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THE ONE ROOM SCHOOL

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Rural education in the early 1900's in San Joaquin County was in tune with the customs and demands of the day, but it was a far cry from the education offered our rural youth today. Information for this paper has been compiled from our own recollections and from conversations with individuals who either attended or taught in one room schools during this era.

Schools dotted the countryside four to six miles apart, each governed by a board of three trustees who were responsive to the demands of their own community.

The typical school ground was approximately one acre in size with a simple rectangular schoolhouse located near the center. At one edge of the schoolyard there was a combination horse shed and wood shed. Near the back fence were the proverbial two small structures, each with its own path. Most schoolyards were inclosed by a board fence. Often a stile on the roadside provided access, also serving as a nice spot to sit in the sun eating lunch and visiting.

The floor plan of these schools was much the same -- a front porch, main door, an anteroom with a row of hooks for coats and a shelf for lunch pails, a door at either end leading into the classroom. Pupils lined up outside at the start of each session, boys on one side, girls on the other, marching through the two doors in cadence to the tap-tap of a hand bell held by the teacher.

Inside a large wood or coal heating stove occupied the center spot. A teacher's desk and a recitation bench dominated the front of the room. Desks fastened to the floor, many of them double desks for two pupils, were arranged in rows facing the teacher. Slate blackboards lined the walls and there were windows on two or three sides of the room. The blackboards were used by the teacher for assignments and for instruction. They were also used by pupils to practice spelling lessons, write and rewrite the multiplication tables, and diagram sentences. For some reason the children vied with each other for the privilege of cleaning the blackboards and patting the chalk dust out of the erasers.

Some of the schools had wells and hand pumps but others had no wells. Either the teacher or one of the older boys living nearby carried water to school. A hand dipper often served everyone and a basin of water washed many hands before being thrown out. A roller towel served all.

The teacher served as janitor, sometimes assisted by one of the upper grade pupils. If the teacher lived in the neighborhood she traveled to school by horse and cart or buggy. Otherwise it usually fell to the lot of the nearest trustee to board the teacher. One teacher of the period told us received \$70 a month and paid \$25 of it for room and board.

Most of the children walked to school and dawdling along the way was one of the diversions of the day. A few came by horseback or in a cart. If children were needed at home or if the weather was inclement or roads too muddy they just stayed out.

Free state text books had not yet become a policy so parents bought the needed books and supplies at the local store. Books were handed down from one child to another in a family and mothers protected them with cloth covers. As school boards gradually assumed responsibility of providing more of the pupils' needs the suppliers would drive out in their buggies making the rounds of the schools taking their orders.

Report cards were issued once a month with percentage grades indicated for each subject. Eighth graders had to take an examination sent out by the county superintendent's office to determine whether they were entitled to graduate. Results were not known until mid summer.

Sometimes the teacher was a high school graduate who had succeeded in passing the county teachers' examination. Often a graduate of a two year course in a California State Teachers' College found her first teaching experience in a one room school. Even with this seemingly limited background many of these teachers became outstanding educators in our county educational system. There were no consultants, but the County Superintendent was required to visit each school once a year.

Everyone, of course, brought his own lunch and trading sandwiches or treats was a part of the lunchtime ritual. Favorite lunch boxes were lard pails and tobacco boxes such as Union Leader, Pedro, and Dixie Belle.

If there was any concern for fire hazard it was ignored at Christmas time. The school room was always packed with people. A generous sized tree would be adorned with ropes of bright paper chains and lighted with real candles. Angels in gauzy gowns and little ones in their night wear carrying lighted candles flitted about during the program. But I never heard of any disasters in our county.

Pupils did not talk with others during session or leave their seats without permission. As each class took its turn at the recitation bench the rest of the pupils were busy studying and doing assignments. With permission a pupil might approach the teacher for brief assistance while she was hearing another lesson.

At recess time the pupils filed out in orderly fashion for play time. Usually they were left to their own devices as playground supervision was not required. The school boards did not feel that they had any right to spend hard earned money for play equipment. Consequently pupils became quite resourceful at devising their own. Occasionally someone would bring his prized possession to school thereby becoming "boss" of the game. Some tell about constructing their own baseballs using a small rubber ball for the core, winding it skillfully with heavy twine and lacing on a cover of heavy denim. A piece of fence board with a shaped hand grip served as a bat. Rules were tailored to fit the needs or whims of each school group.

A favorite game was Ante-over wherein two teams would take positions on opposite sides of the school building. One of the bigger boys would throw the ball over the schoolhouse. If the ball was caught that team would come charging around the building. Whomever they could tag had to become a part of their team. Many of the games played were of the running and tagging type. Some of these were Dare Base, Prisoners' Base, and Run, Sheep, Run. Sometimes these became rough and tumble affairs and many a shirt was torn. Jump Rope, Hopscotch and Kick-the-Can were frowned on by some thrifty parents because they were so hard on shoes.

The playground was left as is. If there were bothersome squirrel holes the children filled them in. Tincture of arnica cured all injuries short of broken bones.

Devotees of marbles had several variations on that game. Purgatory required considerable skill. Overalls with threadbare knees and thumb nails worn to the quick were signs that marbles were currently the favored game.

The smaller children played circle games such as Drop the Handkerchief, Farmer in the Dell, Two Deep, or In and Out the Window. A charade type game called New York was popular. Rainy day favorites included Tick-Tack-Toe, Blind Man's Buff, Spin the Plate, Hide the Thimble, and Jackstones.

Today's standards would have us believe these were severely disadvantaged children but many of today's successful business men and women received their education in a one room school.

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ORGANIZATION

San Joaquin County Historical Society meets on the fourth Monday of each month except July and August, at Micken County Park, at 8 p.m. Visitors are always welcome.

The Society is organized to discover, preserve, and spread the knowledge of historical records and events, particularly those involving the history of San Joaquin County and the State of California. Anyone interested in the activities of the Society is invited to join. Dues are \$3.00 a year. Contributions to the Society are deductible for income tax purposes.

NOTE: Correction on June S. J. Historian (Lathrop). Last words of paragraph four should be Charles Lathrop.