

SCHOOL DAY REMINISCENCES

BY Helena G. Van Vliet

At one time there were one room schools at Clinton Corners, Prospect Hill, Schultzville, Bulls Head, Clinton Hollow, Oak Grove, Pleasant Plains, Ruskey, Frost Mills and Mountain View. Many of the original schoolhouses still stand and are today being used for residences. The last school district in the Town was Prospect Hill and the last school used was in Clinton Corners, the present Post Office.

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The local school covered grades 1 through 8. My first memory of a teacher in the district school is Rowland C. Cookingham. His aim was to teach the business of living as well as the traditional knowledge outlined in the syllabus.

I know many teachers from that era who felt they were slaves in a hostile environment, but no Mr. Cookingham. He poured on the enthusiasm and everyone loved it. In addition to his other accomplishments I recently learned that he did not spare the rod.

High School, grades 9-12, posed a real question - where to go. The families made their own decision, and factors of convenience, boarding near the school for the winter, and road conditions were considered. There were no school buses and each family paid tuition to the school their child attended. May from East Clinton went to Poughkeepsie and those from West Clinton went to Poughkeepsie, Hyde Park, Rhinebeck, or Staatsburg.

As a glimpse of personal experience, we (VanVliets) went to Rhinebeck, driving the one-horse buggy, parking the horse at my Grandfather Tremper's on Route 308 and walking the last mile. This added two hours on each end of the day. Alice Foster, more recently Mrs. Donal Norton of Red Hook, drove in from the Town of Milan, in a Ford, pre 1915 vintage, which her brother coaxed into action in

the early morning. She parked in a vacant lot on South Street and at school closing time, her classmates turned out to make the vehicle mobile; unscrew the spark plugs, squirt raw gas into the cylinders, replace the plugs, crank the handle -- and pray. My sister and I rode Alice's running boards out to the Tremper stable where the old horse showed more road interest than the Ford.

In the High School auditorium a large blackboard was reserved for checking late arrivals with their excuses. Our late arrival was a chronic condition and the town slickers began to have a giggling interest in the reasons that they felt were the fiments of our imagination.

Father neglected to call us before he went to the barn....Grandfather forgot to put down hay for the horse and we had to do it ourselves.... A sudden, unexpected cold snap - the bit on the head stall had frozen and we had to bring it to the house to thaw.... An early, heavy snow storm, roads in poor condition.

Life became quite dull during the winter when we stayed in town with Grandfather Tremper.

As to Gym and basketball, the yokels were subject to segregation and could not aspire to playing on the regular team. However, we must show up for practice and in some cases when the team was experiencing tough going an extra good yokel might replace a dull town guy. I remember a winter game in Pine Plains - the local livery stable tossed a hay rigging on top of a bob sleigh, a padding of hay covered with blankets and some 20 kids were on the road. It was deemed best to rest the horses overnight so the boys bedded down on the gym floor and the girls spread out into homes in the town.

I remember awakening to see the sun shining against the snow on Stissing Mountain.