

# A New Look at Iowa's One-Room Schools

Iowa's Lost Treasure—A System of 12,623 Rural Schools 1858-1966

## Introduction

### Iowa's Lost Treasure of One-Room Schools



This book provides in-depth details and stories of Iowa's highly successful Iowa (Common) Rural School System (1858-1966) and how it anchored the huge farm settlement (1870-1900) and helped shape the character of Iowa. While there are still people today who have fond childhood memories of attending one-room schools in the mid-1900's, most are unaware that 12,623 one-room schools were built mostly during the Victorian Age (1870-1900) or that they were linked together as part of a legislated state-wide system of rural schools that provided easy access for all children within a 2-mile walk from home. Willow Tree School in Richland Township, Sac County, Iowa serves as a representative of a one-room school during the time that the Iowa Rural School System operated. We invite you to get to know the individuals associated with Willow Tree and let them take you to another time and place!

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The Iowa Rural School Museum of Odebolt, IA  
is housed in the restored one-room 1883 Victorian style school  
Willow Tree/ Richland #1 in Sac County.  
122 2<sup>nd</sup> St., Odebolt, IA 51458

[www.odebolt.net](http://www.odebolt.net).

[www.iowaruralschoolsmuseum.net](http://www.iowaruralschoolsmuseum.net)

[www.iowahistoricschools.com](http://www.iowahistoricschools.com).

For appointments call 712-830-8328

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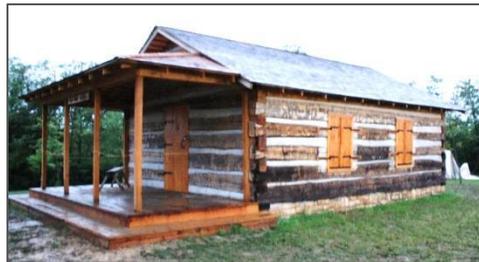


The photos above are of the very few restored, colorful 1800's one-room Iowa schools that were built mostly as private/settlement schools. Some schools that were built before the Civil War, were then converted for use in the Iowa Rural School System (1858-1966) while others were built specifically for the rural system. Most are from eastern Iowa where limestone quarries and brick companies were plentiful along the rivers. The wooded, hilly terrain in Eastern Iowa meant that existing schools were not always in locations to allow easy access for farm children.

Thousands of new wooden one-room schools were built from 1870-1900 to serve rural prairie areas in all counties across the state. Iowans today, tend to remember the vast majority of rural schools as plain white, one-room schools with 3 windows on each side of the classroom and a flat front with an enclosed entry room(s) or a jutting entry room. All were similar, but no two were the same. Plain may have been true in the 1950's but not for many originally built in the late 1800's with Victorian style. For information on Victorian schools go to [www.iowahistoricschools.com](http://www.iowahistoricschools.com)



Replica of Iowa's first school known as the Galland school in Lee Co. was built in 1830 and used for one term for eight students. It is located near Melrose



The restored Oak Ridge Log School was built originally in 1840 in Lee County to serve children of parents who were white and Native American in the Half-breed Tract. It was moved to Mt. Pleasant in Henry Co.



Photos are examples of 1800's Iowa one-room schools built for the Iowa Rural School System that operated during the period 1858-1966. Farmers built 12,623 by 1901, many with Victorian features that were later removed. The height of the Victorian Era was 1870-1900. For information [www.iowahistoricschools.com](http://www.iowahistoricschools.com) or [www.iowaruralschoolsmuseum.net](http://www.iowaruralschoolsmuseum.net)



1888- Richland Township Rural School  
Sac County, Iowa  
One teacher ungraded class, ages grades 1-8

1881- Iowa Town School Class  
One teacher, same age- grade class



1889- Rockford Township Rural School  
Floyd County, Iowa  
One teacher, ungraded class, ages grades 1-8

Richland Twp.  
church picnic  
July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1900



# A New Look at Iowa's One-Room Schools

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# A New Look at Iowa's One-Room Schools

## Iowa's Lost Treasure—A System of 12,623 Rural Schools 1858-1966

Sandra Kessler Host—author and Curator of the Iowa Rural Schools Museum of Odebolt

### Background

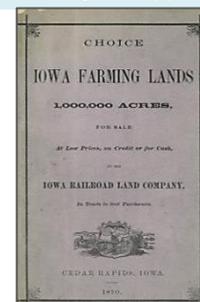
**Step back to 1883.** Learn what former teachers, students, and descendants of the original families who built and maintained their beloved Willow Tree/Richland #1 School have to say. They will tell about the school and its role in rural settlement and in the lives of students who attended this school. The story is similar to stories of other schools heard across Iowa.

Iowa became a state in 1846. It had a hundred thousand residents in only 31 organized counties out of 99 planned. They were in Eastern Iowa and not necessarily settled. (8)(2)(15) By 1870 Iowa's population of over a million was nestled along rivers and rail lines mainly in eastern Iowa. The settlement of this quarter of Iowa has a much longer history of providing education before the Civil War, such as the unsuccessful plan of using the 16<sup>th</sup> Section of townships for education in territories, and early statehood efforts.(8) Three-fourths of Iowa remained an unsettled tall grass prairie unlike the surrounding states and this quarter of Iowa. Because Iowa's farm settlement of the tall grass prairie had been delayed by many factors until after the Civil War, Iowans had a rare opportunity and outstanding leaders to carefully plan a rapid and orderly settlement of the rest of its land.(8)(46)

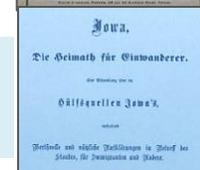
Railroads would move lumber, products and people. Schools would meet the desires of immigrant farm families to have their children educated and have centers for social gatherings. Schools assured Iowa of an educated populace. The Railroad Grant of 1856 encouraged rail lines to be built across and within Iowa with payments in prairie land. The first railroad across Iowa was completed in 1867. In 1858, with advice from Horace Mann, a forward thinking school system was legislated that would allow all children a free, quality education within a 2-mile walk. (15)

In 1870, when large blocks of land from the public domain were offered to settlers and speculators at one time, it afforded a land buyer's market never experienced in Iowa or any other state. (36)(6)(46) In 30 years from 1870 to 1900, over a million immigrant farm settlers from Europe seized the chance of the American dream to be landowners. These new farms quadrupled the tilled acreage in Iowa to 35.5 million acres according to the US Census Reports. By 1900, the Corn-Belt economy that would help feed the world was well established. (36) In this same period these immigrant farmers built 12,623 one-room schools, one for every four square miles of farmland. (40)

1870- 52 page  
Railroad Advertising  
booklet- to encourage  
immigration of European  
farmers to buy land (6)



1870- German translation- of 92  
page booklet of Iowa Board of  
Immigration treatise encouraging  
farmers to move to Iowa(6)



A township (twp.) had 36 sections or square miles with a plan for a maximum of 9 schools, each serving a 4 sq. mile area. Iowa planned easements for roads around every square mile. (2) By 1900, a 4 sq. mile area of Iowa's rich land could support an average of 18 farm families, which included helpers and renters. (14) This population density, unique to Iowa, could fill a one-room school in the center of the school area that meant no child would walk more than 2 miles to school. Farmers pushed and got the law changed in 1872 from a single twp. school board to have the right of twp. residents to vote whether to have one twp. board or allow each school area to have their own board. With few exceptions, residents wanted their own board. Developing towns or topography often reduced the number of schools per twp. Thousands of small towns grew up to support the rural settlement.(8)(2) Voices from the past tell why rural schools are remembered as the anchors for this unprecedented wave of Iowa's farm settlement. The Iowa school model, with its statewide easy accessibility to free, equitable, education for its children regardless of where they lived, their parents' landownership status, their race, citizenship, and gender was historical. The one-room schools were essential in shaping the heritage and character of Iowa.

Significant, often overlooked correlations are that Iowa's late farm settlement coincided with the height of the Victorian Period between 1870 and 1900, and with the second huge wave of European immigration of the Industrial Revolution. It distorts the timeline of Iowa's rural schools when authors fail to distinguish between earlier Midwestern schools, some religious, most private subscription country/settlement schools, used *before* the Civil War and the later one-room schools built as part of a public rural system in the late 1800's, like Iowa's. (14) Iowa's system of one-room schools, mostly built between 1870 and 1900, still have many with ornate Victorian remnants. Across Iowa and around the world, the Victorian influence could be seen in the style of buildings, furnishings and fashions during this time. (29) However, due to the severe financial depression in the 1920's and 30's, most Iowans remember photos of poorly dressed students attending plain, white, often unmaintained structures of the 1900's. Since 1800's school photos are rare, only the endings and not the splendid, ornate Victorian beginnings are remembered. (14)



### **A Note to Readers:**

*Readers will be immersed into the world of Iowa's rural settlement from 1870-1900 and its school system that operated from 1858-1966. Readers will experience life in Willow Tree/Richland #1 School, a typical 1880's rural school. It is representative of other rural school across Iowa because all were part of a progressive state-wide system with the same organization, regulations and Course of Study despite differences in nationalities and faiths. The story is told through photos, museum artifacts and narratives of actual individuals connected to the school both past and present. The artifacts and most photographs shown have been donated to the Iowa Rural Schools Museum of Odebolt, in Sac County Iowa. The author was given permission by the museum to use photos of their collections for this publication.*

## Settlement History and Building of Willow Tree School-



Sebastian Buehler age 16 enlisted in the Union Army 1861

### Sebastian Buehler

Hello, my name is Sebastian Buehler. I would like to tell you a little about me and how I came to Iowa, helped build this school, and ended up as its first teacher in 1883. I came to the United States with my family from Germany in 1855 and settled in Lake County, Indiana with other family and friends we knew from Germany. When I turned 16, I enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 along with John, one of my older brothers, to fight in the Civil War. John died of pneumonia the next year. I was “injured from exposure” and spent months recovering in and out of army hospitals and serving in Washington DC until the war ended in 1865. (3) I never totally recovered my health but I didn’t let it slow me down. I was proud of the medal I received for my actions and served in the Grand Old Army Legion post in Odebolt, Iowa for many years. In 1868, my best buddy Valentine Rudolph married my sister Katharina and I married Mary Obrecht. (12)(3)

Valentine Rudolph b. May 31, 1845 and Katharina Buehler Rudolph b. July 7, 1841  
Charcoal drawings made after marriage in 1868 and before his death May 7, 1873.  
She then married August Dannenberg on March 7, 1875. She died July 15, 1878.



Buehler brothers Jacob and Sebastian after the death of their brother, John



Iowa's Tall Bluegrass Prairie, tan area, 1850 (16)

Valentine and I were growing restless and both of us wanted to strike out on our own. Rumors and advertising began to circulate about a lot of rich, cheap prairieland that would be for sale in Iowa, starting in 1870. (6)(36) We decided to leave our families to scout out the Iowa land. We traveled through many counties to find the richest farmland.



Val even worked a time as a wheelwright and blacksmith to earn money before and during the trip. (3) Finally in 1871, we selected an unsettled area in Sac County that would become Richland Township. Eventually, it would have a town called Odebolt. The nearest town was Ida Grove 17 miles away and the nearest railroad stop, Alta, was 19 miles away. Wood was scarce. With the help of our fathers and father-in-laws, my oldest brother Jacob, Val, and I each bought 200 acres of land next to each other at \$4 an acre. (37) We were the first of many that would do so in Richland Township.



Depiction is the type of dugout used in Pella by Dutch settlers. (45) Iowa's sod was too moist, rich with humus and not good for building whole houses, so dugouts were used by Iowa's first farm settlers.

It was hard and lonely work to turn an uninhabited hostile prairie into farms using horses and steel plows.(15) Val and I made a dugout lined with rocks on his land to live in until we could get lumber and build proper wood frame barns for our animals and houses for our families left in Lake County, Indiana. Jacob, my oldest brother was back in Indiana taking care of our elderly parents and keeping up the home front.

The first winter, Val was on his way home from picking up supplies in Ida Grove when he was caught in a blizzard. The wagon slid off the road trapping him under it. He managed to get the horses loose and they ran home like horses do. I found him alive but badly injured barely a quarter mile from home. I had to take him back to Indiana, so his wife, my sister Katharina and their two young girls could care for him. He had injuries and just wasn't himself. He tried to kill my sister so they had to put him in a mental hospital in Indianapolis. (3) Valentine's health never improved. He ended up dying in the mental hospital a couple of years later. I still miss my friend. My sister Katharina eventually married August Dannenberg who purchased Val's homestead in Richland Township. Katharina died a couple of years later of "bed fever" after the birth of their second child, Marie. (3)



In 1871, I wrote an invitation to friends in Indiana to come join us and buy land in Richland Township.(letter on page 6) Like me, they worked hard to arrange proper wood framed housing so their families could come. Jacob, my oldest brother, helped me get our homesteads ready, so our families, including our parents, could come to Iowa as soon as possible. Huge numbers of people were coming to live in Iowa. In Richland Township, other Germans, like the Kesslers, who came by way of Lee County, IL, joined us. Swedes, Scots, and Irish were settling southern and eastern sections of Richland. (12)(24)(25) Soon there were plans to plat out a town called Odebolt since there were plans for rail lines to come through Richland Township in a year or two. It was hard but somehow by 1876 we had our whole family and lots of friends around us in our new home in Iowa. (37) I was so happy to have my wife and our three young children and a new baby, Henry, with me on our own farm in Iowa.



Sebastian Buehler Farm with house built in 1876  
Photo taken in late 1800's



Sebastian Buehler house  
Photo taken early 1900's



Sebastian Buehler farm  
photo taken in 1940's Note:  
school north of farm



Petersmeyer's house built in 1876; Photo taken 1916- Original farm 1876 below sold to Kessler 1902- Photo 1940



Fred and Caroline Petersmeyer family late 1800's



Friends from Indiana, Fred and Caroline Petersmeyer, became our new neighbors in Iowa. Fred had been a carpenter but decided to buy land so his sons could farm their own land.

(37)(12) They started the Petersmeyer Farm School so all the children could be educated until the



German Methodist Church Built in 1882

public rural school was completed. They eventually had 14 children of their own. Caroline's two married sisters brought the Mandernachs and Kluckhohns along with friends such as the Einspahrs, Dannenbergs and Freverts to Richland Township. Many friends came. (12)(37) In that same year, we also started a church using a circuit minister from Storm Lake who came to our homes until we got the church built. (43) I remember our first wedding was Fred's oldest daughter who married a Frevert boy that summer. (22) Life in Iowa was good.

Then in November of that same year of 1876, a diphtheria outbreak struck in Richland Township. (26) Within a week, our three young children died, along with many others. (22) Somehow our baby, Henry, survived. It was a tough time for all the families, but God gave us strength and we helped each other. Over the years, Mary and I were blessed with 5 more children.



Sebastian Buehler Family



Jacob Buehler Family

It took until 1882 to finish building the church. (22) A year later, we finished building Willow Tree School on the acre of land that I gave to the school district. (37) We were proud of our work. The wives thought that we should make it look as pretty as our homes. So, we added Victorian trim that was so popular on all buildings, including many schools at the time. (14) When the ladies wanted the classroom wall-papered like they had heard other schools had done, we drew the line. Paint was more practical for a school and the extra cost was unnecessary. The State officially called it Richland Township #1 School. Locals called it Willow Tree. It has been a long time since I was the first teacher at Willow Tree.

Our story was no different than the stories of other families that came to Iowa from a variety of European countries. All across Iowa, scouts like me were sent by families to find land where their communities could move to Iowa and take up the challenge of creating their own farms. Many groups wanted freedom to worship. We were a patchwork of communities speaking different languages with different faiths. We



agreed that proselytizing would stop at the school house door. (42) Within 30 years we were all Iowans and proud of it.

Willow Tree built 1883  
Photo 2014 after restoration

Letter reprinted in the Odebolt chronicle 6/2/1977 sent to the paper by Fred Frevert, grandson of Henry Frevert who received this letter from Sebastian Buehler

July 9, 1871

Dear Brother in Christ:

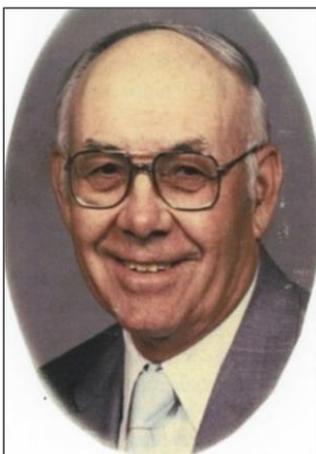
*I take pen in hand to write you a few lines to let you know how we are. We are, God be praised, well and it will please us if you and your family are well when this reaches you. I received your letter when I was still in Indiana. In general, our trip was pretty good; we were stuck only two times on the other side of Ft. Dodge.*

*We drove around quite far. We were in Cherokee, O'Brien, Clay, Palo Alto and Buena Vista Counties and finally we bought us land here when we found nothing better or cheaper. Each one of us bought 200 areas at four dollars an acre, with five years to pay (in Section 12). I had to pay \$160 right away. We do not have our families here but will soon let them come. There is still much land here at the same price as ours. It is railroad land and if you want to buy, according to my idea you can't do any better anywhere than here. It's as good as we saw anywhere. You know we would buy no poor land. We have to go four miles for wood. That is quite far but here in the West one can't expect anything different. We have to go 18 miles to Storm Lake to the railroad. Coal costs here five dollars, lumber twenty-eight dollars.*

*If you want to come to us you must come to Ft. Dodge, then to Storm Lake and from there you can, easily find us if you ask for the Boyer Settlement. When you get in the settlement ask for a man named "Willard," and he can tell you where we live. I will close with greetings to your wife and father-in-law. Write soon again. I remain your true bother-in-Christ.*

Sebastian Buehler

## Overview of the Classroom-Kermit Siebrecht



Kermit Siebrecht  
Born 10-11-1921  
Died 12-13-2009

Hello, my name is Kermit Siebrecht. I'm going to tell you a little bit about the Willow Tree classroom before you learn more about the school from other individuals that are connected to this school. I went to school here for 8 years between 1926 and 1934. I passed my required 8<sup>th</sup> grade exam that took 2



days, so I could go to high school in Odebolt. Town kids never had to take this test. I never thought that was quite fair. After graduating high school, I served in the Navy. I met my wife in Grants Pass, Oregon and married her September 21, 1945. I brought her back with me to our family farm.



Photo 1926- Kermit on right

What a wonderful shivaree (*Fr. Charivari*) our neighbors gave us. They banged loudly on pots and pans with raucous singing after dark to welcome and embarrass us as newlyweds. Our shivaree was still remembered at our

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary because my wife, Jean, answered the noisy neighbors by playing a . . soothing Chopin piece on her piano and offering everyone a fancy homemade dessert. It was good to be home.

We raised our four children here. The school closed in 1951 before our kids were old enough to attend. I loved this school. It looks different now than when I went to school here. It was painted all white outside and all blue on the inside. But the classroom hasn't really changed much. The classroom is still 24'x 24' with a 7 inch high, front platform with three windows on each side. It has an 8'x 8' jutting entry room. Our school, like most, has one entry door. A few schools were built with two doors, one for girls and one for boys.

The coal stove was replaced in 1941 with an oil burning one and we got electric lights that year instead of using hanging kerosene ones. I remember the teacher lifting the top finial and pushing it to the side so the hot plate on top of the coal stove would be exposed. The teacher lifted a heavy wrought iron pot and placed it on the hot plate. It would be filled with water and we would all throw in potatoes and fixings we had brought from home. It made a steaming hot soup for a winter lunch.



In 1883, 2 or 3 students sat in the double wood and wrought iron desks. By the 1920's, I sat alone in a single wood and wrought iron desk. By then everyone had their own sized desk and had their feet touching the floor. In 1883, teacher desks had a slanted top with a book rail. Teachers wanted to have control of the classroom. With their desk on a raised platform facing the door, teachers could see everyone coming in and leaving. (9)



All students had to raise their hands to get permission to stand before speaking or raise one or two fingers to go outside to the outhouse. The platform was also used for the annual Christmas play and declamatory presentations. Old bed sheets were hung on wires above the front edge of the platform to serve as curtains for the stage. A few schools had an opera curtain. To the right of the teacher's desk is the recitation bench. To the left is the reading table for beginning students. Above the slate board are the portraits of Presidents Washington and Lincoln that hung in all rural schools.

The right wall of the museum shows the evolution of teaching music in rural schools. Most rural schools started with reed pump organs. The original pump organ for this



school is in the front corner. Standing next to the organ is the Columbia Record Player that was used in the 1920's and finally the piano. Classrooms would not have had all of these instruments at the same time. School days started with the Pledge of Allegiance and usually singing the song, "America". Following this would be music lessons and singing of a variety of songs often of a patriotic nature.

Music was always an important part of every rural school day. Families wanted their children to learn to sing for church services and for family entertainment, especially before record players, radio and television.

## Toys and Games- Larry Arndt



Larry, Dorothy, Bill, and Sandy in front



Elaine, Helen, Donna and Ron

Hello, my name is Larry Arndt. Along with my brothers, Ron and Bill, we attended this school between 1947 and 1951. My father worked for Walter Kessler. We lived in the house built by Sebastian Buehler in 1876 and used the white china cabinet that now displays toys. Seeing it again, brought back many memories for us. The three of us boys played with the three Kessler girls Helen, Sandra and Dorothy in and out of school.

One time they all got extremely sick, including their parents, with mumps. My mom, who thought she had had the mumps, took care of them and organized daily food deliveries from the neighbors. Just as the Kesslers were recovering, our family all came down with the mumps. The neighbors took care of us too. I also remember Helen getting polio during the epidemic across our country from 1949-1952. I came down with it in the summer of 1951. Both of us and many others still have health problems today because of it.

Walter Kessler rescued this cabinet from the Sebastian Buehler house before it was torn down. It now houses toys that span three generations of pupils from 1883 to



1951. Toys allowed children to mimic and learn what parents did. Many boys coming from Germany brought their only toy, German Anker limestone building block sets. Girls brought precious ceramic headed dolls kept in doll chests. Many early toys were hand made.

Table games were common activities for monthly community get togethers to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries while the rural schools operated. Throughout this time period the game of marbles was the most popular game at school. In the 1800's there were clay marbles that evolved to glass ones still used today. Softball was also popular. Oversized balls were used in the 1800's. By the 1900's softballs were smaller and this size is still used today.



Most children visiting the museum are surprised to see play guns and jack knives that were routinely brought to rural schools. Boys were expected to use knives to whittle the pencil

points for themselves and the girls. Many stories have been told of students carrying real rifles to school and shooting game, like pheasants, rabbits and squirrels, along the way.



For Re-Molding Lead Shots



Willow Tree boys showing off toy guns- Jim Meyer 3<sup>rd</sup> from left- Photo 1940's



Ring necked pheasant



Edgar Woods with toy gun and real rifle- Photo 1930's



## Children's Chores and Popcorn- August C. Petersmeyer



Hello, my name is August C. Petersmeyer. I am known as AC. I was born in 1863. I am the oldest son of Fred and Caroline Petersmeyer. I had 13 siblings. My father was a master carpenter and led the efforts to build Willow Tree School and our church.

He built the cherry kitchen cabinet that now holds elements that were used to do chores. I was responsible for our farming operation. To have a self-sufficient farm there are many necessary routine chores to do over and over. Everyone had to help. It was good that we had such a large family. (12)(24)



Iowa farms required children to do chores before and after school. In the 1800's, most farm children had two changes of clothes-one for chores and play and one for school and church. Children started with simple chores like bottle-feeding orphan animals and helping tend the gardens with their mothers. Then they would gather eggs from clucking hens, feed squealing pigs, and learn to milk cows before moving to advanced chores. Chores taught responsibility. Children knew their families and farms survival depended upon their help. Farms were dangerous places for both adults and children. Besides disease and childbirth, children died by falling off wagons, being kicked by animals, being stung by insects, getting burned and catching appendages in machinery, etc. (12)



My mother started a farm school when we came in 1876 for my younger siblings and many neighborhood children until the public rural school was built in 1883. Two of my sisters were the first Willow Tree/Richland #1 students to graduate from the new Odebolt High School built in 1880. (24) I stayed on the farm with my father until 1889 when he died. Then I moved to Odebolt to start the Petersmeyer Grain Business. (12)



When I visited Chicago, I learned popcorn was a great crop to grow and that the Rueckheim Brothers needed more and more of it for their business. Eventually they discovered a way to make caramel popcorn stay fresh in a wax sealed container which they called Cracker Jack. In 1918, I sold my grain business to them. Shortly after that, they

changed the company name to Cracker Jack in 1922 after their wildly popular product. (15)

### **Popcorn and Progressive Farmers**

Since Odebolt was a major supplier for two giant popcorn companies, by 1915 Odebolt claimed the title of “Popcorn Capital of the World.” It was producing more popcorn than the rest of the world combined according to its own “Booster Club” advertising in 1915. In addition to Cracker Jack, Clويد Smith, who first farmed on the Cook Ranch, started American popcorn with its Jolly Time brand in 1914. Smith also led a successful effort by the Richland farmers to get telephone lines to farms so they could have telephone services like town residents. In 1902, the Sac County Mutual Telephone Company was established by Richland farmers. (26) The company expanded and still serves the area today.

Another agricultural claim to fame was that Richland, Cook and Wheeler Townships surrounding Odebolt were home to the Adams and Cook Ranches. (12)(17) These farms were the biggest row crop operations in Iowa; 10 and 12 square miles respectively. The Odebolt Museum has many artifacts and pictures to learn more about these large experimental farm operations. For comparison, by 1900 an average owner-operated Iowa farm was nearly a quarter section (155 acres average per US Census of 1900 report) A quarter square mile has 160 acres.



Entrance to Wheeler/Adams/Fairview Ranch

## **Music of Professor Charles Fullerton- Elaine Miller Gunderson**

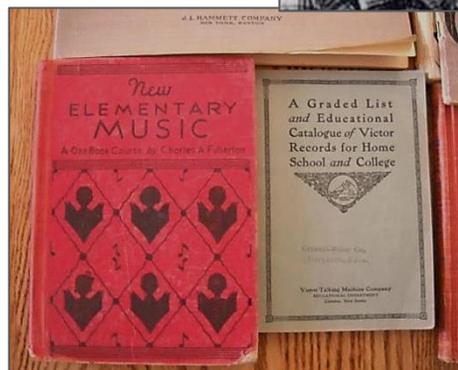


Hello, my name is Elaine Miller Gunderson. I went to this school along with my brother Paul Miller from 1943 to 1950. I played the piano for morning exercises. On the piano are five music books written by the renowned Professor Charles Fullerton. I used the last book written in 1925, revised in 1936. He was head of the department of music at Iowa State Teacher's College, now UNI. He believed that no child could learn to sing or play a song unless the child heard the music produced correctly. He needed a system that every teacher could use even if they did not have a trained voice.



In 1925, he came up with the idea to use the technology of record players that had become very popular. He could use professionals to record music as it should be played or sung and make the music available for teachers.

After nearly every school in Iowa used his methods, he began to select several songs each year for teachers to order on records to prepare for concerts. At the end of the school year 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduates from different schools were able to perform as one of many "Rural Choirs" for concerts at 8<sup>th</sup> grade County graduations



Fullerton is standing by the piano in the photo

held at Chautauqua centers or for State ceremonies. One time Fullerton brought over 4000 rural students together for a State concert with only one rehearsal. (11)

## **School Maintenance and Outhouses- Ferne Kessler Carstensen**



Hello, my name is Ferne Kessler Carstensen. My sister Lois Kessler Oxendale and I went to this school during the period 1937 to 1948. I remember that every fall before the school opened all the parents would come to repair and clean the school and grounds. My dad, Elmer Kessler, and his cousin, Walter Kessler, cleaned out the outhouses. Dad supplied the lime for odor control. The Buehlers brought coal and cobs. Walter Kessler used his horse drawn sickle for years to mow the tall blue-grass that had grown over the summer.

Fall maintenance included repairing shades and desks and washing the extra tall Italianate windows. Curtains were often made out of chicken feed sacks with a calico print on cotton. In the 1800's, lacey Victorian curtains were sometimes ordered through the newly available Sears & Roebuck Catalog first printed in 1893. More often curtains were handmade by farm wives. Daily cleaning chores during the school year were the responsibility of the teacher with the help of students.

I remember something that happened in kindergarten that I never forgot. A new kindergartner came back from lunch, sat down, and raised her hand to get permission to go to the outhouse. The teacher refused to give her permission and reminded her that recess and lunch time are when she is to go to the outhouse. When a little puddle formed on her seat, the teacher wiped it up and told her to take her wet panties off. The windows of the school were always open for fresh air unless it was so cold that the heater was on. The teacher then hung the panties in the open window to dry. The little girl and the rest of the students could see the panties fluttering in the breeze all afternoon. No student ever asked to go to the outhouse after lunch or recess again.



A common 2-holer outhouse- boys and girls had separate facilities



**Victorian Influence- Carol Skelton Raasch**



Hello, my name is Carol Skelton Raasch. I never attended this school, but the school was on our property for many years. My husband Curtis and I formed the Rural Legacy Project in 2010. The group was descendants of the original families who built Willow Tree School,

former students, and local residents interested in history. I have had the honor of serving as chair of the Project.



It has been a remarkable opportunity to help steer the move and restoration of the school that was built by farmers in 1883. And farmers again, headed by Carol Youngren, came with their pickups to move the collected furnishings to the restored museum from the Kessler attic, basement and garage in 2013.



To the surprise of all of us involved with the school restoration, we learned that the school itself was originally built in a Victorian style! We found this out from a study



completed by our restoration architect, Marie Sedleck. Features you can find on this school include the original fish scales with gingerbread on the entry; decorative corbels/brackets; tall, narrow Italianate windows; and two or more colors of paint. The original Victorian tin roof ridges ending in a

fleur de lis design can be seen in the photo and the original arsenic dyed green cedar shingles can be seen in the entry room.

While Queen Victoria ruled the British Empire from 1837 to 1901, Victorian fashions and architecture spread around the world. In the 1880's, teachers and scholars dressed in their best clothes for church and school. Women wore long skirts with long-sleeved waists/blouses that featured handmade lacy jabots or hand-stitched collars. The photo shows the display of Victorian style handmade articles made by Iowa farm women in the Research Library. For more everyday wear, females were more likely to wear long dresses made of calico or plaid materials.

Until the 1920's women and girls wore pinafores over their dresses to keep them clean. The model, in the photo, shows a girl's calico dress and pinafore (also see photos on page 7&28). The colored photo on the next page of a boy model in the entry room shows what boys wore. When Willow Tree opened, school boys wore cotton or



wool pants (breeches/ knickers) that ended tight below their knees. They wore collarless shirts with suspenders and bandanas. During the Victorian Era, it was common for a young male age 2-6 to wear a dress until the passage of breeching occurred. Passage times varied but wearing breeches meant he entered boyhood and the father was now in charge of



parenting. A second passage was from boyhood to manhood and was indicated by wearing long pants. By the 1900's denim jeans and overalls, more suitable for farm work, became very popular and are still preferred today.

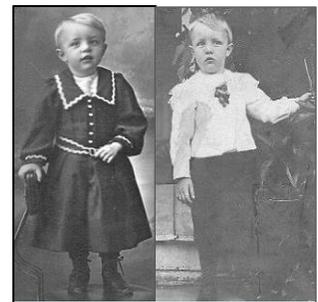


Easter Fashions after WWI

An interesting old photo shows the drastic change in fashions after WW I. By the 1920's the necklines dipped and the hem lines rose to the knees. Unfortunately, it was the same decade that severe poverty hit farm families. Women no longer practiced the art of fine stitching to make elaborate collars or fancy lace jabots that were required for Victorian clothes. When people today think about rural schools, they tend to picture poorly dressed children and unmaintained schools. They have no idea about the ornate Victorian period in which the schools began. (14)



Photos show late 1800's handmade fashions by Richland Township farm women



Albert Kuehl in dress and then kickers/breeches after passage to boyhood



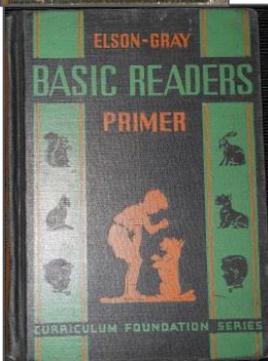
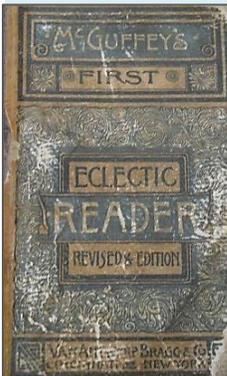
Walter Kessler in dress with mother- below first breeches with father after passage to boyhood



## Treasured Books and Geography Artifacts- Barbara Bloom



McGuffey's  
Revised 1879



Hello, my name is Barbara Bloom. I never went to this school but taught for years in Odebolt. Teaching children has been my passion for many years. Today students take field trips to come here. When this school operated, there was only one field trip recorded in the teacher's record books. In 1946, on the last day of passenger service for the train, students and their parents rode the train from Odebolt to Ida Grove. They had a

picnic before returning home. Field trips help pass history on to children. I like telling visitors young and old about the treasures we have.

The library for the school was originally kept in the wainscot corner cabinet in the current research library. All the other book shelves and cabinets were added for the museum. The textbooks and objects on the right side of the classroom are from 1883-1920. The textbooks for 1920 to 1951 which include the famous Elson-Gray, Dick and Jane, series (1936) are in the bookcase on the left side of the classroom under the windows. A big primer collection is also displayed.

On the wall above the pump organ, there are wall maps that were a part of every school. There is also a rare 1900 Victorian globe in the corner and a 1940's globe hanging over the reading table.

It was lowered to teach geography. Sand tables like the one in the photo were sometimes used to teach geography as well. (4) Farmers strongly supported the teaching of geography and history because they were something that

could not be taught outside of school as easily as other subjects. (10)



## **Pump Organs and Record Players- Bernice Siebrecht Christiansen**



Hello, my name is Bernice Siebrecht Christiansen. I went to this school 8 years from 1921-1929. Music was always important to Iowans. Reed pump organs used in homes and churches were larger and more ornate than ones like this used in schools. (See photo on page 19) Families wanted girls to learn how to play so they would have music in their homes and churches.

Reed pump organs were popular because they could be moved easily, did not go out of tune, and they did not need electricity to play. I remember when the mice got into the school organ and it didn't work anymore. All of us kids remember the teacher saying that if the organ and mice were not removed immediately, she would not come back. Ed Kessler came and hauled it away and stored it in the old original Petersmeyer house that was left standing on his farm for many years. A modern record player replaced the organ.



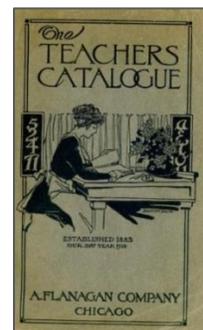
I have to tell you a story about the first portable Victrola Willow Tree had and how we ended up with this particular Columbia record player next to the pump organ. After the organ did not work because of the mice, a brand new portable Victrola record player was purchased for the school to use, like in the left photo. I remember the morning we walked into school and the player was gone! None of us claimed to know who had taken it and none of us know today. A few days after it was taken, we all walked into school and there was a new, beautiful stand-alone Columbia record player. It was much prettier and cost more money than the table-top Victrola. We kids assumed that the School Board members found out who took it and made them buy another better one that would not walk off so easily. I'm in my 90's and it is still a mystery!

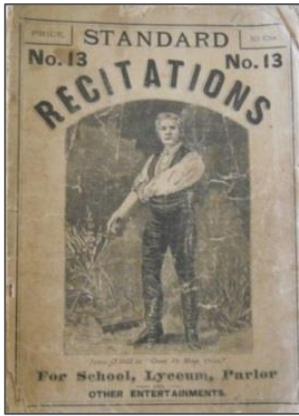


## **Recitation and Teaching Methods- Dorothy Kessler Engstrom**

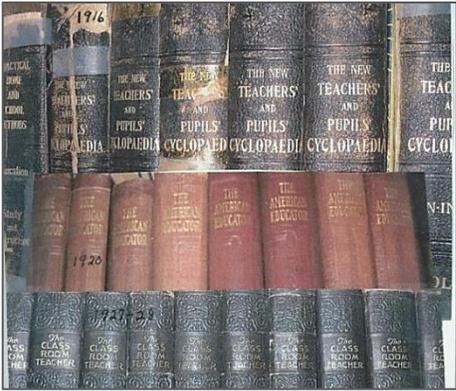
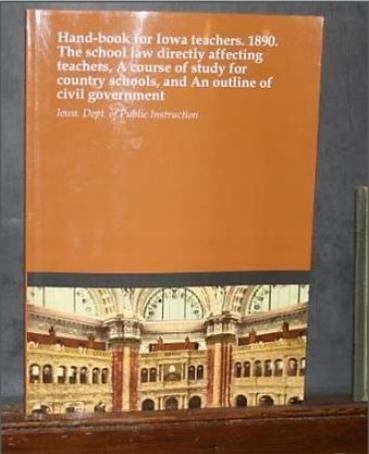


Hello, my name is Dorothy Kessler Engstrom. I only attended kindergarten at this school before it closed in 1951. But, I have taught teaching methods to teachers most of my life. Starting in the late 1800's, Iowa rural teachers had good resources to help them. Textbooks were starting to be mass produced making them affordable for parents to buy them for their rural students.





In the right corner area is a copy of the *Handbook for Teachers 1890* which contains the Iowa Course of Study. (18) In the 1800's, three life skills were taught to both boys and girls in rural schools. These life skills were meant to build character traits and to support the main branches of learning. Today we call branches subject areas. The



first skill was observation of nature and the world. It taught self-reliance and humility. The second skill was sewing using fine motor movements that taught persistence, patience and control. Finally, the last life skill was singing and playing music that taught a sense of community and celebration of others. (18)

Successful teaching methods, such as recitation, were used throughout the time rural schools operated. (27)(44)(35)(9)(31) A teacher would usually place scholars, as students were called until the 1920's, into 3 or 4 groups according to the level of their knowledge in different branches or subjects. A different group would be called to sit on the recitation bench or at the reading table about every 10 minutes. The bench was usually in front of the blackboard. If arithmetic was the branch, pupils would put the seat up and face the blackboard to work on problems. The purpose of recitation was testing, teaching, and training all pupils to speak clearly and to the point. Teachers would find out what students knew or didn't know, correct mistakes, supplement knowledge, lead pupils to correct expression, prepare for the next lesson, work with each pupil, and mark and record each pupil's recitation.(7) Grades and test scores were reported in percentages; in the 1930's a change to letter grades was made.

The pupils sitting at their desks were assigned seat work but still eavesdropped and listened to the recitations to learn more. Older students helped younger ones. Pupils never just gave answers, especially in math. Instead they had to explain how they solved the problem and then give the answer. Recitations allowed children to hear information over and over which enabled them to learn difficult concepts.



Teachers required a lot of memorization to help pupils learn materials. Using mnemonics, like *Every Good Boy Does Fine* that give the notes of the lines of the music staff from the bottom to the top; or *FACE* that gives the notes of the spaces from the bottom to the top of the music staff, preparing for public civil discourse/debate, and presenting memorized declamatory recitation pieces to an audience were other effective methods of learning.



### Lyceums

In the 1880's, civil discourse/debate for both adults and children were of community interest and a form of social entertainment until radio. In rural schools, events called lyceums were scheduled in the evenings and were lit with hanging kerosene lanterns. They were a very welcome change from the required daily routines of farming. Children were packed together in desks pushed into a corner to make space for adults who brought their own wooden folding chairs, like they did for all community gathering. The children intensely watched and learned civil discourse from the adults.

Since many families did not have an opportunity to read the newspaper for lack of rural delivery, the event included reading the local paper's social columns and major news stories. An example would be using play on words in the social column- "*Miss Aupperle hates mud and loves Meyer*" and "*How could a 90 lb. Badger land a 180 lb. Sucker.*" (23) A decision was made as to the subjects of the next week's debates. Then the previously planned evening's festivities would then continue. The counterpart of lyceums for town residents were events held at Chautauqua Centers or at Opera Houses that often included traveling entertainers.

### 1880's One-Room School Teacher- Hannah Aupperle Meyer



Hello, my name is Hannah Aupperle Meyer. I was an early teacher at Willow Tree School. I taught for four years before I married William



Meyer, Jr. in 1892. I was the mother of Dwight Meyer. He also taught at Willow Tree, farmed, and was elected to the US House of Representatives for three terms, starting in 1948.

His wife Helen was the first woman to be a Director of a Richland Rural School District. I was grandmother to Jim Meyer who farmed and was elected to the Iowa House of Representatives for 3 terms starting in 1992. Everyone in our family attended this school for three generations. (23)(24)(25)



I was 18 when I started teaching. Teachers were expected to set a good moral example. I rode my horse 2 miles to school wearing an outfit like the one on the teacher's model. The waist/blouse and jabot you see are original and handmade. The long black cotton twill skirt and black jacket are reproductions.



On the shelf above the model, are an original 1880's riding hat, crop, and embroidered riding gloves. The handmade rabbit muff kept my hands warm. Items that I carried in my muff are on the teacher's desk. Ladies always carried a

hand-tatted handkerchief. In addition, I carried a small brass match carrier with matches, an ocular (monocular) to see objects and animals approaching from a distance when riding my horse, a small leather coin purse, and a comb. We did not use make-up or show skin below the neck except for hands.



Another item on the desk is a classroom pointer which was usually made out of hickory. This particular pointer is made out of a willow branch. Sometimes we used the pointers to rap the knuckles of misbehaving pupils. Every school had a brass hand bell for teachers to call children into the classroom. Some schools had large bells on top their roofs for letting children know that it was time for school. Children knew if they needed to start running to make it to school on time.



For more memories of teachers in the 1900's, "Ring in the Memories" is a good source. The book was written in 1996, by 170 former teachers and students in Sac County. (34)

## School Flag



The flag with 38 stars for the number of states we had in 1883 stands by the teacher's desk. In 1883, the Pledge of Allegiance had not yet been written and flags were not yet common in schools. Willow Tree's first teacher was Sebastian Buehler. He was a patriotic Civil War veteran who cherished the American flag. The story passed down in the community is that the neighborhood women made a flag for

him to have at the school is probably true. This flag is a reproduction with its 38 stars in a medallion pattern as the stars were placed in 1883. It is lightweight scrim cotton, hand-dyed, with embroidered stars. (15)

Francis Bellamy wrote the Oath of Loyalty in 1892 for the Columbus Day celebration. The Oath was later modified. The Woodman organization started giving thousands of flags to Iowa schools in 1892 for the Columbus Day celebration. This meant that all schools could start by saying the Oath and then sing patriotic songs. At first the salute was given with an extended straight right arm out with the right palm up. When it was too similar to the Nazi salute, the position changed to placing the right hand on the chest over the heart. Later the Oath was called the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

Luke Hart was an Iowan raised on a farm near Maloy, Iowa. In 1954, as Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, he led a successful effort to add the phrase "under God" to the Pledge. The Oath of Loyalty as written in 1892, "*I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pledge\\_of\\_Allegiance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pledge_of_Allegiance)

## Awards and Citizenship- Ruth Dannenberg Boney



Hello, my name is Ruth Dannenberg Boney. I went to this school from 1923 to 1931 and returned as a teacher after I graduated high school and turned 18 years of age. I graduated with an 85% average on my 2-day 8<sup>th</sup> Grade exam. Students who passed with over 90% were awarded the coveted 5-inch Yellow Felt Letter "T" at the County 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation Ceremony by the County Superintendent of Schools. From the 1880's until the schools were closed, awards and citizenship were prized by the teachers, students, families and communities. Awards were given for attendance, reading, spelling, industry, homework, declamatory, and even hygiene and dental care. (15)

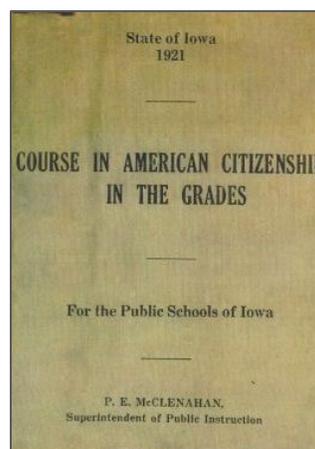


My class got the County Dental Care award and I had a student, Mary Jean Meyer Thompson, who won a county declamatory award. From the beginning, schools celebrated special days. They were divided into three groups: 1) Home Celebrations-Thanksgiving,

Christmas, Valentines, and Mother's Day; 2) Outdoor Celebrations- Arbor and Audubon Day and 3) Loyalty and Patriotism- Flag Day, Washington and Lincoln's birthdays, and Memorial Day starting in 1868 after the Civil War. There were special programs and cards for Valentines, Mother's Day, and Christmas. (19)



Awards usually had words about citizenship or patriotism. They were signed by the teacher and often the County Superintendent of Schools. The official gold County seal on them made them seem very valuable. If you got an award you knew you had done something special. Not every student got an award. Many students have kept their awards for their whole life. Patriotism and citizenship were taught to all ages. One of the most popular texts was the *Course of American Citizenship in the Grades* that was written in 1921 by PE McClenahan, State Superintendent of Iowa Schools. (21) It was used for many years by teachers. It taught children habits and manners needed to live and interact with groups of people and the path to citizenship.

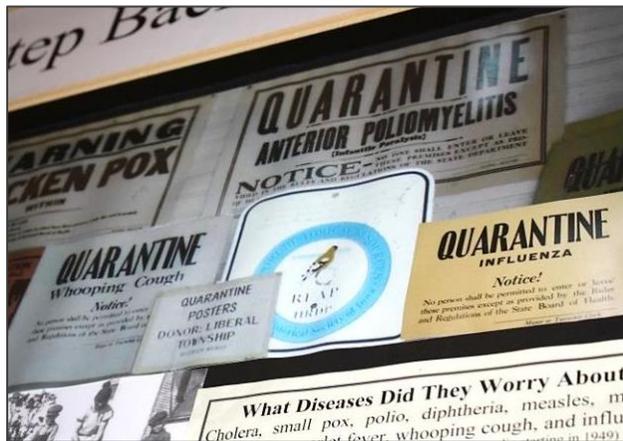


### **Health Concerns and Discipline- Elaine Raasch**



Hello, my name is Elaine Dannenberg Raasch. I attended from 1920 to 1929. I then taught school like my sisters did. I have many fond memories of Willow Tree. My worst memory is when a new little girl came to school with very dirty hands. The teacher always checked pupils and their clothing for cleanliness. The teacher gave me a brush and told me to take the little girl and clean her hands or neither of us could return to the classroom. I am in my nineties now and I still remember I made the little girl cry to get her hands clean enough. She never came to school with dirty hands again.

In addition to the teacher, we also had a county health nurse that would come to the schools in the county and check our cleanliness and check for signs of illness. If a student did not pass inspection, he/she was sent home to correct the problem or stayed home if he/she were sick. Rural schools hired nurses to train teachers in spotting health issues quickly. Teachers were educated to promote good health habits for their pupils.

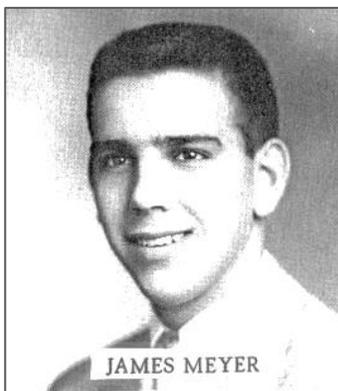


During the operation of rural schools, rural communities and towns had outbreaks of communicable diseases like, diphtheria, whooping cough, small pox, measles, mumps, chickenpox, and scarlet fever. The epidemic of polio (1949-1951) in the Richland area affected town and country students according to township records. In 1952 the polio vaccine became available, making polio a rare disease in America.

Rural school teachers used a pointer, yard stick or ruler to rap knuckles of pupils who were not following directions or were misbehaving. Teachers had the parent and community support and respect that were the keys in maintaining an orderly learning environment. Occasionally, new students would have a bar of lye soap put in their mouths if they used bad words. If students broke a rule, they wrote the rule a 100 times on the board or on the back of a roll of wall paper after school. Students might lose the privilege of going to recess or have to stand for a few minutes with their noses touching the circles the teacher drew on the black board. (34)

The worst thing a teacher could do was to tell the student's parents of his/hers misbehavior because the student knew he/she would get a spanking. There was always the threat of a public paddling by the County Superintendent of Schools for bad behavior. Teachers had rules they could not break also. I remember all teachers were expected to remain single, believe in a higher power, and live a good moral life.

### **PA Lauterbach-County Superintendent of Schools- by Jim Meyer**



Hello, my name is Jim Meyer. I went to this school from 1941 to 1948. I never received a public paddling from the County Superintendent of Schools, but like all rural students, I was aware that it could happen for bad behavior. This is where I learned the value of good character and ended up being trusted by my community to represent them in the Iowa State Legislature for three terms.

Lois, Clyde, Barbara, Mary Jean, front row:  
Dwight, Jim, and Helen Meyer



Let me tell you a story about the County Superintendent of Schools, PA Lauterbach. The story took place in the fall of 1949. The Richland #1 School Board hired a young man to be the teacher. He fell into a bad habit of sleeping in the back seat of his car at lunchtime. He kept sleeping longer and longer until the children had no instruction at all in the afternoons. Unknown to the teacher and students, the surrounding neighborhood of farmers were watching this extended play time.

All residents have heard about the day that the Superintendent, PA Lauterbach, and the School Board Director, Walter Kessler came to the school after lunch hour had well passed. They walked up to the teacher's car parked by the school steps. The students, all thinking they were in big trouble, ran quietly to line up on the school steps ready to be called into the classroom.



Mr. Lauterbach opened the back door of the car on the far side and yanked the sleeping teacher out. (See photo of car above) Mr. Lauterbach announced it was time for school and everyone took their seats in the classroom except Mr. Lauterbach and Mr. Kessler. They stood by the library cabinet without saying a word. The 17 students stayed in school until four o'clock. It was a very quiet and orderly afternoon. You could have heard a pin drop! Nothing was said to the students as they exited the school and went home for the weekend.

As students arrived on Monday a friendly and loving face greeted them. It was their former teacher, Evelyn Hanson. She had been their teacher the previous two years but had gotten married so she retired during the summer. Everyone was happy to see her and wanted to get back to learning. After WWII it became acceptable to teach after marriage.



Miss Evelyn Hanson taught 1947-1951

## **Duties of the County Superintendents**

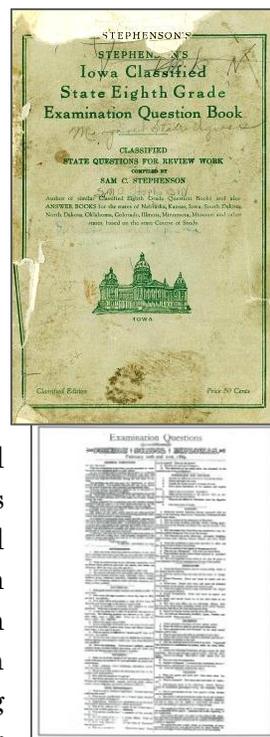
If teachers did not do their job, firing and rehiring were done by the local school boards in consultation with the County Superintendent who maintained the names of certified teachers qualified to teach. Firings were rare. More often stories from other schools were heard about teachers who just left and quit without notice. Teaching was hard work, but for most a rewarding experience. (34) The exceptional stories of rural schools are often the ones remembered. There were a few bad schools but the records of success show the great majority served students well. Mr. P.A. Lauterbach was elected and re-elected as County Superintendent of Schools for Sac County from 1919 until the last rural school in Sac County closed in 1959. At the peak in 1901, Sac Co. had 132 rural schools. (37)(15) Iowa passed a law in 1962, revised in 1965, requiring all public rural schools be in a high school district ending the public rural system in 1966. Iowa has less than 70 private rural schools operating today.

Most County School Superintendents were known as the ultimate disciplinarians. This was because many teachers threatened misbehaving students with a public paddling from the Superintendents. Actually, they had other duties by reading their annual state reports. They trained and held lists of qualified and certified teachers for the rural school boards; enforced the State Course of Study regarding curriculum and grading policies; visited a minimum of one site visit per term/semester to evaluate each teacher and rural school structure in the county; maintained the County Teacher's Library; supervised the County Health Nurse; wrote an annual State report; prepared and administered the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Exam under State instructions; issued high school admission certificates required of all rural student to enter town high schools; and most importantly, transitioned teachers by requiring records be kept on scholars' progress in each branch/subject for all new teachers to have for starting the next semester.(9)

This last item was critical to overcome issues with the rapid turnover of teachers due to marriage. Until WWII it was the social norm, that all women quit paying jobs when they got married. Some teaching contracts had terms to terminate, if the teacher married. An average of 2 to 3 years was the time most female rural teachers taught before marrying is found in reviewing many rural teacher and school records.

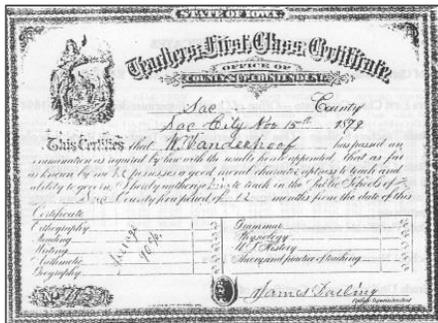
## **Teachers' Salaries and Training Requirements**

Female rural teachers were paid about 75% of what men were paid in Iowa. In 1882, females' pay was \$27.46 and males' pay was \$35.20/ mo. By 1901 males were paid \$41.53 and females \$30.68/mo. (40) Beginning in 1920, salaries of teachers were tied to their certifications. A teacher with a certificate by exam started at \$80/month. (1920

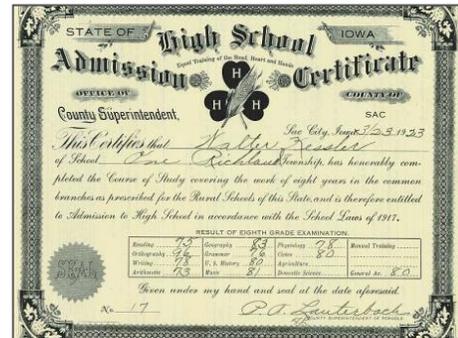


1889 8<sup>th</sup> grade exam

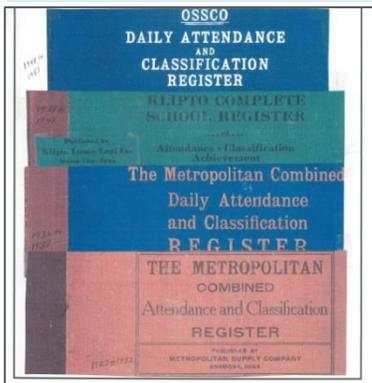
Iowa Code 4141) During the time of the Great Depression, salaries were drastically lowered to \$55/month and even lower. By the 1950's school records show that rural teacher salaries had climbed to \$225/month or \$2025/school year. For comparison, in 1949 the Iowa Median Farm Family Income was \$2670/year. [www.iowadatacenter.org](http://www.iowadatacenter.org) Printed teachers' scores on the certificates enabled school boards to select the brightest teachers. Most teachers were 18 years or older. The first teachers had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. By the early 1900's most were high school graduates. Teachers of the 1880's started teaching with 2 weeks of summer training by the Superintendents. Starting in 1912, Normal School Training courses were offered in high schools. After 1953, all elementary teachers needed two years of college. By 1959, a 4-yr college degree was required. (15) Today women have a choice of a big variety of careers.



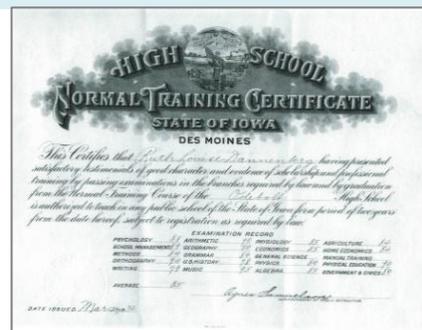
1879's Teacher's Certificate with test scores written on the front



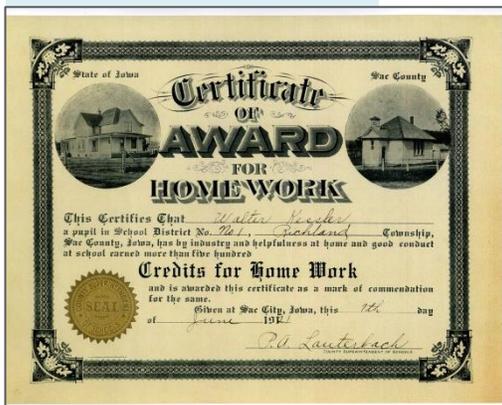
High School Admission Certificate from 1923; 3-leaf clover forerunner to 4-H



Teacher Records



Normal Training Certificate from 1935 with test scores written on the front



Gold County Seal on Awards



Brass Award given to schools that met 800+ points on the Rating Card for Standard Iowa Rural Schools. (20)

## Assimilating Germans Immigrants- Eleanor Kessler Schwab



Hello, my name is Eleanor Kessler Schwab. I attended this school from 1919 to 1927 with my brother Walter Kessler who attended from 1917 to 1924. He attended one year less than most students because he finished the curriculum and passed the exam required to get into high school early.



Our first language was German like most of the students attending this school. When I started school, I was timid and had a hard time learning English. My brother helped me and soon I was speaking English like the rest of the pupils. We continued to speak German at home and at church. After the US entered WWI in 1917, the Governor of Iowa asked Germans not to speak German when in public out of respect for America. (20) Germans then spoke only English in public and even



in our church after 1925.



Lydia Wallbaum Kessler, wife of Edward, mother of Eleanor and Walter, with rural class in Floyd County 1889

Our mother had beautiful handwriting in German and English. When my mother was a girl it was expensive to buy paper and send a letter. She then had to wait and wait hoping for a response. She wrote to her cousin in Germany until she died. She went to a rural school in Floyd

County. She impressed on me how beautiful hand writing reflected well on a person and how important writing had become as a way to communicate. She also insisted it was important for girls to learn fine stitching and to play the piano and sing. Mother served as our church organist for many years and father and I were church soloists.

### Evolution of Writing Instruments

In 1896, the Federal Rural Mail Delivery law passed. States had to assure good roads so mail could be delivered free on a routine and timely basis. Iowa--through the Counties--took responsibility for maintaining rural roads around every section/square mile that the townships had been paying farmers to do. After the bill passed, a big revolution in writing and communication occurred across the nation. Everyone could now get magazines, catalogs, newspapers, and letters in a reliable delivery system. Postage continued to be paid but now it included the delivery to rural addresses. No longer did rural residents have to pay someone to ride far distances or travel themselves to a town post office to get their mail. Everyone started writing to each other and ordering through the mail. The skills of reading and cursive writing became essential for all citizens.

The displays in the cases on the wall show the evolution of writing instruments from the 1880's to the 1950's. Slate books with slate pencils and double slates with chalk were used in the 1800's. By the 1900's, inexpensive, massed produced paper, composition books, tablets, and pencils were used. Until rural schools closed, single slates were used by younger children to practice their letters and numbers. Quills dipped into ink moved to steel nib dipping pens and later to fountains pens. Ink in crocks that teachers used to fill ink wells in desks evolved into small individual bottles of ink that students needed to supply. The display of actual ink containers from student desks became obsolete with the use of small ink bottles. Most former students

remember round holes in their desks without the ink wells like the photo to the right shows.



The most well-known change was the Palmer writing method introduced first in 1888 as a business course and then in 1912 as a series of school books. Other methods like Payton's and Harper's were used earlier.



However, most rural students remember the emphasis on large arm and shoulder movements and the endless hours of practicing circular movements all the while sitting with good posture that the Palmer method required. No one was allowed to just move their fingers to write.



The Palmer writing method encouraged longer sessions of writing and easier, more uniform cursive for all to read. The Palmer Company created an incentive program to have students improve their handwriting. Engraved and colorful pins were awarded. Some schools awarded progress in writing by allowing better writers to use a series of colored inks other than black. The color used by the writer would immediately signal to all, the level of good penmanship someone had mastered.



## *Iowa Rural Schools Museum of Odebolt- Sandra Kessler Host*



Hello, my name is Sandra Kessler Host. I was raised as an Iowa farm girl. I attended this school like three generations of my family did. My great grandfather, Henry Kessler, broke the prairie sod in 1874. With the grand opening of the



museum held in 2013, homage was given to rural culture and its schools. My friend and fellow country school enthusiast,

Dr. William Faller, was at the ceremony to present his bronze sculpture titled, "Time for School". It is located in front of the school museum.

The artwork shows a boy studying a frog with his sister pulling on his suspenders and telling him it was time for school. Dr. Faller believed the best combination of schooling is in a classroom with ample time to study nature all around us. I was fortunate to have had this combination when I started my educational journey in Iowa schools. In 2014, the City of Odebolt, received the Iowa Preservation Award for best rural restoration effort in Iowa. I want to show you a few of my favorite items in the museum.



Late 1870's photo shows a rope pull with Richland farmers in suits against their wives in Victorian style dresses. They all played and worked hard. This characteristic of farm women led to establishing organized, statewide sports, like basketball for both boys and girls in their schools long before it was acceptable to have girls' sports in other states. It also shows the early farms with a few young trees planted for a shelterbelt and farm buildings profiling the landscape of the once treeless, tall bluegrass prairie known to be hostile with fires, insects, extremes in weather, and little surface water.



A clock like this 1880's hand-wound pendulum Ansonia clock hung above the entrance/exit of the schools



This is the original reading table for Willow Tree. This table was designed to be separated into two parts to be used as four extra desks, if needed.



The original kerosene heater kept the teacher warm. The carrier held kerosene for providing 10 hours of heat.

### **Daily Routines to Start the School Day-Ruth Kessler Youngren**



Hello, my name is Ruth Kessler Youngren. My older brother Raymond and I attended this school. I went from 1938 to 1946. I had a mile to walk to school. Sometimes I rode my bike. There were other students who rode ponies or rode in carts pulled by



ponies. Most of us walked because the roads often had deep ruts that made it hard to ride bikes or ponies. We had to wear something over our shoes to keep them dry when the weather caused the roads to be muddy, wet or snowy. When we got to school we took off our overshoes, goulashes or boots and put them on the boot step in the entry room. We put our lunch boxes up on the shelf. Our jackets and hats were put on hooks.



Dry Sink and lye soap for cleaning

When this school started, a broom stick and a bucket or pail with or without a lid, were used to fetch water from the nearest farm. The broom stick was slipped under the handle of the bucket or pail so the heavy bucket could be carried between two children. The pail of water was placed into a zinc lined dry sink. Originally a single dipper was used by all the children. Health concerns changed the practice to use a dipper to fill individual tin cups. A drain bucket was under the dry sink to catch water used to wash hands and cups. At the end of the day the waste water was poured outside into the ditch. In winter this

water would freeze and resurface the snow slide to play on the next day. For the last couple of decades, the teachers brought the water if they came by car. The water would be put in a 3 gallon crock with a spigot to fill cups. The entry room has a wonderful shoes and boots collection for children, women, and men from the 1880's to the 1950's and one display of lunch boxes from the 1880's starting on the left going to the 1950's on the right (page 31).

**Hand Crafted Leather Work by Farmers Becomes Outdated**



In the 1800's farmers needed to know how to do leather repairs, make reins for the horses and sew lacings. They also resoled shoes and made repairs that allowed long wear through many children in their large families. The photo shows a small shoe on the shoe stand that has three

soles and many repairs. Many siblings shared this shoe. By the late 1800's, catalogs were starting. Ordering shoes from catalogs or local stores allowed better access to footwear for isolated farm families.



From 1870's-1930's all farm work and most transportation of farm families were done by horses. All had leather- reins, harnesses, saddles, covers for buggies etc. that needed to be maintained by farmers.

By the 1920's, cars were replacing horses and buggies. By the 1930's and 1940's tractors were replacing draft horses.



**Electricity Replaces Kerosene-LaDon Thayer**

Hello, my name is LaDon Thayer. I went to this school from 1936 to 1944. My biggest memory is the fun walk to and from school. There was always something to see like birds, rabbits and garter snakes and things to do like collecting different seeds or rocks to put in my pockets. The best was seeing the big trucks with poles and equipment and commotion when electricity was coming to the school and farm places in Richland Township in 1940 and 1941.



Before electricity, Delco batteries powered phones; McCormick kerosene generators (see p. 11), later tractors, moved machinery like elevators and

washing machines; and windmills pumped water. Installing electricity required a lot of men to be on the road to dig holes to set the extremely tall wooden poles to which electrical wires were attached. It was quite a distraction because I wanted to know how they did things and was tempted to not continue on to school. When they reached our school, they replaced the nine hanging kerosene lanterns in the classroom with new hanging electrical lights with globes. The lights were usually used only for evening activities.



Hanging  
kerosene lights

After electricity was available to farms, the last big difference between town and country living was indoor plumbing. It was not until the 1950's that nearly all farm houses had indoor plumbing. Most students who had toilets inside their homes disliked using outhouses when attending the old original one-room schools. The few replacement rural schools built in the 1900's usually had basements and chemical/plumbed toilets. Few school acres had a water source. Along with other factors like fewer children to fill a school and better roads and buses to transport students to town, the additional cost to do plumbing in old schools, tipped the balance towards farmers agreeing in the 1950's to close the 1800's built one-room schools and consolidate with town schools.



New electrical  
lights

**A Concluding Word-** We have told you our stories and provided information in order to give you a glimpse into a special, but often overlooked period in American history (1870-1900) that significantly moved the nation towards a democratic society when all children regardless of where they lived were educated. We hope that you have developed new insights into the beginnings of Midwestern rural settlement, its culture and schools. We especially hope that we have fostered an appreciation for the Victorian Era families and Iowa lawmakers who set in motion and implemented the principles and organization of a school system that served farm families well for over three generations (1858-1966).

Some educators, starting from the 1800's, were motivated to "save" farm children when they advocated for consolidation—closing rural schools so children could have a modern education in town schools.<sup>(1)(33)(10)(5)</sup> Many Iowans, especially farmers, never bought this argument. In reality, the Iowa democratic system of schools, with a large majority of them being rural, produced the most literate populace in the nation by 1901. <sup>(10)</sup> Iowa continued to set new educational standards with innovations such as tracking individual student progress with standardized tests. <sup>(28)</sup> Iowa's one-room school system that assured easy access for all students regardless of where they lived, resulted in a rich culture made up of many nationalities, a highly informed rural electorate, and progressive farmers able to develop and use new technologies to help feed the world. <sup>(36)</sup> Hopefully, revisiting the accomplishments of the 1800's Midwestern rural culture and its schools will help readers to appreciate the contributions. Each culture, like the Midwestern rural culture, needs to be valued for what it has contributed to the American Story and to the advancement of democracy.

# Lessons Learned from Iowa's One-Room Schools

By Sandra Kessler Host, 2015

*There are lessons from Iowa's past that can be applied in designing a new innovative educational system for all our children today. Consider: What were Iowa's challenges that led to the creation of its rural school system? What were the principles that made it work so well? What impact did it have on the nation and our democracy?*

Iowa's rural settlement was delayed until after the Civil War as opposed to other Midwestern states that were already largely settled. The 6 to 8 foot tall Blue Stem grass prairie covered 75% of Iowa. It had been skirted and mostly avoided by explorers, fur traders, early settlers of the great Western Expansion and even the Sioux. They preferred staying close to waterways that were tributaries of the Missouri, Big Sioux, and Mississippi rivers. The tall grass also slowed the completion of the Federal land survey until 1859. The survey was required prior to the sale of any prairie land. Solutions to unique problems created by the tall grass prairie had to be found before Iowa's rich, fertile land would entice established farm families to uproot and move to Iowa.

## Problems Found

*How to plow tough, tall grass & stop annual prairie fires-*  
*How to keep animals in a confined space-*  
*How to find a water source-*  
*How to find wood on a treeless prairie-*

## Solutions

*Mass production of steel share plows*  
*Build barbed wire fences*  
*Dig shallow wells and build windmills*  
*Build railroads*

By the late 1800's, the second wave of immigration of Europeans to America was in full swing. Millions of immigrants arrived seeking jobs created by the Industrial Revolution in growing cities. Farmers and agricultural workers in Europe or those who had recently arrived in eastern states, were looking for good, cheap farm land. They were willing to uproot whole families and communities and commit all their resources to achieve the American dream of owning land and many were seeking freedom of worship. In less than thirty years, over a million immigrant farm settlers from different countries, speaking different languages and having a variety of faiths, took the chance to become independent and self-sufficient farmers in Iowa. They doubled Iowa's population and quadrupled the tilled acres to 35.5 million by 1900. Although there were many differences to overcome, Iowans and other Midwesterners learned in their schools about American democracy, its freedoms, and what it meant to be good citizens. They agreed any proscription would stop at the school house door. These immigrants, who struggled against the odds and survived to settle in America, passed on a legacy of cherishing all of America's freedoms and opportunities for all.

Iowa's execution of its vision for a cost effective, yet quality school system for all children set a new standard for accessibility to good public education for both rural and town children. It resulted in the most literate citizenry in the US starting in 1901. Starting in 1935, Iowa had a reputation for educational standards and innovative testing for individual student progress.

Perhaps it is time to remember the example of the one-room school system, not to duplicate it but for the lessons we can learn from it. It served the needs of Iowans, including the immigrants, as well as the needs of the State of Iowa and the Nation. Iowa demonstrated the critical importance of free, easy access to quality education that resulted in improved attendance and high test scores. Iowa's success in designing and executing a system that balanced state and local responsibilities to educate **all** children and track individual student's progress, raised the educational expectations for the nation. It created an informed electorate critical for sustaining and strengthening our democracy. Like missions did for California, one-room schools did for Iowa. Each anchored its states' European settlement and helped develop its heritage and character.

# Foundation and Evidence of Iowa's Excellence in Education

2015 By Sandra Kessler Host author of *A New Look at Iowa One-Room Schools*

The following documented events in Iowa's history provide the historical context for the often overlooked contribution of the academic achievement of rural students starting in the late 1800's. They formed the foundation for Iowa's high standings later in adult literacy, standardized testing, higher degrees earned as well as Iowa's reputation for informed voters. This would not have been conceivable had it not been for a system of one-room rural schools specifically designed in 1858 to serve all farm families, speaking many different languages, with the goal of producing an educated, united and thriving populace. It had advanced features such as county superintendents, uniform curriculum, competency testing and teacher certification standards. Prosperous immigrant families were expected to flood Iowa's prairie when three-quarters of the state's land mass was finally advertised for sale in 1870. This late, rapid, dense settlement within 30 years was unique to Iowa. It made it possible to entice new immigrant settlers and to provide education for them—learning from the trial and errors of other states.

By 1900, Iowa operated 13,861 schools with 12,623 being one-room ungraded 1-8 rural schools and 1,238 being town schools, 645 of these town schools had no high schools. It is estimated that more than 75% of Iowans were educated in rural schools while they operated 1858-1966. Unfortunately, the focus of most educational historians has been on the problems of aging one-room school structures without plumbing instead of acknowledging the outstanding results of the learning environments within. This has clouded the actual worth of rural schools. The contribution of rural schools to the educational status of Iowa is undeniable; as is the need for a nation to have an educated populace to sustain and move a democracy forward.

- 🕒 **1846-** Iowa becomes a state with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of its land still unsettled prairie that was potentially 95-98% rich, tillable farmland.
- 🕒 **1856-** To settle the rest of Iowa, a Federal Railroad Grant was used to build railroads across and within Iowa. Railroad companies were paid in sections of land. Along with cheap, rich prairie land for sale, provisions for railroads and schools were incentives for well-established farmers in Europe to commit to a new life and move their families and whole communities to Iowa. They knew it would be hard work to create farms and provide amenities for their families out on a hostile, treeless prairie, but they wanted the American dream to have all their sons to be able to own land and all wanted freedom.
- 🕒 **1858-** Common (Rural) School Legislation was passed that allowed all children in Iowa to have free, easy access to schools. The model chosen to educate farm children was that of a one-room school, ungraded classes 1-8, with one teacher. Schools were to be located near the center of every four square miles of farmland so all children could be within a 2-mile walk to increase attendance resulting in better learning. Farmers pushed for legislation to have a right to vote for either keeping a township school board serving 36 square miles or a board for each school. Nearly every rural school voted to have its own board made up of the residents within its boundaries. By 1879, every county had a state-appointed (*elected after 1919*) County Superintendent of Schools to oversee state requirements; support teachers; supervise curriculum and testing; and maintain records including teacher certification. Duties were coordinated with local school boards. Iowa's rich land had farms averaging 155 acres, nearly a quarter of a section by 1900. That meant the 16-18 families living on a four-square mile area could fill a one-room school. By the 1960's, with larger farms and smaller farm families this model no longer worked. Improvements in roads and vehicles allowed farm children to be safely and reliably transported to town schools.
- 🕒 **1861-1865 Civil War-** Iowans opposed slavery; 73,534 Iowa men served in the Union Army.
- 🕒 **1870 to 1900-** This was the time period rural one-room schools were built. The biggest land sale to individual buyers in US history was sparked by sale of railroad lands. A million immigrant farm settlers came to Iowa from Europe; some with brief stopovers in eastern states. These farmers built 12,623 one-room schools as part of the Iowa Rural

School System that operated until 1966. Ambitious immigrants doubled the population of Iowa and quadrupled the tilled acreage to 35.5 million acres within a 30-year period. This period coincided with the second huge wave of immigration that was part of the Industrial Revolution. It was also the height of Victorian influence in buildings and fashions.

- 🔔 **1896-** The first study of educational results of Iowa's use of their one-room rural school system to educate all rural children, mostly children of immigrants, came indirectly through an analysis done by the US Postal Service. Federal Free Rural Delivery legislation was passed to provide delivery to rural addresses in exchange for states, through the counties, maintaining good rural roads instead of depending on farmers to do it. The US Postal Service conducted a survey from 1896-1910 that traced costs and revenues. Increasing usage and readership by farmers meant more postal revenues to offset increased costs of rural deliveries.
- 🔔 **1896-1910-** A regression analysis of the US Postal Service free rural delivery in Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Texas found the number of voters in each county was (t-ratio=22.58) positively related to more postal revenues. The higher the illiteracy rate the more negative the impact was on earning revenues (t-score=-6.134). Adult literacy rate total is the percentage of the population age 15 and above who could read and write with understanding, a short, simple statement on their everyday life. Generally, 'literacy' also encompassed 'numeracy', the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. Being literate required much more than just signing your name instead of making an X. The US Postal survey showed the highest literacy rate was **Iowa at 97.9% literate adults** compared to 84.5% literate adult rate for Texas. *Annals of Iowa* Volume 58/#3/Summer 1999 Daniel Carpenter "From Patronage to Policy: the Centralization Campaign and Iowa Post Offices, 1890-1915" pp. 273-309 note 34
- 🔔 **1935-** E. F. Lindquist at the University of Iowa developed the Iowa Every Pupil Tests (became the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) that were used to track individual student progress in Iowa; later used nationally. In 1959, he co-founded the American College Testing Program (ACT) in which Iowa ranked in the top three states for the rest of the century.
- 🔔 **1960-** About the time of the end of the rural school system in 1966, Iowa had the highest literacy rate in the nation at 99.3% while the average of all 52 states was 97.5%. *February 12, 1963, Washington 25, D.C. Series p-23#, 1960*
- 🔔 **1963-** Iowa ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> highest state in number of PhDs awarded per capita. *Iowa Employment Security Commission printed article from the Des Moines Register, "The New Iowa Spirit of Progress", 1964*
- 🔔 **1989-** Iowa has the highest literacy rate in the nation. Ninety-three percent of its schools ranked above the national average in scholastic achievement. Iowans earned more undergraduate degrees per 100,000 people than the population of any other state. Iowa is one of four states in the nation with two world-class research universities. *Iowa Official Register 1989-90 page 325*
- 🔔 **1992-** The average prose, document, and quantitative proficiencies of adults in Iowa were comparable to those of adults living in the Midwest region and were significantly (13 to 16 points) higher than adults nationwide. (This study broke literacy down to five levels with new definitions.) *Executive summary Adult Literacy in Iowa from "National Adult Literacy Survey" by Jenkins & Kirsch, Education Testing Service, February 1994*
- 🔔 **2001-** Iowa has a high school graduation rate of 90% and high ACT scores that consistently rates Iowa in the top 3 states. *Iowa Official Register 2001-02 page 399*
- 🔔 **2009-** Iowa has a graduation rate of 87.2% and an average ACT score of 22.4, above the national average of 21.1. *Iowa Official Register 2009-2010 page 40*
- 🔔 **2013-** Iowa students posted SAT mean scores that were above the national average: Critical Reading — 592, compared to a national mean score of 496; Math — 601, compared to a national mean score of 514; and Writing — 570, compared to a national mean score of 488. (College Board, 2013) *Iowa Official Register 2013-14 p. 431*
- 🔔 **2014-** Iowa has an average ACT score of 22.0 compared to the national ACT score of 20.9. *Average Scores by State - State Reports - ACT Profile Reports 2014*

# A New Look at Iowa's One-Room Schools

## Iowa's Lost Treasure—A System of 12,623 Rural Schools 1858-1966

### Author's Journey and Ideas for Researching Iowa's Local One-Room Schools

Since 2006, Sandra Kessler Host has read hundreds of books and documents on Iowa's history, researching for information about Iowa's Rural School System (1858-1966). She continued her father and grandfather's passion for collecting and preserving Iowa's farm settlement history, including that of its schools. Since the descendants of Richland Township, Sac County, kept many of the original school artifacts and historical records and donated them to the Iowa Rural Schools Museum, Host interviewed numerous former rural school students and descendants of the pioneer families. She also traveled to all 99 counties on her search to find 1800's one-room schools to determine the Victorian influence on them. During travels over a 3-year period, Host listened to local historians, visited and read school documents at historical societies, explored court houses, hunted down plat maps, lunched at senior citizen centers, and located, photographed and documented 260 historic schools. These schools are still standing and have not been re-purposed for other uses, like homes. Information on Host's books [www.iowahistoricschools.com](http://www.iowahistoricschools.com)

To tap local history, an ad was placed in the local newspaper requesting information on country schools in the area. Many responses were received. Host researched newspaper archives of Sac County in Odebolt and Sac City, and studied plat maps from 1883 to the present, usually finding schools marked on them. Libraries in Odebolt and Sac City had publications on town and county history celebrations and early settlers. She interviewed families about their histories and studied records they had kept, such as all the Richland Township public and health records from 1876 to 1950, and the original teacher records of the school from 1921-1951. Host found it very useful to carefully research land titles and transfers at the Sac County Courthouse and several others. Old land titles usually referred to a married woman as "wife" instead of using her legal name and a few were signed with an "X" for illiterate buyers. Land records show when a farmer donated an acre of land for one dollar to the local school district. He and other farmers would then donate their labor to build a one-room school. Knowledge of when a land title transfers helps researchers estimate the year when a school was built. A farmer would not have left his acre lie fallow by transferring titles before the school was actually going to be built.

For understanding the 1800's State of Iowa Department of Instruction, researchers can read the annual County Superintendent of Schools reports and the Department's reports that are kept at the State Historical Society of Iowa libraries. The University of Northern Iowa which has become the repository for old Iowa county rural school records is another valuable resource. Rev. David McDonald, a national certified genealogist, has spent years studying migration to the Midwest. At the 2015 Spring Workshop in Omaha, on Iowa Migration, he emphasized the importance of knowing that most immigrants came as parts of communities, not as individuals. Host found the migrations of Germans to Richland Twp.in Iowa, involved stopovers and regrouping in Lake Co., ID, Lee Co. IL, and Chicago.

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40. William L. Sherman, Editor, *Iowa's Country Schools: Landmarks of Learning* (Parkersburg, IA: Iowa State Ed. Ass. and Mid-Prairie Books) 1998, p.48 number of schools, p.48 Iowa teachers average salaries
41. Paul Theobald, *Call School-Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale, Il: SIU Press) 1995

- 42. David B. Tyack & all, *Law and the Shaping of Public Education 1785-1954* (Madison, WI: Univ. Press) 1987
- 43. C.H. Wagerslev & Thomas Walpole, *Past and Present of Buena Vista County* (Chicago, IL: S.J. Clarke Co.)1909
- 44. W.M. Welch A.M., *How to Organize, Classify, and Teach a County School* (Chicago, IL: Welch Publishing) 1886 p. 90-106 recitation

- 45. **Notes:** Dugouts- Lumber was scarce on the prairie and innovation was required for survival. K. Van Stigt description of the Dutch early settlement of Pella, referred to as *Strawtown*, in his History of Pella 1897 is unique for its detailed written description. *“They fell to digging in the ground like so many earthworms, usually on a side hill or slope. This provided a wall which was then built a little higher above the ground...with grass sod cut into squares 18”X 18” or 18”X 24” and some even a trifle wider. Over this a roof was stretched made of rafters cut from trees nearby and covered with straw.”* This and more information is in the Pella Historic Village in Pella, Ia. Host heard of the use of dugouts across Iowa including family stories and histories of Richland Township by the very first German farm settlers. This drawing shows a place next to the living space for two horses. Iowa lore also tells that sometimes a barn needed for horses and cows was the first building with the settlers living in the loft until a house could be built.
- 46. **Notes:** Maps Showing Timeframe of Iowa’s Rural (Farm)Settlement. Appendix D in the book, *Iowa Historic Schools Highlighting Victorian Influence*, by Host gives details on why Iowa’s rural farm settlement of the tall grass prairie and the building of one-room schools has been inadvertently omitted on the timeline of important events in Iowa’s history. Organized did not necessarily mean completely settled.

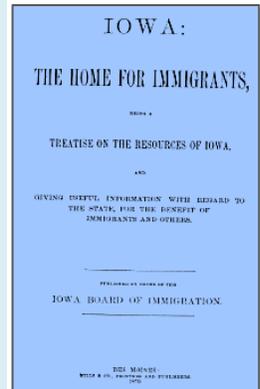
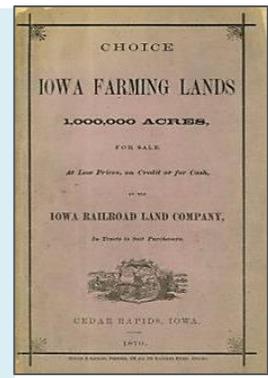
1839 Iowa Territorial Map with 18 organized counties and 3 others named along the eastern side of Iowa- the Iowa Territory was formed in 1833



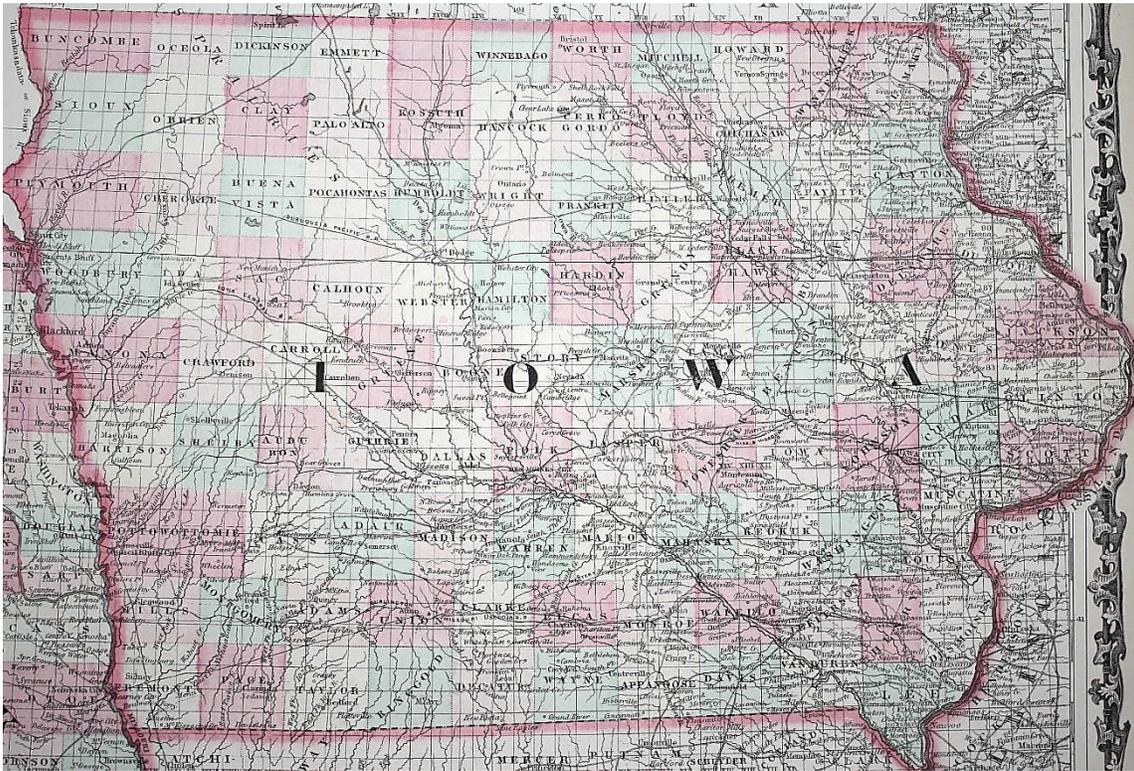
1844 Iowa Territory- By statehood in 1846, Iowa had 31 counties organized and a population of a hundred thousand concentrated in the eastern quarter of the state



1860 Census Map before the Civil War show about a quarter of Iowa is settled. During the civil war 73,534 Iowa men served when Iowa had only a population of 674,913 in 1860. The war delayed plans to settle the rest of Iowa which included building railroads across the prairie. The first rail line crossed Iowa in 1867. By 1869 the railroads companies formed the Iowa Railroad and Land Company to start selling their native prairie land in 1870. In 1869, the State of Iowa set up a Board of Immigration that also published, translated, and sent a treatise to many countries in Europe in 1870. This sparked the largest private land sell in history and helped bring a million farm settlers to Iowa. This second wave of European immigrants doubled Iowa’s population and quadrupled its tilled acres to 35.5 million by 1900. They also built 12,623 one-room schools. Millions of other immigrants came to other states and cities during this time of the Industrial Revolution seeking jobs.



1863 Map of Iowa by Johnson & Ward NY- Iowa in 1853 had laid out all 99 counties and named each. The little squares are townships of 36 sq. miles each that were set up through the federal land survey required before land could be sold. Iowa's survey was completed in 1859. Each County started with at least one township and as the population grew, each federally surveyed township could organize a new township board and call a vote to name the township with a handful of residents. The only county to change names was in the northeast corner named Buncombe by the State. In 1862 the County changed its name to Lyon after Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon, who served in the Mexican-American War and was killed in a Civil War battle 8-10-1861 at Wilson Creek, Mo.



1872 Iowa map by Asher & Adams- Small squares represent townships of 36 sq. miles. First towns were along rivers and then rail lines. The small blank box areas are where the tall grass prairie was ready for settlement. Any trip by horse and wagon more than a few miles was considered a major and often dangerous outing. When enough settlers arrived in an area, small towns would grow to support the farm families.

