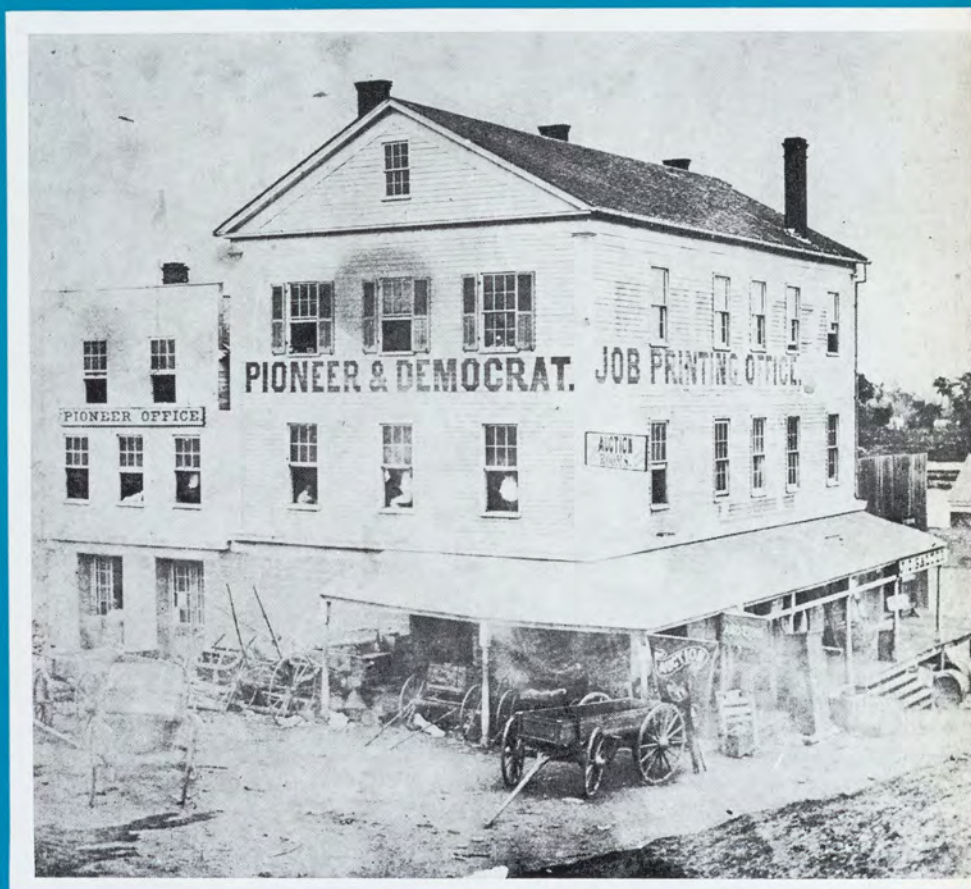


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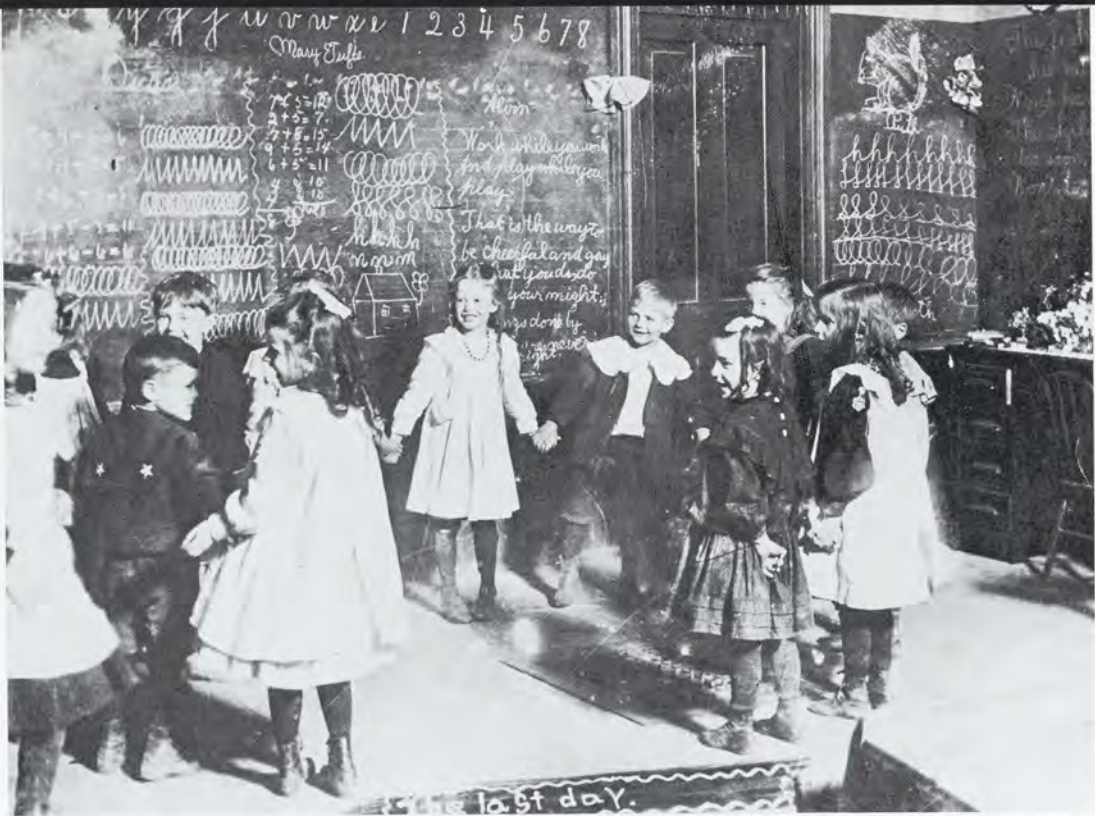
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ON THE COVER: *The Pioneer and Democrat* office, as it looked between 1854 and 1857. It stood on the corner of Third and Jackson Streets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: *Barbara Owen and Paul Trautman, Macalester College students, for preparing the basic material for the stories on pages 16 and 18, winter interim projects; Nancy L. Woolworth, for additional research, annotation and writing; Dorothy A. Smith, for editing and production help; the Minnesota Historical Society Picture Department for all pictures except those with Mr. Bull's story.*



Last day of school in a small school house of the 1890's.

Box Stoves, Cipher-Downs, Sleigh Rides

Memories of A Rural School

EDITOR'S NOTE: In January, the Ramsey County Historical Society acquired a one-room, rural schoolhouse and moved it to the Society's museum grounds at 2097 Larpentour Avenue West, St. Paul. The author

of the following article was in good part responsible for the acquisition of the schoolhouse. Here, he shares some of his own memories of his years in a country school.

By Frank Paskewitz

WHEN I BEGAN school in 1906, Minnesota had 7,471 one-room schools according to the Minnesota Educational Directory, published yearly by the state department of education. Last year only 803 of these one-teacher schools

still were holding classes. Nevertheless, for many years the country school had been the cornerstone of our educational system and thousands of men and women today share a common bond in having attended a one-room school.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Frank Paskewitz is a graduate of Macalester College, St. Paul, and attended Harvard School of Business, Boston, Massachusetts. For ten years he was business manager of Macalester, then served as a trustee of the college for fifteen years. He now is director of the Group and Pension Department of Mutual Service Life Insurance Company, St. Paul. He has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Ramsey County Historical Society for ten years; has served on the Board of Directors of the St. Paul Chapter of the American Red Cross and the St. Paul Civic Opera, and is a past president of the St. Paul Junior Chamber of Commerce.

I grew up on a farm near Browerville, in Todd County, Minnesota. The school I attended was similar to the many one-room schools which once dotted Ramsey County. It was a frame building with wainscoting covering the inside walls and ceiling. Many schools of that era were finished in wood. The newer finishing materials were not known and wood was plentiful.

There was a chimney at the rear of the building and the belfry at the front. The bell was enclosed by latticework. The

older boys pitched stones at the slats to break them, then threw stones at the bell to make it ring—just for excitement.

WHEN I started school, the building had a full-width plank porch in front and we entered directly into the schoolroom. The clothes pegs were at the front of the room, and around the sides. Later, an entry-way was built and we hung our coats out there.

This was a large building and at one time it housed 55 students, from the very youngest to those 20 or more years old.

The school was heated by a four-legged box stove that had lids in the flat-top surface and a small door in the front through which the wood could be thrown. The stove could hold a stick of wood four feet long.

Well do I remember that schoolhouse as it was on cold winter mornings! It was the teacher's job to get there about 8:30 to build the fire and get the school somewhat warm before classes began at 9 o'clock. When the weather was very cold, a man from a nearby farm went over to start the fire. This was a rather grueling chore for a girl of 18 to 22, the age of most of the country school teachers of that period.

BY THE TIME we arrived, the schoolhouse still was mighty cold in the corners of the room and the smaller children would hasten to sit around the stove. I remember seeing the sides of that stove turning red hot. Eventually, the room warmed up and we went to our seats.

The box stove had a long stove-pipe suspended from the ceiling by wires. The pipe ran to the back of the building where the chimney was located. This type of stove usually stood in the center of the room in order to heat the whole area. About 1910, before I finished grade school, box stoves became a thing of the past and round stoves were used instead. These usually were placed in the rear corner of the building.

I HAVE ONE memory in particular that is rather nostalgic for me. During the winter, many of the families brought the children to school in bob sleighs drawn by teams of horses. They returned at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to pick them up again. Children from several families rode home together and those rides in the

sleighs, with the sleighbells ringing and everybody having a great time, were a highlight of my young life.

On Friday afternoons we often piled all the students into several bob sleighs, with their boxes, hay and blankets, and drove to a neighboring school where we had an inter-school spell-down and cipher-down. I never was much good on the spelling but I usually was the dual school winner in ciphering.

In the cipher-down we were given a three-or four-digit series of numbers in a column five, six or seven numbers deep. The object was to see who could add them up the fastest and, of course, get the right answer. I added the first row of numbers as they were given to us so I'd have that figure ready to write down first.

ALL BLACKBOARDS were slate, as I recall. Later, some of the wood compounds came into use. During my earlier years in school, we did all our work on individual slates. They were seven to eight inches wide, eleven or twelve inches long and usable on both sides. Our arithmetic lessons and some of our early themes were written on these slates. It was an excellent arrangement because we could erase what we had written and no parents could save those themes to show us years later! Later on, we used thick, lined, tablets of rough paper and "penny pencils" with the erasers fitted into a hollowed-out part of the wood at the end of the pencils.

My school served students from four or five miles away and some rode ponies to school. Two of the boys kept their ponies in a neighbor's barn half-a-mile from school and went over there at noon to feed their horses. At one time, a place for horses was provided in the woodshed, a fairly large building behind the schoolhouse.

MOST OF US boys rode horses, either to school or for pleasure on Sunday afternoons. These were not the work animals for use in the fields. At this time, farmers usually owned two different types of horses because they did not have automobiles. They had "driving" horses—the lighter, pony-type of horse which they used for buggies, sleighs and horseback riding.

The work horse, on the other hand, was



a draft animal that was used in the fields and often was idle during the winter.

We carried cold lunches, usually in old sorghum buckets. During the winter, if we left either our clothes or lunches in the unheated entry, they would freeze. Consequently, we brought our lunches into the schoolroom and lined them up along the back. When the weather was warm, we ate on the lawn but in the winter, at our desks.

LUNCH USUALLY consisted of a sandwich. Sometimes cake or cookies were added but there was very little fresh fruit. Rarely, at that time, could we get oranges and bananas. Even apples were scarce during part of the year. In the fall, a produce dealer usually brought apples into town in carload lots and we would buy a barrel, or several bushels. These lasted through part of the winter. We also had vegetables from the root cellar, such as carrots. Hard-boiled eggs often were used for lunches, too, and meat for sandwiches was plentiful. Nearly every family did its own butchering and almost everyone cured and smoked their own meats, such as ham and bacon, there on the farm. Many people made sausages, too. There was no safe way to carry milk to school. Thermos bottles were inventions of the future and Mason jars leaked, so it was unusual for anyone to have anything to drink but water. We had a bucket of water with a dipper which sat on a bench

Government Indian school near Morton, Minnesota, about 1901, with box stove in center, surrounded by double desks.

in the entry. During the winter, we brought the bucket into the schoolroom to keep the water from freezing.

Of course, we had outhouses. They were not separated by a seven-foot fence, as some regulations suggested, but were simply a few rods apart. They were little buildings out on the back of the lot, uncovered by vines or anything else to beautify or hide them.

THERE WAS no such thing as a janitor. The teacher tended the fire, washed the blackboards, cleaned the erasers and swept the floor. Sweeping compound was provided by the school board. Usually some of the youngsters volunteered to keep the stove filled with wood during the day. In my school, the teacher arranged to have several children sweep the floor after school, and as a reward, usually gave each of them a pretty picture or card. To be asked to sweep the floor and to pound out the erasers was considered to be an honor. We took them outdoors and pounded them against each other to get the dust out.

There was a bookshelf near the teacher's desk and it held the school's entire supply of books—three or four dozen, I think. Titles I remember were *With Lee in Virginia* and *With Wolfe in Canada*.



We also had the old *Sheldon Speller*, *Little Women*, *Seven Little Sisters*, *Hans Brinker*, *Hiawatha Primer*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.

One year my brother was our teacher. To quiet us down after lunch, he read to us, thus progressing slowly through the book. It was interesting and soothing.

In 1914 or 1915 when my brother was teaching there, he was paid \$50 a month for the months school was in session. Our school term began early in September and ran through May. We had a two-week vacation at Christmas and another week off in the spring.

OUR CURRICULUM included reading, arithmetic, geography, grammar, history, physiology, spelling and writing. We were taught the Palmer method of penmanship. There was no fixed time when we advanced into these subjects. When I was in perhaps the sixth grade, I asked the teacher if I could join the geography class and she consented. When I went up to recite with the geography class, some of the other students about my age wanted to know if they could begin to study geography, too. This was the way we stumbled along, although we stayed in one grade a year before advancing into the next grade.

The local school did not pass on our graduation at the end of eighth grade. We had to take county board exams sent out by the county superintendent's office. We got credit slips from the county saying we had passed in grammar, arithmetic, history, and so on. When we passed the required number of subjects, we were considered to have graduated and we could

go on into high school. Our school, and most other rural schools, offered classes through the eighth grade and we were required to stay in school through eighth grade or until we were 16 years old. However, if we wanted to drop out of school, we could get a signed excuse slip from the school board. Sometimes we asked for an excuse in order to help with the spring work on the farm but this was only for a brief period. We went back in time to polish up our studies in order to finish the school year.

We had no school playground equipment of any kind. We concocted our own entertainment. We made snowball forts, had our little flags, chose up sides and stormed the other fort. When warmer days came and the snow began to melt we had snowball fights. We got wet but we could bring our coats and mittens into the school room until they dried. I wonder how many people have childhood memories tied up with the smell of drying wool. Those thick, homemade mittens were wonderful for snowballing.

Some of our other sports were "Pompom pull-away" and "Annie-Annie-Over." In playing the latter game, we chose up sides, threw a ball over the schoolhouse and when it was caught on the other side, the other team came dashing around the building, touching as many people with the ball as possible. The side that got all

the other players on its side by this touch system won the game.

IN THE SPRING, we older boys would go down to the creek for a swim at noon. We had an hour for lunch and made arrangements with the teacher to ring the bell half-an-hour before we had to be back in class. We ate our lunch on the way, dropped our lunch buckets and then started dropping our clothes. By the time we got to the creek we were ready to go in.

We must have been hard to discipline at times. We were so rambunctious that we drove one teacher out of our school by spring vacation. The school board asked her to leave because she couldn't cope with us. Then we got another teacher and all the older boys quit school. She was really snappy, a good disciplinarian, and we were far more devoted to her than to the previous teacher.

ONCE WE CAME BACK from the creek with our pockets full of little turtles. We turned them loose in the schoolroom and all the girls jumped and screamed. Of course, at times we whispered and pulled the girls' hair. A standard way of bringing us into line was a switch across the seat of the pants. The teacher sent

someone outside to cut the switch—not the boy who was to be punished. Our sympathies, however, always were with the transgressor.

The one-room rural school, as I knew it, was far more than a place to teach children their "three R's." These schools served as community centers in a land that still was essentially rural.

We had special programs, at Christmas, for example, and on other occasions. Usually these were held in the evening so the entire family could come. The small children gave their recitations and sang. Then the adults often participated, too, by having a debate. Two sides were chosen ahead of time and given the question to be debated so that teams could make some preparation. Each team had five or ten minutes to present its case and then each side had a few minutes for rebuttal. Judges had previously been chosen to decide who won. It was entertaining and educational—adult education and participation that we don't see so much of today.

The one-room rural school is passing from the American scene but it is leaving behind it many memories of a more simple, less complex and, as I remember it, a happy way of life.

The Press and the Public—100 Years Ago

IN CERTAIN CIRCLES, it sometimes has been considered expedient to attempt to woo the press but it is interesting that such an idea took shape long before anyone had heard of "public relations" or "press passes."

Minutes of a meeting of the Minnesota Editorial Association (now the Minnesota Newspaper Association) bear this out. The Association is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The following paragraphs are taken from the "Synopsis of the First Day's Proceedings" of the association's convention in St. Paul in 1867 and was published in the *Winona Daily Republican* on Feb. 22 of that year:

"A number of invitations were tendered the Convention. They were invited to a banquet at the Merchant's Hotel, given by the city press of St. Paul. An invitation was received from Gov.

Marshall to attend his levee on Thursday evening. Another, to have their pictures taken at Whitney's gallery. A grand sleigh ride around the city was given them by Messrs. Cook and Webb. Ossian E. Dodge, Esq., asked the Convention to visit his house and examine his library, paintings and cabinet of curiosities. They were served with complimentary tickets of the opening concert of the Opera House; also the Imperial Circus. Each member of the Convention was presented with a copy of the Revised Statutes of Minnesota, by the Pioneer Printing Company.

"All of these attentions were received with manifest unanimity and gratification on the part of the Convention and accepted."

—From the records of the Minnesota Newspaper Association.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.