

## THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE

As I Remember It

Composed by Wellington Rotz

It was a plain log building set in a bosky dell surrounded by alder, birch, willow and quaking aspen, on a small natural clearing little more than an acre in area. It was actually on an island as in those long gone days before much of the present tilled land in this vicinity was under cultivation and irrigation, much water flowed down Confederate to the Missouri and its main stream formed the Eastern border of this glade while a small clear stream flowing from a big pond on which we skated at our peril in the Wintertime, formed the other boundary of this island. This seat of learning was built through community effort and the site chosen because of its central location among the homes then comprising the district and for the further reason that the land had little value for other purposes. I think the land was donated by Mr. John Duncan. It was located about midway between the Duncan (now Christie) and the Buckingham (now Sandy Allen or Rankin) places in the big brush. The school house was built early in the 1870's, probably as early as 1875. Three trails and a little-used wagon road led to the clearing and a long foot-bridge over the small creek and marshland from the Duncan home which provided a never ending source of experiment and interest at playtime, provided a means of going to and from when the water was very high.

The old school house stood as a symbol of pioneer unity in a by-gone era and its complete history would entail the record of all the parents and many of the pupils of that early day, few of whom remain among us. To them the honor of converting the land then virgin and unbroken to the present lovely cultivated countryside belongs.

There were really two seasons at the old school: the Autumn-Winter and the Spring-Summer terms. Few of the older children attended the Spring-Summer term, the business of earning or helping earn a livelihood requiring their assistance at home, only the juveniles being privileged to attend. In Fall and Winter riding horses, carts, sleds and other contraptions were used to get to school, but in the other months most of the children walked and what memories are revived when we recall those morning and evening strolls. The grassy green meadows; the big spring in Christie's field at which we never failed to regale ourselves whether thirsty or not, because of the danger incurred in going to it over the quivering marshy fen; the somnolent Spring days there at the old citadel of learning in the glen, with bright alluring sunshine outside. The droning of bees, the rustle of quaking leaves, the scraping of big red hoppers legs against their drums, the twittering chica-dees, the larks, robins, canaries, and across the playground darting about like animate things, the little whirlwinds fumbling the grass and leaves, then spiraling their slender threads of dust aloft. Oh! the tragedy of compulsory attention to lessons midst so many distractions. And those lessons—the three "R's", best of them all McGuffey's readers with their inspiring stories of great men and their deeds of heroism and patriotism. One who has not read the story of McGuffey's life and contribution to American ideals should read about him in the Readers Digest for April of this year. He knew that schoolbooks greatly influenced a nation's thought and shaped young minds along the lines we think of as distinctly American and that then was and long will be the spirit of the old school.

Then as now the school house was the community recreation center with the difference that in those primitive early days it was the sole center and because of lack of the other amusement places of greater importance to all in the neighborhood. Not only the public meetings, dances, social affairs, but traveling shows were held there. The visit of a traveling magician and ventriloquist with his "Punch and Judy" and "Davey Crockett slaying the Devil" shows, is recalled. He was the Edgar Bergen and Charley McCarthy of those days. This strange man came to our

home seeking lodging for the night his show was to be given. His light wagon was drawn by a single horse. I had never before seen a breast collar harness and as he unhitched I called attention to his loss. Quickly sensing my ignorance he pretended great concern and offered me a handsome fee for the recovery of the missing collar. So off up the road went a simply country boy seeking the end of a rainbow which he never found. That evening at the show proudly presuming upon acquaintance with this great man I took a front seat and was rewarded by again being made the butt of his jokes. He first drew a large handful of fine cut tobacco from my inner coat pocket to my great discomfiture and embarrassment, because my parents there present had laid much stree upon the inevitable result of discovery that I had been using the weed and later he recovered from my pocket a large silver watch with chain that he had picked from the pocket of another yokel in the audience.

The children attending the first school tere were:

The Winstons (old Millegan-Broderick place) Sarah, Martin, Albert, Molly, and Kitty.

The Morgans (the place where Bigler lived) Fanny, Dora, and Ted.

The Buckingham (old Sandy Allen place) William, Nelly, and Joe.

The Lovells (their mother then Mrs. Rotz) David, George, and Ida.

The Duncans (the Christie place) Etta and Hattie.

The Hentons, Willie, Belle, and Edward.

and possibly some others of whom I find no present record.

A later generation included the following:

The Barkers-Minnie, Sophia, John, and Frank.

The Johnsons-Earle, Viola, and Florence.

The Rotzs-Wellington, Maude, and Clorabelle.

The Bumps, Guy, Edith, and Earnest

The Daniels-Martha, Daisey, and Elmer.

The Rowlands-Minnie, and SAMuel.

The Estes-Laura and Effie.

Early in the 1880's a school district was formed on lower Duck Creek known as the Keene school, which drew away the Rowland, Daniels and Rotz children and the old school house was moved to a new location on a rocky knoll just across the creek and North from the Noble home and was in use until the present school house was built in 1905. At that place the Honorable A. E. Spriggs, later Lieutenant Governor of Montana was one of the teachers. Also Wellington Rotz, a former pupil.

The first teacher at the old school was Mr. Andrew Holland who afterwards became a substantial businessman at White Sulphur Springs. Others were: Sarah Winston, a former pupil: Charles Morgan: Simon Danforth; Mr. G.E. Poole and Mary Jane Earle.

Notes about the school house on Christie property written by Wellington Rotz:

Wellington Rotz was Homer Henry's uncle (Homer's mother was a Rotz)

The Rotz place was under the lake in the Confederate/Duck Creek area.

The foundation of this school can be seen on the creek side of the "bull pen": ~ 300 feet from the corrals (there used to be a road along Confederate Creek that went to "the island" and went past the school). (This is all on Christie property).

The Duncans owned the Christie place before Christies.