

woman or girl who had baked it. Two or three times during each school year, volunteers made oyster soup or stew for a community supper and served it with oyster crackers. Sometimes a neighbor would entertain the crowd by playing the harmonica, the Jew's harp, or the ocarina, which we called a "sweet potato." I remember one wonderful trio of three neighbor women (Laura Kane, Addie Burchett, and Minnie West) singing "Shortnin' Bread." On rare occasions somebody would bring a fiddle and play a few square dance tunes. There really wasn't enough room in the schoolhouse to form squares, but sometimes a couple or two would do-si-do in the confined space.

Christmas programs were also fun—learning "pieces" to speak, acting in little plays, singing carols, and getting sacks of candy from the teacher. We did not have a Christmas tree or a Santa Claus, but red paper bells and chains of construction-paper loops hung from the ceiling, and green paper evergreens and white snowflakes were pasted on the window glass.

I shared a birthday date with another student, and usually my mother and his mother would come to school that day and bring cake and jello and the school would have a little party. The cake was always angel food and the jello was always red, with fruit cocktail in it and sliced bananas on it. No presents were involved and no other students ever did this on their birthdays.

Whacking the birthday person was sometimes done, most often not. However, the following two days were referred to as "kicking day" and "pinching day," and the person who had celebrated a birthday was energetically kicked and pinched on those days.

The most fun I remember at Brushwood was the

last day of school. Parents came as well as interested neighbors. I was always glad school was over for the year, and besides, the variety of food at the picnic or potluck was exciting. Sometimes we would go to a nearby timber and roast wieners and marshmallows over an open fire. One wonderful time the teacher drove us all the way to the Grand River and we had our picnic there and waded in the river afterwards. Sometimes the potlucks were held on the school grounds and parents brought the fare: lemonade, Kool-Aid, iced tea pre-sweetened with saccharin, sandwiches, fried chicken, potato salad, jello, cake, and pie. Now and then we had something called bavarian cream, which consisted of jello and whipped cream mixed together. It was at that time my favorite food.

World War II began while I was attending Brushwood. As children, we played war games, held maneuvers with three-inch lead soldiers, practiced black-out and air-raid drills, and generally felt we were contributing to the war effort. Rationing of sugar, rubber, and gasoline also had a real impact in a rural neighborhood. As students, we bought war savings stamps, studied current events, gathered milkweed floss (we were told it could be used to stuff life jackets in place of kapok, the supply of which was controlled by the Japanese), collected copper, aluminum, and tinfoil, saved bacon grease, and worried about the young men from the neighborhood who were in the armed forces. Four of these young men from the neighborhood were killed during the war—my brother George, who also had attended Brushwood School, as

## World War II and Iowa's Rural Schools

The effects of World War II on rural schools were made explicit in the 1942 Biennial Report of the Department of Public Instruction: "Rural Iowa is under heavy war responsibilities. It is supplying half of Iowa's fighting men. It is the recruiting ground for workers for war industries throughout the nation. It is producing in increasing quantities food for victory. . . . Here the public school is a most important factor. It has taught us to understand and to love the American way of life. It has fitted us for today's tasks. There are many sacrifices ahead. The best of our youth are being taken from us. Impossible tasks are to be faced without the use of war-necessary materials. . . . It is vitally important that our rural schools which have accomplished so much shall serve us now with even greater efficiency and definiteness. Our

younger citizens must be more intelligent, must better understand, believe in, and practice our fundamental American idealism. . . . Our rural children must be assured improved educational opportunity. The war is furnishing an unparalleled opportunity to our public schools to vitalize citizenship training." Among ten objectives listed was number 7: "Group activity shall be encouraged and working together to common ends recognized as the American way." Patriotism became a vehicle for local pride and competition.

In 1944, Jessie M. Parker, Superintendent of Public Instruction, used the biennial report to elaborate further: "The two-year period covered by this report has been two years of war. Some hundreds of our school workers have joined the armed forces. Additional hundreds have accepted other



well as Gene Jones, Roland McNeal, and Johnnie Coon—and this had a profound impact on everyone. It brought the war very close to home, indeed.

Because our farm was half in one school district and half in another, I spent my last two years, grades 7 and 8, in Fairview School, Doyle #6, a mile west of our house. My attendance at that one-room school was essential in order to have enough students to actually open it (it had been closed for several years because of the dearth of school-aged children in the district).

I learned many things during my six years at Brushwood School. Many of them are never to be forgotten. Some of them were academic, some of them were social, and some are hard to categorize. Certainly there were fun times and miserable times, just as there have been in almost any situation that I have since found myself in. ❖

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**Loren Horton (above) with army helmet and gun, 1943, and a war-time valentine.**

war responsibilities. The remaining workers are loyally discharging their no less heroic duty. These remaining workers, their effort supplemented by that of emergency teachers [issued emergency certification], are absorbing the added tasks of the war programs and the extra load caused by staff shortages. . . . We have thus attempted to save our schools from the marked deterioration which the war emergency threatened to bring."

Sundry other situations were made apparent in the 1944 report. Although Iowa had some new one-room school houses, the majority of them were judged to be from 40 to 50 years old. It was noted that about 3,000 of the 7,690 total rural schools had electric lighting and appliances, about 3,500 had approved heating, nearly 7,000 had Victrolas for use of

recorded lessons, more than 3,000 had pianos, and almost 5,500 had indoor toilet facilities. These statistics are framed positively, but subtracting from the total reveals the significant number of rural schools that lacked these features.

After the war, Iowa's rural population continued to decline, and centralizing the control of education in the state again gained momentum. So did pressuring the rural school districts to consolidate or to align themselves with a district that operated a four-year high school. The process was finally completed by the late 1960s, with the exception made by statute for the schools operated by the Amish in their own communities for their own children.

—by Loren N. Horton





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Serving all the children in a rural neighborhood, a one-room school comprised kindergarten or 1st grade through 8th grade. One teacher juggled the needs of multi-age students, shifting attention between small groups of similarly aged children while maintaining order over the entire school. Left: Students of various heights and ages pose at Dover #2, Fayette County, early 1950s. Top: A small group at Dover #1 (same county). Below: Smaller pupils sit at newer desks than the older pupils, in this Ringgold County school. (WPA photo, Jan. 1942)

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