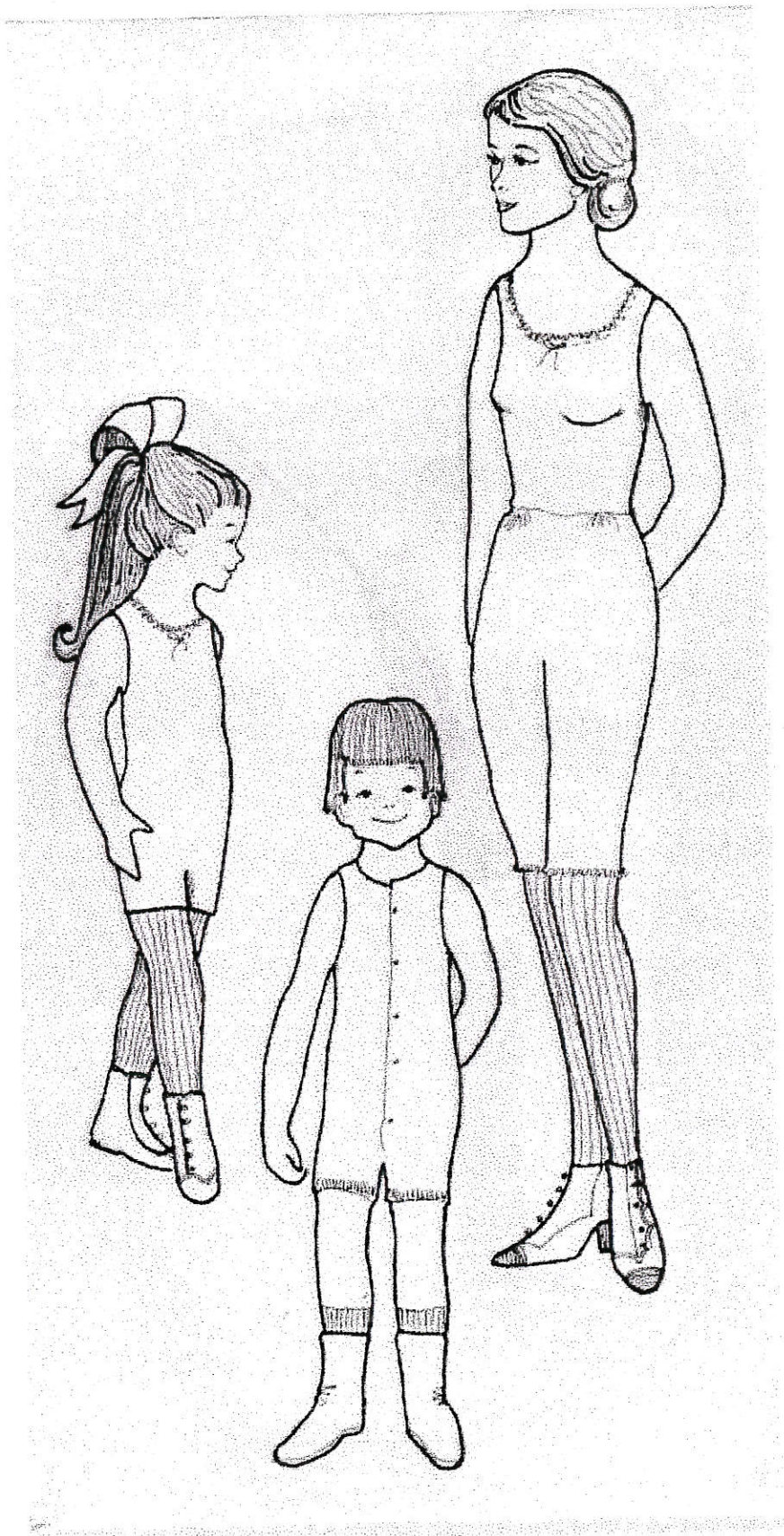
The wilderness might have been conquered without it, but the apron certainly played its part in civilizing the west!



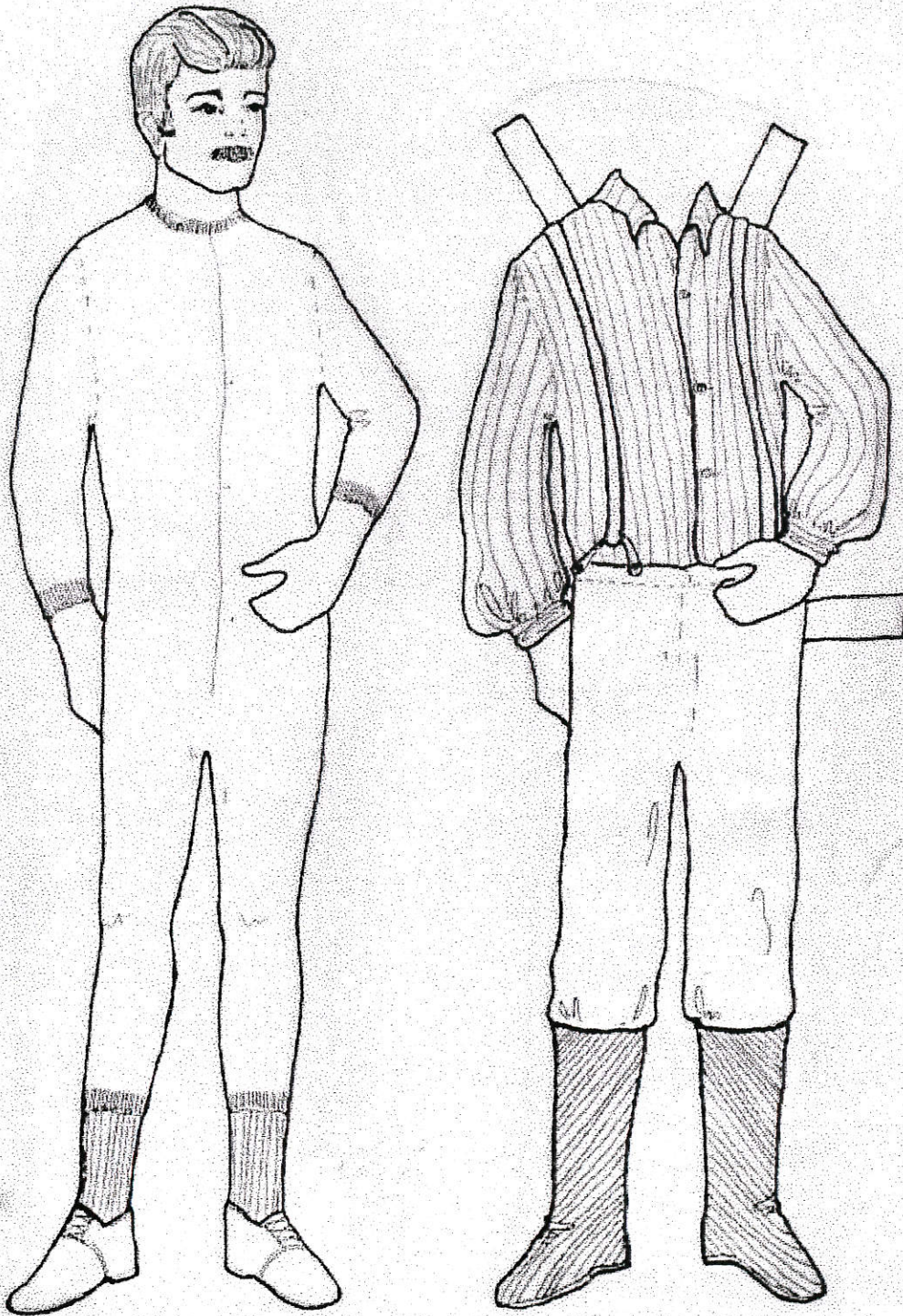
A pattern for the dress and bonnet shown above is available at SOAR/ESU #13.



The children learned that the Egyptians  
 used a special system of writing. They  
 wrote in hieroglyphs. They  
 used pictures to represent  
 words.



From the Nebraska State Historical Society.  
For information, call (402) 471-4751.



## Preparatory Activities for the Country School Experience

1. The DVD, Country School Legacy, will be made available to the teachers, who attend Flowerfield Historic School, courtesy of ESU# 13.

Viewing the DVD before attending Flowerfield can help the children understand what they might experience and the dress appropriate for them to wear. The DVD does not stop with historical presentation. However, it *ap-*proaches some of the modern issues pertinent to rural schools and education. The DVD might even be considered for part of a parent program. A paperback book was written by the author of the DVD and is available at SOAR. It is very readable and would be of interest to students as well as adults. Ask for Country School Legacy by Andrew Guilliford.

### Discussion Questions

- A) Before starting the DVD, ask students to note the styles of pupil clothing and how they carry their books and lunch. Little girls did not wear floor length skirts in the late 1800's. Fashion was not a high concern to the earliest settlers.
- B) Flowerfield School will follow the older style of hand position during the Pledge of Allegiance. (See section in Opening Exercises). Note this difference from the DVD with the students and have them practice it as well as the omission of the words, "under God." (In 1954, Congress added the words, "under God," to the Pledge. The Pledge was now both a patriotic oath and a public prayer.)
- C) What is a "symbol"? (Use the flag, 4-H clover, or eagle as examples). Why were schools called "symbols of pioneer hope and vision"?
- D) Why was the school often the first building erected on the prairie? The Pilgrims would first erect a church. The pioneers first built a school. Why the difference?
- E) In what ways did the school serve as a community center? Does the school today still serve this role? How?
- F) What is a "school marm"? Why were 9 out of 10 teachers in Nebraska women?
- G) Why did foreign born and first generation Americans value education highly? What nationalities have recently immigrated to America? (You might have Vietnamese, Haitian, or students from Central or South America in your class.) Do these immigrants face language problems? How do schools handle the problems today in different parts of our country? What does "back to the basics" mean? Should schools teach the skills that the society needs? What was "basic" 100 years ago? What is "basic" today? What might be basic skills 100 years from now?
- H) What is a school board? Invite a school board member to class or have the class visit a school board meeting. Some teachers have invited their Superintendent or other administrators to "guest teach" a lesson to their class. Discuss the differences between a small school system with one or a few teachers, maybe a head teacher and a school board versus a more complex system with several schools, hundreds of teachers, several levels of administration and a school board. Students are always surprised to learn that the administrators do not "own" the school as do businessmen. This research can lead to investigations of the county government and career awareness.

- J) What would it be like to attend one of those rural schools in Albany County, Wyoming where you are the only pupil? What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages? A teacher in one of those schools brings her student into town (when the weather permits) for roller skating with students from other schools. Why would that be?
- K) Some districts have tried 4 day weeks to save expenses. Propose changes to improve your school such as a 12 month year with alternating vacation time for pupils and teachers. Then list all of the consequences of your change. For example, when would the janitors wax the floors?
- L) Other issues and activities suggested by the film include interviewing retired teachers or older citizens to find out about their schooling and changes that have occurred.
- M) Conduct a poll concerning school consolidation issues. Find pen pals with another class in our area which represents a different size school and have the students compare organization and experiences.

### **Comments on Consolidation**

The consolidation controversy is addressed in the film, Country School Legacy. Students might be able to discern the author's intent or opinion on this issue and be able to locate his justifications. This allows the teacher the opportunity to discuss the power of film and media to tell opinions and help students begin to distinguish fact, opinion, and supporting statements without becoming too embroiled in the issue itself. It is important for students to know that there is more than one side to this issue.

The number of country schools today is in serious decline. Many of these schools have disappeared and many more will in the near future. In 1938 there were 210,000 one-room schools scattered throughout the United States. Today there are only a dozen one-room schools in Colorado, 189 rural schools in South Dakota (from 1978 statistics), 33 small rural schools in Wyoming, and 305 rural schools in Nebraska. Only one non-consolidated school still exists in Kansas and it may have recently closed because of declining enrollment.

In 1999 there were approximately 194 schools in Nebraska with 20 or fewer students.

Why are the country schools closing? Some reasons are low teacher pay, isolation, housing shortages, lack of services, less variety in the curriculum, fewer opportunities for slower or gifted students, fewer opportunities to develop social applied to the assessed evaluation of the property in the school district.

Still, there are many advocates of the small rural school who do not want to see consolidation. They cite local control, development of self-reliance, individualized instruction, students helping and cooperating with each other, teaching the values of the community, providing a focal point for community activities, cost in time and energy of busing for long distances, and the desire not to expose their children to the so-called big city problems such as drugs as major reasons for their stance.



**2. A possible activity for your class could include role play vignettes of experiences from early schools. Telling Tales Out of School is one fine source written by retired teachers. Several such incidents which would be suitable for dramatization are included in this handbook.**

### **The Hog-nosed Vipers**

Elizabeth Clare Neville

(The author of this piece, who is unable to write because of arthritis, related these memories to Lydia E. Butler, also a retired teacher, who has recorded them.)

In 1918, Elizabeth Clare Neville began her career in a rural school. Her three most memorable experiences are: The closing of the school the first year because of flu; having to consult the county superintendent for a head lice remedy the next year; and a gopher-snake episode the third year. It seems the gophers invaded the alfalfa field adjacent to the school yard. Then the garden snakes came to kill the gophers. The students were angered because Miss Bess wouldn't let them kill the snakes, which they called little hog-nosed vipers. The moderator came to investigate, and Bess explained the balance of nature to him, so he made the rule: "Do not kill Miss Neville's hog-nosed vipers any more!"

Miss Neville also taught in high school and finally finished her career at Norfolk Junior College in the English department. She says she got her job at Norfolk over seven other applicants because she was the one who didn't smoke cigarettes.

### **An Unusual Schoolhouse**

Margaret E. Tyrrell

In 1919, when I was a young bride, my husband and I were living the three years requirement for a claim of 320 acres in western Nebraska. I was a teacher, so the school-board chairman came to me and said, "Margaret, will you teach school in my new tool shed, until we can get a schoolhouse built?"

I replied that I would be glad to do so, and he continued, "I can build some benches, with a wide board for their desk, running in front of the children's seats, and for you I'll make a desk of a barrel, covered by a smooth board and a teacher's chair of a keg, with a board on top for you to sit on. How's that?"

"If it gets too cold, Millie and I will clear out our living room for you to move the school children into. There will be our three children and four from the Merwin family, north of here; some new ones may have quite long distances to walk or ride horseback."

More children did come, and the next summer everybody pitched in and helped build a new schoolhouse, but I will always remember the tool shed.

## **A Surprise**

Greta Svendsen

A stranger came to our door on a Saturday evening in the last week in May.

"You don't remember me. I am Bennie Doggett. You taught me in the second grade in 1926," he said.

I invited him to come into the house, and we spent several hours visiting and reminiscing about school.

Ben said, "Remember that cold winter day when it was my turn to furnish the hot dish for the school lunch? I brought cocoa in a syrup pail and put it on the hot potbelly stove. We were busy studying our lessons when we heard a loud bang! We had forgotten about the cocoa and had not taken the lid off the pail. The cocoa had exploded! It had shot up on the ceiling, over the books and desks, and everywhere on the floor.

"The rest of the day," he said, "we spent cleaning the schoolroom and our books. It was one of the happiest days of my school years. I will always remember it and you."

## **The Planetarium**

Neva Bloodgood Muller

In the early 1900's, I taught in the Oliver Branch School in Kearney County; this building was used as a rural school from 1878 to 1955. In the spring of 1912, there were only four pupils. By 1921, the school had grown to 28 pupils.

Reading, writing, arithmetic, physiology, language, history, and geography were the subjects taught. No science of any kind was taught. At one time, a salesman came through the country selling Trippensee Planetariums. Almost every school had one—we thought they were wonderful! The only problem was that most teachers didn't know how to explain the working technique, so the boxes with planetariums sat on shelves and collected dust for years.

## **Language Problems**

Frieda D. Rowoldt

Teaching the English language to two four-year-old girls who spoke the Bohemian language, such as "Hezka holka dej me hubicku," meaning "Pretty girl give me a kiss" and "brambory and maso," meaning "potatoes and meat," food which the pupils like to eat. I wrote sentences on the board and translated their language into the English language. I made flash cards of items in the schoolroom and let the children run a race to see who could get the most cards, pronouncing the words in English. When the pupils raised their hands and said, "Hella!" I wondered if they meant "Hell," only to find out it means, "Look here."

## Our Pony

Maude Whitcomb

It was a lovely spring morning when the children and teacher set out for school in a cute little buggy drawn by a brown and white Shetland pony named Chick. The school was perhaps a mile from home, the last quarter mile being a gentle slope. The birds sang, and the children laughed as they clip-clopped along the road.

On the last quarter mile, Chick began to rebel against the load she was pulling. It became evident that Chick was not going to make it. Therefore, the teacher and two of the children walked the rest of the way.

School went on as usual that morning. The noon hour came; lunch was eaten, and the youngsters ran out to play. The teacher and several little ones were interested in a quiet game in the room. Suddenly the door opened, and in rushed the rest of the students. They screamed, "Teacher, teacher, Chick has a colt."

Sure enough! The teacher quickly demanded that all the children come inside, and she drew the shades down as far as they could be drawn. Quiet reigned. A child was dispatched to call his father and tell him what had happened.

After school the farmer came with a spring wagon, and children and teacher piled into the back. The children held the baby colt, and the teacher held the rope to which was tied the little mother.

## Lasting Memories

Marjorie Smith

What profession can be more satisfying, exciting, interesting, and more hard work than teaching children? Every morning you say to yourself. "What will happen today that is new and different?" I preferred children in the fourth grade, for they are old enough to help themselves, yet not old enough to be critical, but just outspoken and honest. As the saying goes, "Out of the mouths of babes come words of truth."

I began my teaching career in a country school where I became acquainted with Donnie. He was in the fifth grade and having some difficulty with fractions. I had tried several approaches. This day we were at the old slate blackboard, and I was drawing pictures, trying to illustrate fractions to him. Finally, I drew a circle and divided it into sections.

Impatiently I remarked, "Donnie, don't you see a fraction is a part of a whole?" Very solemnly he answered, "Teacher, I don't see a hole."

## The One-Room School

Ella Zahradnicek

My first year of teaching was in 1925. The school was only four miles from town, and it was known as the poorest, most run-down school in the county. This school was small, set in the middle of a section, unpainted, with old straw around the foundation to add a bit of warmth. It had three windows, one on the south, one on the west, and one on the north. There was a lean-to on the east for fuel and for children's wraps and dinner buckets. One panel of the room door was missing, but a board member nailed on a piece of peach crate. This harmonized with the rest of the decor.

There was one book in the library, Ten Nights in a Barroom, and very few textbooks of any kind.

On the morning of the first day, I came very early to put flowers on my desk and to greet the children. From all directions came children until 21 had gathered. They were so happy to see a young teacher and to see one another.

There was no kindling to start fires, so recesses and noon hours were used to gather brush in the cottonwood grove and place this in the lean-to. The children thought this fun to walk through the grove and along the creek. Finally, before cold weather, one board member brought a load of coal and told me, "Make this last."

There was no well, so a boy living a quarter of a mile from the school always brought a gallon of water. This had to do for the day for 21 children. Twice during high winds, the straw foundation caught fire, and the older boys threw sand on it as there was no water. Some suggested, "Let her go!"

Each family furnished one and one-half gallons of soup, hot chocolate, stew, chicken and noodles, or some other food once a week. This was put on the heater at 11:30 so the pupils could have a hot dish at noon.

When snow was very deep, I had to board at a home close to school. I hated to open my dinner bucket each day because there it was—the inevitable peanut-butter and jelly sandwich. But the fun in this home in the evenings made up for the poor lunches. I played the piano, one boy played the clarinet, the others sang, and there was always popcorn.

In the spring, the county superintendent came to visit. She said she hadn't been there in six years because she couldn't find the place. She was appalled at the condition of the building, the absence of materials, the poor equipment, and the fact that there was no well. She told the board that they could either build a new school or close.

The next term the children were sent to a nearby school, and this one-room school ceased to exist.

## A Memorial

Grace Moore Fetters

Sunny Hillside, the rural school where I taught in 1930, has been renewed and placed in the Cambridge Roadside Park as a memorial to old-day rural schools. The one-room building was designed with an entryway with hooks on which to hang cloaks and shelves on which pupils placed their lunch pails and books. Another shed, or room, was the utility room for fuel, such as coal, wood, and cormcobs.

Within the schoolroom are the old stationary desks and seats in rows, a potbelly stove with its outer circular deflector so the heat would spread to the perimeter of the room, and not be unbearable if one was seated too close.

In front of the room on a platform about eight inches higher than the main floor of the room are the teacher's desk and chair and a bench where classes were held. On the wall nearby are the blackboard, roll-up maps, and high above prominently displayed are the pictures of Washington and Lincoln.

In those days guidebooks and manuals were missing items. The teacher devised her own methods and motivations. One science lesson involved the earth represented by a ball in a child's hand marked with the posed and a spot where he might live. This ball would be revolving in the child's hand. Another child might have a similar ball or apple or even a piece of coal, representing the moon, and going around the child holding the "earth." Still another child would be holding a shiny can high above his head for the sun. So went the universe, at which one small boy exclaimed, "I don't believe it."

One spring afternoon a storm came up. A board member, who lived about one-half mile from the school and who was mindful that this was my first teaching experience, came to stay with us during the storm. I was grateful for his presence during all the darkness, thunder, and lightning, followed by pelting hail and rain.

The Christmas programs were gala affairs with all the pupils taking part and with the parents in attendance. I shudder to think of the chances of fire that were taken with lighted candles used on the Christmas trees. One morning before Christmas a little fellow came to me saying, "I tried it. I tried it."

I asked, "What did you try?"

He answered, "You know that story you read to us about Santa Claus when he put his finger aside of his nose and up the chimney he rose? Well, I did it. I did it."

Then I asked, "What happened, Billy?"

He assured me, "I went up a little ways."

## A Bucketful of Slack

Margaret Patterson

Somewhere back in the "dear dead days" I was a young lady, trained at the University of Nebraska to become a kindergarten teacher. My hopes were high, for with my training in music, why shouldn't I expect to be teacher of exceptional merit? It should not be hard for me with my music background to control the live-wire five-year-olds in any group assigned to me. Perhaps this idea of applying a little music therapy to accomplish law and order from chaos may have sounded far-fetched to others, but I had big hopes.

With genuine apprehension, I boarded the train from Scottsbluff as no one had given me any encouragement to come west. I had been told that Scottsbluff was the jumping-off place, a place in western Nebraska with no trees and only barren prairies. I knew there was a teaching job there, so there certainly would be parents and children. I bravely proceeded with my head above the clouds and with ecstatic visions of what I hoped to do.

I arrived in a downpour of rain, hoping I could find the teacher who had promised to meet me. The rain caused a change in the prearranged wearing apparel, so we didn't recognize each other. I took a taxi to the hotel and arrived at the same time that my delegated companion reached the hotel. We made ourselves known to each other and were good friends from the start.

I looked around the town. Who said there weren't trees? The streets were lined with beautiful cottonwoods. I was escorted to the Lincoln Ward School. We looked over the school, then I said, "Where is the kindergarten room?"

My new friend, Amy, said, "You'll be in that little schoolhouse, that little building, that you see at the back of the school grounds.

There it was, a little country schoolhouse with four windows on each side resembling inquisitive eyes sizing up the situation.

Almost in disbelief, I said, "you mean this is the kindergarten room?"

To allay my suspicions, she said, "Yes, let's go and look at it." So we went in.

In my bewilderment, I said, "Well, it looks like a country school, sure enough, but oh goody, there is a piano." Then seeing a water pail and a dipper, I said, "Really, do the children get drinks from the dipper? Where are the restroom facilities?"

My new friend said, "Here's the emergency rest room."

In almost shock, I nearly shouted, "That?" There was the little four-by-five room with a chemical toilet resembling a small garbage can.

Recovering, at last, I took a look at the big potbelly stove at one end of the room, and I groaned, "Heavens, I don't have to build fires too, do I?" Really, I felt that I had dropped back in history to 1865. She assured me that the janitor built the fires.

Monday came, and 25 adorable children arrived for their first day of school life. Noon time came, and the janitor came over armed with his sweeping equipment to get the room ready for the afternoon session. For lack of anything better to say, I remarked, "Won't be long before we'll have to have fires." He just grunted and left.

The days sped by quickly, and soon the air was quite chilly. The janitor appeared with a coal bucket of slack that came from the furnace supply of fuel. On top of this coal bucket of slack were a half-dozen pint bottles of milk, which I was to give to certain children who participated in the milk program. I asked him if he would please carry the milk in some other container, but all the answer I got was a look that was supposed to trim me down to size. He proceeded to build the fire, throwing the full bucket of slack all in one heap in the stove with no chance for air. Again I spoke, "You know if you aren't careful, that stove will blow up." He made no answer.

Well, the day arrived when my prophecy came true. The fire was built as usual with the big bucket of slack all placed in one heap. School was going beautifully with the children in the middle of the room enjoying their organized play period. The "big critter" gave a mighty shake and a heave, then emitted an enormous POOF of smoke. The stovepipe went sailing through the air and landed on the top of a little boy's head. Fire shot out of the top of the stovepipe connection, and smoke billowed out in a big cloud. I rushed to the piano and played our fire-drill signal which we had learned, and every child knew what to do. They marched out of the door like well-trained soldiers, not even pausing a second to get wraps. There were no tears and apparently few fears on the part of the children.

Needless to say, we had a half-day vacation as everything was covered with soot, including all the children. Our faces were black and so were the clothes we were wearing. As I recall, all later fires were built in a proper manner, and better coal was used. Always, however, I seemed to get the same withering glances from my good friend, the janitor.

## Parental Punishment

Estelle Schuman

In the autumn of 1924 I went to the Creighton Valley School, southeast of Gering, Nebraska, to teach school, after being graduated from Scottsbluff High School with normal training. Creighton Valley was a modern, three-teacher school offering ten grades. I was assigned to the intermediate room, grades four through seven. There were 37 pupils enrolled in my room, and all but four were from German-Russian families.

The building was quite new, and the upper grades were assigned to the basement room—really a half basement room. To provide sufficient light, the basement rooms had full-length windows, and the first floor was seven or eight steps above the ground level. There were sturdy but steep concrete steps leading to a large concrete porch.

Many of our pupils rode horses to school. The more adventurous would ride their horses up the steps to the porch. This endangered the children on the porch. Punishment had been promised to anyone who rode up on the steps.

One morning I heard screaming outside, and looking out the window, I saw Henry riding his horse up the steps to the porch. As he got to the porch he saw me, hurried his horse down the steps, out the gate, and toward home.

School took up as usual. Some time later there was a knock at my door, and I was confronted by a very angry father and a triumphant Henry. The father spoke. "My Henry says you're fixin' to lick him an' he don't know what for!" I eased them out onto the porch, but my pupils rushed to the window to see the excitement.

I turned my sternest 18-year-old look on Henry. To the father I said, "Oh, Mr. Kuxhaus, I believe Henry can tell you what he did."

Henry cringed, looked at his friends lining the window, at me for mercy, then fearfully at his father. He saw no help from any quarter so ducked his head and began to stammer, "I didn't hurt nothin'; I only rode Old Prince up on the porch."

His father's mouth dropped open as he looked at the steep steps. He roared, "You mean you rode that horse up these cee-ment steps! You might of broken his leg!" Then turning to me, the father yelled, "Get your rubber hose! I'll hold him while you lick him!"

This was a dilemma. I had no rubber hose. I drew myself up to my full five-feet-four inches and said haughtily, "He's your child. Now that you understand the problem, you take him home and punish him yourself."

## Rattlesnakes at School

Bertie Randall

One beautiful Sunday afternoon in early September in 1936, I drove to the small country schoolhouse near Whitney, Nebraska, where I had contracted to teach during the 1936-37 term. About a mile and a half before I reached the schoolhouse, I saw some strange things hanging from the barbs of the fence. Later I learned that those things were a part of the 200 rattlers killed on a snake hunt the day before. I was a bit dismayed, but I needed the job, so I taught.

Monday morning when I walked the mile and a half across the pasture to the schoolhouse, I was very particular where I put my feet as I walked; however, in all the times I walked across the pasture, I never saw a snake.

When the mornings were cool enough that a fire was needed to take the chill from the room, as I rattled the fuel while filing the bucket with coal, I could hear the snakes rattling under the building. The building had no foundation and sat on the edge of a prairie-dog town. Prairie dogs and rattlesnakes often share the same prairie-dog hole as a home.

One morning one of my boys left the room to go to the rest room, but he soon came running back saying, "Miss Davis, there is a snake out there." I took the broom from the hall and went to see, but by the time I got there, the snake had gone.

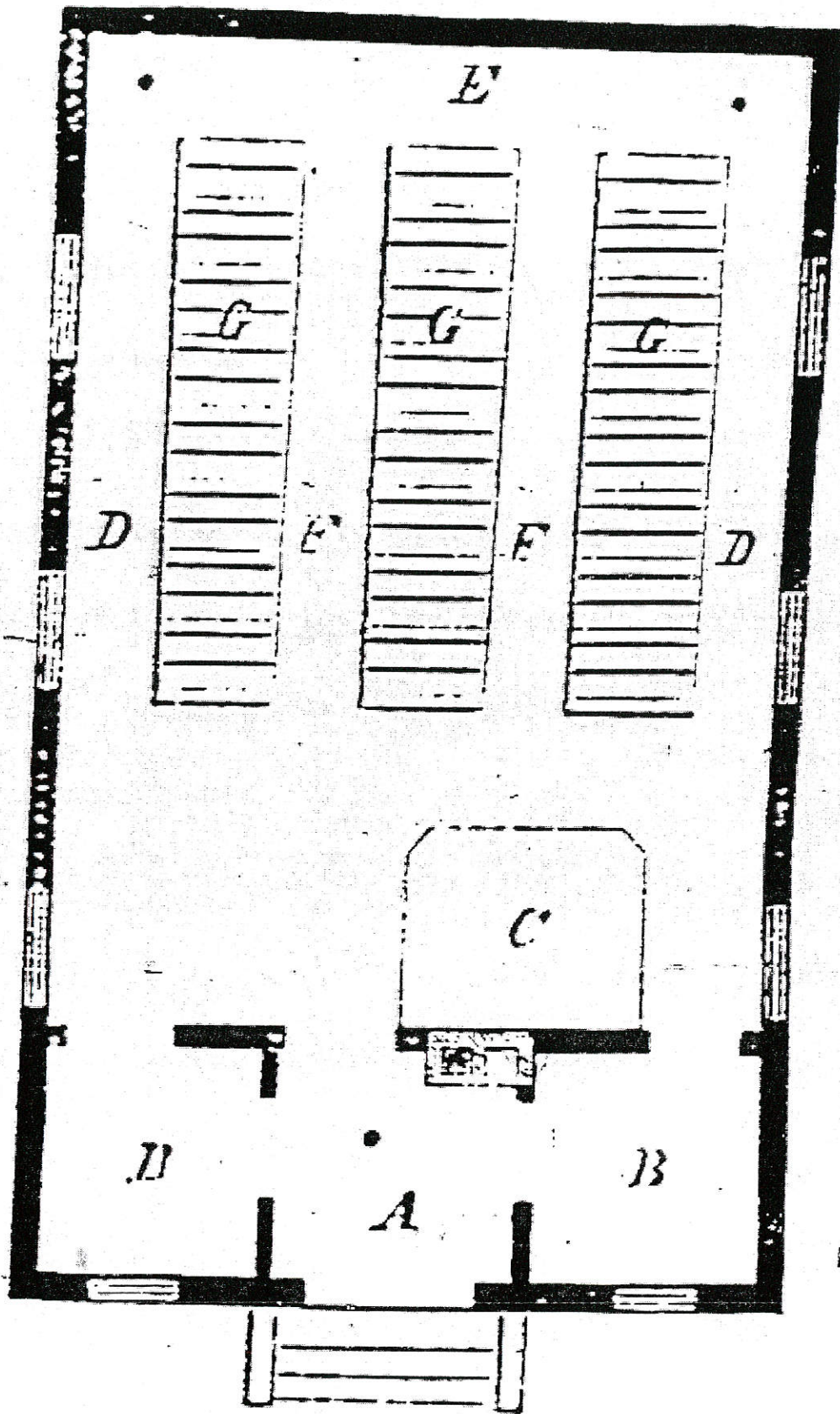
Another morning a child came in to say that there was a rattlesnake at the south side of the building. Seeing a man herding sheep in the pasture just north of the schoolhouse, I called to him. He came and tried to kill the snake with the shovel which he carried on his saddle. He wounded the snake, but it escaped under the building.

Sometimes I still dream about the next snake we saw. The day was beautiful with a warm sun and no wind. My pupils and I decided to take our lunches outside to eat them. We sat on the ground in the L-shaped corner where the hall joined our building. A bit later I looked up and to my horror saw a large rattler coiled directly behind a little boy, and not one foot away from him. I did not know what to do, but I knew I must do something.

Forcing my voice to be calm and quiet, I said, "Dwight, move toward me as quietly as you can; there is a snake behind you." All the color drained from his face, and he moved quietly and calmly out of reach of the snake. A man going by on horseback came with his shotgun and tried to kill the snake, but this one, too, escaped under the schoolhouse.

## Follow-up Activities for the Historic School Experience

1. Examine the dimensions given for a "standard school" around 1920. An overhead transparency or paper copies can be made from the master in this guide. Students can construct a scale model or measure out the actual dimensions within the school room or on the school yard.
2. Since early settlers had to utilize the materials by their environment to construct schools, challenge students to creatively problem solve with limited materials. Provide each team of students an identical sack containing 3 pages of newspaper, 2 paperclips, a rubber band, a pair of scissors, a straw, a ruler, and a piece of string 12 inches long. Tell the teams that they must create the tallest, free-standing "school" possible using only the materials they have been given within the time limit. When time is called, the team will be called upon to not only display their structure, but to also explain how the features of the structure function in the school. For example, "When class is dismissed, students at the top floor of our school slide down the straw to go home."
3. Utilize the lessons on architecture for fourth grade as described in the text, Discover Art. Artists can be interior designers. They help plan the insides of buildings so they will have useful spaces and be nice to see. We can really see interior design in our fast food restaurants. They are sometimes exactly the same from town to town. More and more businesses are planning color schemes, textures and patterns so that everything in the room coordinates with everything else. What signs of interior design are in our school? Imagine you could design a new room. What shape would the room be? What colors would you choose for the walls? Where would you place the furniture? Design the room so it will look like a model inside a box. Draw and color the furniture and designs on a flat sheet of paper. Then tape it. Some students may want to illustrate schools of the past: log, sod, or straw bales. Some may illustrate present day classrooms. Others can illustrate a school of the future.



*Perspective and ground plan for a country school house.*