

## Early School Life in De Kalb Junction by Mabel Sheldon, De Kalb Town Historian 1956 -1958

The first schoolhouse was located at the end of School Street and faced the Main Street. It was established in the early 1860's as this village was forming and was discontinued with then opening of the brick schoolhouse on the hill that is still in use.

After the building was no longer used for a school it was purchased by George E. Gibbons who moved it around to be in line with the other residences on the street facing School Street. He remodeled it for a residence for his sister the late Mrs. Thomas (Helen) Fields. It is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Turnbull and family.

School Street was so named because of the school. This has been a source of wonderment to later residents since the school is now so far from it.

In 1926 a lady who had attended this school and had been the second teacher of the Primary Department of the brick school on the hill was asked to tell some facts pertaining to the school of her day. She was the late Mrs. Forrest D. Sayer, nee Addie F. Smith, and was my aunt.



The article which she prepared follows:

The general school system prevalent in small villages when I attended school was much different than the system of today.

Regular attendance was not compulsory and as most boys worked during the spring and summer months, attending school only in the fall and winter, usually a man was hired to teach during the winter term, with a woman teacher for the

summer term. Select schools were also held during the time now given to summer vacation. This was independent of the school district. A teacher would secure a certain number of pupils and the price they paid for the term was \$2.50 each.

Books were not so easily obtained as now and one set of books usually served a family, as each pupil rarely owned an individual set. These books were not furnished by the district but were purchased by the parents.

We used slates until the last few years of my schoolwork. Tablets were a great novelty when we had them, and were used very carefully. The classes were not graded as now. If some pupils possessed the ability to advance more rapidly than other in the same class, the teachers did not hold them back to the regular lessons assigned to the class, but allowed them to study more advanced lessons, and pupils who desired to do so, studied subjects now covered in the first part of high school work, and the study of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and geography was continued nearly to the end of school work. (Spelldowns were a regular Friday afternoon event.) These subjects were not dropped at the early age they now are.

My arithmetic was a graded book, and from it primary and intermediate classes studied. The later book I used was also used in more than one grade. The same applied to English. Our geography lessons included what are now studied as separate subjects, Physical and

Economic geography, as well as what is now covered in Preliminary geography. The subjects I studied were reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, English, geography, history, Civil Government, Algebra, Botany, Physiology, Book Keeping, and General Science.

The school I attended was in a building at then lower end of School Street that was later remodeled as a house and is now occupied by T. E. Gibbons. It was due to that schoolhouse that this street was called School Street. It's use as a school building ended when the present schoolhouse was built.

At times there were as many as 90 pupils attending that school with only one teacher in charge, and good order was maintained, although there had to be old fashion whippings administered frequently, along with other forms of punishments.

At mid-morning and mid-afternoon each day a water pail was passed, each pupil having a drink of water, using a common dipper. To pass the water was a privilege for which the pupils vied. It was considered an honor.

I finished my schoolwork in the new schoolhouse. I wanted to prepare for teaching and availed myself of every opportunity. My later teachers let me study from Teacher's Edition of books not used by pupils, so that by home study, supervised by my teachers, I was able to pass the State Examination which granted a Teacher's License.

While I was still in the old school house before I was 15, as there was a large attendance, the District Superintendent granted me a permit to hear classes to assist the teacher.

I secured my license when I was 16 years of age and for my first rural teaching I received \$4 a week, the regular salary at that time, and I paid \$1.50 a week for board. In one district I boarded around with different families. Later when I taught in this school building I received \$7 per week.

The books I studied were:

Barnes National Reader

Thompson's Complete Graded Arithmetic

Mac Vicar's Graded Arithmetic

Elementary Lessons in English

Teacher's Edition, English Language Series

Northam's Civil Government

Barnes History and The Normal History of the United States

Wentworth's Algebra and Robinson's Algebra

Rand and McNally's Geography

All of these books I still have. I used my teacher's books for Botany Physiology and General Science."

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Sources;

Sheldon, Mabel De Kalb Town Historian Files/ Schools 1956.