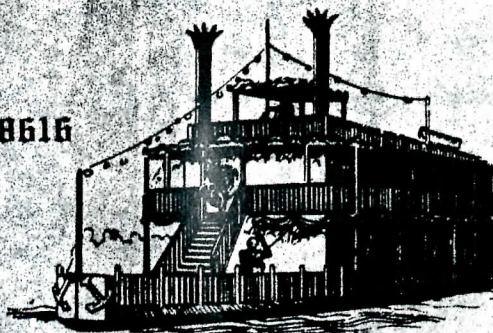


Esther Ward (50 yrs. of teaching)
Education

Chesaning Public Library

227 East Broad Street Chesaning, Michigan 49616

Phone 845-3211



I have been asked to participate in the Chesaning Public Library Oral History Project. I have agreed to a tape recording between a library representative and myself. I take this opportunity to assure you that these recordings are the property of the library and its historical collection, for use as the library sees fit, and I agree that no monetary consideration need be paid me.

Esther Ward
6-10-76

Witness:

Helene G. Frink

Now Mrs. Ward, I understand you have taught for over fifty years. I taught for fifty years and I substituted for five.

Well, will you give us your full name.

Esther Haney Ward.

Do you want to give us your birth date, or not?

April 15, 1900, State income tax day.

And where were you born?

Chesaning Township.

Now tell us a little bit about your early life.

Oh I had lots of fun. I went to a rural school, and I'm dyed-in-the-wool as far as the country schools are concerned. I wish I could go back and teach one more year in a good old country school. We had lots of fun, big classes, one-room school. It was fun at recess and was ~~fun~~ fun during school time. We had three of the most wonderful teachers, and I think many people in Chesaning know two of them. Kate Mahoney was my first teacher, but Mrs. Ellen Carson and Alice Goetzen were two of the ^{other} grandest teachers that ever taught in this locality. I went to school first with Kate Mahoney. There were 35 or 40 pupils there at that time. She was very, very strict and very thorough, but you got places. We had about 32 or 33 classes a day, so you see they were short. When we got behind, the older people stepped in and helped ~~her~~ and I think perhaps that is where I got my start with Mrs. Carson, because I often took over the younger children and helped them.

Tell us about some of the things you did for recreation during school.

Oh I'm telling you! We had exciting times when we had our spelling bees and our arithmetic matches. In the winter time my dad often took a sleigh load to another school, and when we heard the sleigh bells and heard the kids yelling we would hurry and get things in place, and we always had a spell down and often times, as I said before, the arithmetic matches. And that was a big day. Sometimes we just took our sleigh rides, oh say downtown. And then at noons and recesses in the winter time we always went down to the creek to skate. We wanted an hour-and-a-half of noon so we gave up our recesses because in those days we had to put in all of our time to get our classes in. We were regimented to that. And during warmer weather some of the things

that we played were Toss over the Woodshed (Toss the Ball over the Woodshed); another game was Going to Philadelphia, and London Bridges Falling Down, Pom-Pom Pull Away and I can't remember what the others were, but we had a lot of simple games and just notice we had nothing to play with, only a ball. This school went through the 8th grade?

Yes.

Which school was this?

Morley Town, out on Sharon Road.

And then where did you go?

Down to High School, and I want you to know, I didn't have a bus to ride. I went with a horse and buggy - I always had a good driving horse - and in the winter time I had a horse and cutter with sleigh bells, which was equal to a Cadillac in those days, and the boys and girls sure envied me because I had such a good driving horse.

Then you drove every day....

Every day, and put my horse in the livery barn, and I carried my fork full of hay in the back of the buggy.

And your own lunch, I suppose.

I suppose I did have my own lunch because I can't remember anything else about it.

Yes, I think most people did.

Yes, I think so.

Tell us a little bit about your High School if you wish.

I didn't enjoy that so much, I really didn't, because I lived so far out in the country, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and we went with the horse and buggy.

Now about how long would that take you, one way.

Well I was a fast walker, but I don't remember just how long.

Well with the horse,

Oh, with the horse? I don't remember, probably a half hour. I could walk it nearly as fast.

Well you said you didn't enjoy High School as much because you lived out in the country.

Yes. I couldn't get in to the festivities that they had, the ball games and all that sort of thing, although when it came time for the J-Hop and the Senior Play and those things I took part in or the special banquets, but I couldn't go to all the things like the others did. [By the way, we started out with a big class in

omit

the 9th grade of about 39 I think, and the graduating class was six girls, five living now.

Only girls? No boys?

Just girls graduated, and my class was the first class to graduate in what is now known as the middle school.

Then where did you go? How did you get into teaching? Tell us about that.

Oh, that's rare! I went to Ypsilanti for six weeks, took my State exams, and went back to teaching where I had gone to school for nine years, and I taught there ~~for~~ one year, then taught two years at the Ziegler School, and then I went down to Indiantown School in Buena Vista Township, where I spent two very delightful years.

Now tell me Mrs. Ward, did this six weeks at Ypsilanti and this one examination that you took qualify you for all those of teaching?

For three years, but then I had to earn so many credits, I think it was six hours, in the next three years, and I ^{think I} took the State examination if I remember correctly, twice. And then I quit for one year and went to County Normal, which was located in the Middle School in Chesaning. Then from then on I went to school nights and summers to get my degree.

Once you'd gone to County Normal, you didn't have to take any more exams, did you?

No. I just had to get so many hours of credit and keep right on working, but no more, but that was a long haul to get your degree. When did you get your degree approximately?

About 1954, just going nights.

Well there weren't any community colleges then were there?

No, and I had to earn my own way, and I put my daughter through school.

Well tell us some interesting things about when you first began teaching, and then let's work up into the way it is at the present.

Well, we still had big attendance and short class periods in 1919, is when I started. The children were really cooperative, maybe it was because they had to be. The parents were right behind me. We had parental control at that time. And another thing we had was a rubber hose.

What did you do with that?

Hah!

You better tell us, it sounds terrible.

Well I had one colored boy stole it from me once.

You mean you gave them a little swat with it.

Yes, I didn't kill them with it. Sometimes all you had to do was hold it up and that was enough. They really dreaded that because, well it ^(wouldn't) didn't leave marks, but it hurt like the dickens.

Well then, how many years did you teach in a rural school? →

Thirty-four.

And then how did you happen to come into town school?

Mr. Dietzel came out to school (that's when they were consolidating), and asked if I wouldn't come in, and I debated for about three weeks if I would give up the rural work because I loved it. I liked the idea of all these Christmas programs that we used to have, and our box socials and spelling bees and oh, the different things we had; and the cooperation that we got from the older children helping. And at the last we were preparing food for their lunches right on top of the furnace.

Tell us how that came about.

The hot lunch? I don't remember how we happened to have our first, but I guess it was because some children didn't have too much. They'd come to school without breakfast, and sometimes we prepared breakfast for them.

Where did this food come from?

Most of it came from the homes, but some from Welfare.

What did you cook?

Soup. Soup and more soup, different kinds.

And you just cooked it on top of the furnace? →

On top of the furnace. That was very, very dangerous, because Mrs. Price, one of our well-known teachers near her, especially in Indiantown, upset a kettle of soup right down the front of her.

How come you didn't have a little stove to cook on?

We did later, after the accidents started happening, but we just didn't have it.

How did you manage to prepare this food and teach school at the same time?

The kids took care of it.

Of the food.....

Yes, the kids did it, willingly. We had committees. And there's

omit

Begin

omit?

one thing I want to go back to, and that was at Christmas, how dangerous it was, as I look at it now. We had real candles burning on the Christmas tree. We had lamps and lanterns to light the room, and I tell you we took everything from my home. My dad used to say, "Are we going to have anything left in the house?" But it was dangerous.

What did you take from your home?

Bed sheets, all kinds of wearing apparel to dress up in.

This was for your program.

Yes.

And the bed sheets were for the curtains?

For the curtains, So that was fun....

....I found my work in the Line Street Elementary School very enjoyable, and I spent sixteen happy years there. The first eight years either in the fifth or sixth grade, wherever I was needed, and the last eight years in the first grade. Really I found the first grade the hardest. I do enjoy fifth and sixth about the best. You can see where they have accomplished quite a bit of work and can go on their own, while the little folks need so much individual attention.

Did they have any programs in the elementary school?

Some of the teachers did, but I didn't.

You didn't put on programs yourself....

I didn't put on programs. I thought it was more difficult I guess there than I did in the rural. Of course I was brought up on programs in the rural school.

How did your work differ?

I had one grade. I had good sized classes, but it was one grade. But of course you had to divide your grades according to their ability. For music, Mr. Newman and I used to work together because his room was right next to mine in '54; and he was very good at it. We could have gym, and I don't know, we settled down quite thoroughly to our regular school work.

You mean academic work.

Yes, academic work is right. But it was enjoyable and the youngsters... oh well, we had difficulties once in a while, nothing too serious, and they could cooperate very well. We used to do quite a bit in art, and one Christmas time I bought a hundred pounds of plaster of paris and we made pins and pictures and

*go to
page 7*

everything imaginable that you could make with that gooey stuff. You really think the rural school could come back today and operate efficiently?

No, I don't. I don't think that the teachers would put up with it.

Well, leaving the teachers out of it, do you think that the rural school could be made to operate efficiently?

I do, if they set their minds to it. Of course, not very many people agree with me, I know that.

I'm not asking you who agrees with you, I'm just asking you what you think.

Well, that's just exactly the way I feel about it. If they made up their minds to it, and went into it wholeheartedly, they could. It would cost too much money. That would be their main thing, it would cost too much money.

Well, don't you think that's the reason why they were disbanded ~~Mostly~~ ~~entirely~~. no.

Not entirely, no. I know you said mostly, but I think they worked awfully hard to get these big consolidated schools. Not many people agree with me, on my feelings.

They don't have to agree with you. This your idea. This is your idea, they don't have to agree with you.

Well, I'm happy about that.

No, but you think that consolidation was kind of a thing that was going on, so everybody kind of got on the bandwagon. Is that how you feel?

In one way, yes.

Well, I don't want to put words in your mouth, tell me how you do feel. ~~What~~ What do you feel about it?

Well, you have one bad apple in the basket, you know what happens to the whole bushel.

But, where is this bad apple, what are you trying to say? Where is the bad apple?

Those that are continually disrupting...

Are you speaking of the children?

Yes, I'm speaking of the children. Those that get together and lead others. Of course, that can happen in any situation.

Well, are you trying to say this (now if you aren't we'll erase this), but are you trying to say that the teacher would have a

better control and be able to handle this bad apple better if there wouldn't be so many in that one school?

Yes, I do. That's right. That's right, but again, not too many people agree with me, but that's my own thoughts.

Well it's a very good thought. You know, I don't think people have to agree with each other all the time. You know, you may find out you're right.

Well, they're trying out some of these new ways in California right now, going back. And in one way, within our own system. And I understand in Saginaw Township, it's the same thing, of having a grade in one part of a building. Now, in Saginaw Township, the fifth grade is in one part of the school, and they're separate from the rest; and down here the sixth grade in the new Middle School will be in one part of the building. They're allotted to that part, and the seventh and eighth grade in another part, and I really think that's an improvement.

Well, I think so too.

They won't be so subjected to this misbehavior as much, and we've all got to face it, I don't care if it was in the rural schools, the village, large cities... of course the large cities have more of it... but I think that we have our discipline problems no matter where we are. And one thing that really worries me is the lack of parental guidance. That I can see more than anything ^{else} in the downfall of our schools.

Well this ^{was} certainly been an interesting interview, and I'm happy you let us have it.

I only hope that it's satisfactory.

Of course it is.

I could talk.....

You can talk more if you want to.

No. I could talk by the hour about my experiences in the rural schools. The one thing, although I've made many friends teaching in the consolidated schools, I find that when we had the children for more than one year, and really got acquainted with them, you gained lasting friendships, which means a lot. I have people who will drive a hundred miles to come down and have lunch with me, that I had their children in school.

Well how much money did you make a year when you taught?

I started in at \$65. a month, and that was high.

About what year would that be?

1919.

And then, how much raise did you get the next year?

I went to another school at \$95, and the third year a hundred.

Then I went down to Buena Vista and I got \$125. the first year.

It was a bigger school. I had 83 in the spring and fall, and I

had 65 all winter. And the next year I was there I got \$150.

And then I moved to Battle Creek. I had a smaller school, and I

believe it was a hundred dollars a month when I went there, and

from then on it went down because it was Depression times.

What was the smallest amount you ever made?

\$ixty-five.

You never went below that.

No, and during Depression times I made \$75, but I was fortunate.

The School Board told me that I couldn't live on less than that.

So I felt that I was really fortunate. They came and underbid me to \$50. and yet they kept me.

Other teachers underbid you.

Yes.

That was quite common in those days, wasn't it?

You bet your sweet life, and I was making as much as a college professor, so I felt quite proud.

Well, I mean this underbidding.

Oh yes.

Well of course that's one thing we don't have now, but I suppose it's possible at any time if we have a bad economic situation.

Well I think \$75. was very good for during the Depression.

I think it was wonderful.

Some people were even teaching at \$40. a month then.

Yes, I know.

My name is Esther Ward.

The date; September, 1976

Today the school bells are sounding again. Not the ones you can hear over the countryside, but those you can hear within the buildings or on the playgrounds.

I wish to reminisce back to the beginning of the century as it is seventy years ago since I first attended the little country school, those which were numerous at that time.

The schools at that time were spaced so the children had no further than two miles to walk to school. Of course, every one walked to school unless the weather was really bad, and then Dad took his children and perhaps the neighbor children to school with the horse and buggy, or in the winter with horses and sleigh or cutter.

When we arrived at the one-room school we found one teacher, eight grades, and often over sixty pupils. One time during my teaching career I had 83 pupils in the spring and fall and over sixty all winter. I never had a more enjoyable year. Why? Cooperation of parents and pupils and lots of fun. The older pupils prepared hot lunches at noon and did all the work.

More about our building and school grounds. The building had a large stove which burned wood, a cloak room for girls and one for boys, outside toilets, outside pump for our drinking water which was served from a pail and dipper. There was no electricity. We did have kerosene lights which were fastened on side of walls. Our lighting on dark dreary days was the long windows on two sides of the room.

Surrounding our school was a rail fence and at the entrance there were posts placed in a checkerboard design. The children could go through but the cows could not.

Two of our very dear teachers we had in those early years were Katherine Mahoney and Ellen Carson.

I spent 24 years in that one school. I attended grade school for nine years and taught there 15 years.

Besides 30 classes a day, we took time during the week for music, games, stories and other enjoyable experiences. The singing was accompanied by one of the girls at the organ. We were always lucky to have a musician in our room.

We were very fortunate in having a good library, Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, set of Encyclopedias, and some delightful teachers.

Some of the enjoyable experiences were skating on the creek at noon, sleigh rides to visit other schools, spelling bees, and arithmetic contests.

The older children helped the younger ones when their work was finished.

Many (teachers) had to do their own janitor work. Luckily, at our school a big boy was hired to do the work.

We also prepared a booth for the Saginaw County Fair each September. We had an enjoyable time attending the State and County Institute. Safety was little considered. We had one door.

My salary, which was high, was \$65. per month for 9 months, and retirement was five dollars per year.

Before we entered High School we had to write a State examination. Not too many went to High School, as they had to pay their own tuition and transportation.

I lived $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles out in the country, so I drove a horse and buggy or cutter to school. Sometimes I had to walk. I attended the Old School (twelve grades), which was torn down and what is now known as the Old Middle School was built in 1918-19. The graduating class of 1919 was the first to graduate from the new school.

High School was a great change from the country school. They had plays, basketball, baseball, music by a qualified instructor, beside the regular subjects and one teacher for each subject. After leaving High School one could attend State Normal for six weeks, take State examination and teach, and that is what I did. I had to earn my own way through College, so I kept on taking exams, attending Summer School, one year at County Normal. It was many years before I received my degree but I finally made it. There were many years that one could get a Life Certificate which did not require as many hours of work.

Going back to the good times. We had box socials. We used the money for extras for school. That was a hilarious time. Later in 1940, we raised enough money to buy a projector and screen for school. Pretty good for a little country school!

We had electricity and inside toilets in the mid-thirties. About

About mid-fifties/sixties schools began to get really consolidated. I transferred to Chesaning, where I spent my last 16 years in 6th, 5th and 1st grades.

I realize each child received more personal help from the teacher, but I will never forget my experiences in the Rural School - the lasting Friendship is worth a million. You really learned the capabilities, personalities, and the lasting knowledge of pupils in rural areas. The knowing of each individual and knowing of their later accomplishments is very rewarding.

My fifty years of teaching and five years of substitute work has been very rewarding and gives me many happy memories.

THE END.