


OVER THE YEARS

SCHOOL DAYS AT OLD SIBLEY

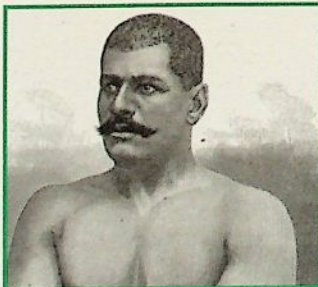
BY ALLAN DEGNAN

Root, Elsa	9 years 11th 1910-4-20th 1915-2-7th	First,	First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Year, First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Year, First, Second, Third, Fourth,	
863 Bidwell St.				
Mr. Charles H. Root				
Ruberto, Annie				
879 Stryker Ave.				
Mr. C. Ruberto				
Ruberto, Rose				

SILK'S GROVE

LEDUC NEWS

PARTNER: LIFEWORKS





**Dakota County Historical Society
Lawshe Memorial Museum
& Research Library**

Wed 9 - 5, Thurs 9 - 8, Fri 9 - 5, Sat 10 - 3
130 Third Avenue North, South St. Paul, MN 55075
(651) 552-7548 Fax (651) 552-7265
e-mail: dakotahistory@co.dakota.mn.us
www.dakotahistory.org



**LeDuc Historic Estate
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Wed-Sat 10 - 5, Sun 1 - 5**

Tours at 10:00, 11:30, 1:00, 2:30, & 4:00
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(651) 437-7055 Fax (651) 437-6225
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*And more than 200 volunteers contributing more than 5,000 hours annually, **THANK YOU!***

**OVER THE YEARS
Volume 52 Number 2 August 2011**

Twenty five years ago, DCHS member Allan Degan wrote a charming memoir about his experiences at Sibley Elementary in West St. Paul.

Boxing historian Jake Wegner came to us researching the location of "Silk's Grove" while working on a book on Minnesota's boxing history. He generously contributed an article about his research for this issue.

Also included is a profile of partner Lifeworks and news from LeDuc.

On the cover: The 4th grade roster of Sibley grade school in 1923. The school was photographed in 1963 by Bob Kuehn. Bottom: Boxer Billy Wilson, River of Ribbons and birding instructor Kevin Smith.

We are a membership organization:

The Society operates the Lawshe Memorial Museum in South St. Paul, featuring a well-equipped research library, 7,000 square feet of exhibit space, and hosting a variety of annual exhibitions and events. The LeDuc Historic Estate in Hastings is an historic house museum offering fully guided tours, a wide variety of events and numerous historical, family friendly programs. Both museums are available for school and group tours year-round.

Society members receive:

- Free admission to both museums.
- *OVER THE YEARS*, published three times a year.
- "Preserving Our History" newsletter.
- Discounts in both museum stores and on rental of the LeDuc Historic Estate for private events.
- Invitations to special Historical Society events.
- A \$15 discount on the purchase of *Picturing the Past*. This coffee table book, filled with memorable stories, rare photographs and newsworthy events, typically retails for \$36.95.

Membership levels:

Senior.....	\$20
Individual.....	\$30
Family.....	\$50
Sustaining	\$100
Silver	\$250
Gold.....	\$500
Tower.....	\$1,000

You can renew your membership online at www.dakotahistory.org.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Members, Partners and Friends,

With the coming of fall the crew here at the Society is gearing up for the busiest time of the year! The next three months will see Over the Brink: Civil War Weekend, the LeDuc-Simmons Country Market, Mississippi-St. Croix Art Show, Hastings Artists Show, a new cemetery tour program in mid-October, three monthly history lectures, two genealogy events, an expansion of Front the Front IV: Vietnam, and more. See our events calendar on the inside of the back cover or at www.dakotahistory.org for more information.

If you haven't visited the DCHS website I encourage you to do so. www.dakotahistory.org is chock-full of great information – research data on all the communities in Dakota County, more than half a million searchable records to help you with genealogy research, online activities for educators and students, and of course information on upcoming events. Despite the wealth of data available, the site itself is dated, looks a bit messy, and doesn't support web 2.0 functions. The Society is looking to change all that. Your feedback on features you would like to see is requested, a link near the top of the center section of the Lawshe and LeDuc home pages will let you send an E-mail to me, please share your thoughts on how the site can be better! Staff and board members have already identified some things that they want to see – streamlined navigation, a more attractive home page, less scrolling, stronger focus on research and event information, and the capacity for users like you to share images and stories. The Society is in the process of identifying a developer to take all these ideas and make them a reality; we hope to have parts of the new site live before our annual meeting in January 2012.

Since we are talking about technology, be sure to check us out on Facebook, please feel free to provide feedback on that as well! We are using Facebook to share some links to history articles from patch.com and remind people of our upcoming events, we think it can be used for more than that, let us know what you think and don't forget to "like" us!

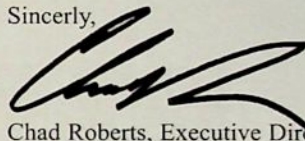
The coming of fall also means the Fred Lawshe Annual Campaign will kick-off soon. Donors, members and partners make it possible for DCHS to provide programs and services that reach more than 90,000

people annually. Your support will help support the research library and make the 70+ programs and exhibitions DCHS delivers county-wide accessible to all.

The Society is also launching a membership campaign. Let your friends, family and colleagues know why you support DCHS and consider getting them gift memberships this year, not only will you be supporting our mission but you will be getting them a gift their whole family can enjoy.

There are dozens of great programs yet to come this fall, I hope to see you at many of them!

Sincerely,



Chad Roberts, Executive Director

CONGRATULATIONS!

To the following winners of the Dakota County
Fair Trivia Challenge:

STEVE BARTZ, HASTINGS

MATTHEW BERNARD, EAGAN

SHELLEY CHIRHART, APPLE VALLEY

BRIANNA KIRK, EAGAN

JACK PHILLIPS, APPLE VALLEY

JESUS VALDIVIA, FARMINGTON

KELTON VAVROSKY, EAGAN

Each winner receives a copy of *Picturing the Past, Dakota County in the 20th Century*.

For answers to the trivia questions, see page 2.

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

A legacy gift, also known as a planned or estate gift, can help ensure DCHS has the resources to preserve and present the history of Dakota County for many years to come.

To learn more about Legacy Gifts at DCHS, contact Chad Roberts, Executive Director at (651)552-7548

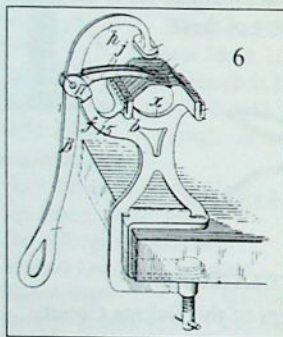
DAKOTA COUNTY FAIR TRIVIA CHALLENGE

In what year did the following events occur?

Answers below

1. The Treaty of Mendota was signed.
2. Rural Free Delivery started in Dakota County.
3. The first cloverleaf intersection was built.
4. A B-52 crashed in Inver Grove.
5. Dakota County purchased land for Jensen Park.

What are the three artifacts?



Answers

1. 1851
2. 1896
3. 1942
4. 1958
5. 1967
6. Raisin Seeder
7. Hog Scraper
8. Hat Stretcher

THANK YOU SUMMER INTERNS!

Eight interns worked diligently with DCHS staff this summer, completing important work in collections, archives, research and development. Opportunities exist year-round for students, contact Rebecca Snyder at (651) 552-7548 for more information.

Dan Chapman, Senior, University of St. Thomas, worked with Chad on identifying prospects and developing materials for membership and fundraising campaigns.

Eric Stoneberg, MA, Arizona State University and **Justin Hitch**, BA, Gustavus Adolphus, have been working as collections interns with Nancy Hanson processing a backlog of accessions. So far they have processed a full year of donations.

Jacob Behnke, BA, Viterbo University, numbered the uncataloged library books and re-organized the research book collection. He relabeled and moved the DCGS obituary collection into the meeting room, making them more accessible for researchers.

Rebekah Angstman, Sophomore, Ave Maria University, completed the baptismal component of the St. Peter's church record transcription project. This leaves just the marriages and burials to be completed.

Edison Benidt, Sophomore, Lakeville South High School, has completed research on Mineral Springs Sanatorium, including a research field trip to Goodhue County Historical Society to access patient records.

Sam Wisneski, Sophomore, University of St. Thomas, has been working on an archival collection from the Dakota County Communications Department.

Sarah Kuenzler, Graduate student, University of St. Thomas, is currently working on increasing our social networking presence, including putting some of the Society's photos on Flickr.

FROM THE FRONT IV: VIETNAM

Lawshe Memorial Museum
Extended through December 2012



SCHOOL DAYS AT OLD SIBLEY

by Allan F. Degnan

In the summer of 1922 our family moved from the Riverview district of St. Paul to an extremely small, three room house located at what was then the very end of Stryker Avenue in West St. Paul. This house, remodeled and enlarged, still stands at No. 1112 Stryker. The house number, issued in 1922, was apparently issued in error, and out of sequence, since No. 1114 is next door to the north, and No. 1118 is next door on the south. Of course, the two next door were built many years later than No. 1112, probably in the 1940s.

As September, and the opening day of school, approached, my Mother contacted Warren J. Klinker, the West St. Paul School Superintendent, for information about where my brother and I were to attend school. This contact was made by telephone, and at one point in the conversation, Mother, who was not very good at remembering names, addressed him as "Mr. Cinder", to her great embarrassment. In any case, we were told to enroll at the Sibley School, which, on the opening day of school, we proceeded to do.

Sibley was located on the south side of Bernard St., and was almost directly in line with Allen Ave., which ended there. It was a two-story building with a peaked, and gabled roof. Since it was built a few feet above grade level, it was necessary to climb 5 or 6 steps to enter either of the double-doors, which were located front and rear. Directly over the rear entrance, was the bell-tower, with its pyramid-shaped roof. In line with each entryway, both front and rear, were stairways up to the second floor.

Each floor had two classrooms, each of which accommodated two grades. The first-floor north room held the first and second grades. The teacher here was Mary Elliott. In the south room were the third and fourth grades, and it was here that Carl and I were assigned, he to the fourth grade, and I to the third. Our teacher was Elva Canniff. On the second floor, the south room, and the fifth and sixth grades, were presided over by Emma Weber, a great teacher, and a tremendous person; more about her farther along in the story. The north room was occupied by the seventh and eighth grades. Helen O'Brien, who taught these grades, was the senior teacher of the school, and also served as acting principal.

Each classroom had a large cloakroom, open at both ends, so that the pupils could march thru as they hung up their coats and hats. These cloakrooms also served as detention areas. Anyone sent to the cloakroom for punishment remained there for the specified time, in a



The students of Sibley grade school gathered for this photograph in 1927.

sort of limbo, not participating in any of the class activities until his sentence had expired.

Directly under the bell tower was a small office, which also served as a library. The walls of this room were lined with book-filled shelves.

During the 1920s, Sibley was often referred to as being substandard, and yet, coming from St. Paul, and having attended Douglas school, it did not, to me, seem to be a step down in quality. It had indoor plumbing, and good "city" water at the drinking fountains. The classrooms were bright and airy, especially those on the south, or sunny side of the building. In addition, the electric lighting in classrooms and hallways was certainly adequate.

The sanitary facilities were located in two separate rooms in the basement, boys going down the front stairway, girls down the rear. The fixtures were as modern as any others in the year 1922, and were always kept spotlessly clean.

Just to the right of the boy's washroom, was the furnace room. A medium-sized, coal-burning steam boiler was located here, which furnished steam to the radiators in the rooms and hallways above. The building was always warm and cozy, even on the coldest winter days.

The late Allan Degnan wrote this memoir for the Mendota-West St. Paul Chapter in 1986.

Everything in the building was kept very clean. The floors in all the rooms and halls were swept each day, sweeping compound being used to keep any dust from rising. The desk tops, window sills, radiators and other fixtures were dusted daily. Periodically, all floors, desks, window sills, etc., were given a thorough soap-and-water scrubbing. The windows were always clean and bright. All in all, Sibley presented a pleasant and cheerful atmosphere, which was certainly an improvement over that presented by the Douglas School.

Which brings me to Mr. Wilford.

The chain of command in the school system ran as follows: At the top, the Mayor and the City Council of the City of West St. Paul. Below them, and accountable to the city officials, was the School Board. Next in line was the School Superintendent, Mr. Klinker. The chain ran from Mr. Klinker down to the teachers, not only those at Sibley, but in all other schools within the city. George Wilford, with the title of janitor, was the low man on the totem pole; the very bottom of the ranking. And yet, the lowly title notwithstanding, Mr. Wilford *really* ran Sibley School.

Mr. Wilford was not a large man, physically, in height, he was about 5' 7", in weight, about 150 pounds, with a lean and wiry look about him. His face was rather thin, though not unkindly. His eyes were a lively, sparkling brown; under his nose was a small moustache, of a pepper-and-salt color, in keeping with his age, which in 1922 must have been somewhere in the late fifties. I never knew his hair color, or even if he had any, since he always wore, winter and summer, day or night a black felt hat with a rather wide brim. His manner of dress never varied. He always wore blue denim bib overalls, faded from many launderings, but a fresh pair every day. A blue work shirt, which matched the overalls in color, a pair of black shoes, and, to top it off, a small black bow tie, just under his bobbing Adams-apple, completed his costume. Mr. Wilford's duties were legion, and I am sure could never have been outlined to him in their entirety. Whatever needed to be done, Mr. Wilford did, and he did it himself.

Our school day consisted of two sessions. The morning session lasted from 8:30 until 12:00, with a 15 minute recess period between 10:00 and 10:15. The afternoon hours ran from 1:00 until 3:30, with the recess period between 2:15 and 2:30. The big bell in the bell tower was used to signal the start of both sessions. The rope which activated this bell ran down from the tower, thru the second floor, and on down to the first floor, in the extreme southeast corner of the building. Thus, it could be reached, and the bell rung, from either floor.

At 8:15 each morning, Mr. Wilford rang the big bell, which was loud enough to be heard for several miles, tolling it 8 or 10 times. This was "first bell". At 8:20 the tolling was repeated. This was "second bell", and anyone who was still some distance from the school had better start to hurry, because he was in danger of being

tardy, which, at Sibley, was a cardinal sin. At 8:25 the bell was tolled again. This was "third bell", and at this point anyone still outside the school, went in, put his hat and coat in the cloakroom, and took his place at this designated desk. At exactly 8:30 a loud electric bell, known as the "tardy" bell was rung. This signaled the start of the morning session. The electric bell was also used to announce the beginning and ending of each recess period, as well as the ending of each school session. At 12:45, the ringing of the big bell thru the 3 stages was repeated exactly as it was in the morning, with the tardy bell being rung at 1:00. All bells were rung by Mr. Wilford, and were timed by him on his nickel-plated Ingersoll watch, which was kept in the breast pocket of his bib overalls, and which was kept secure by means of a heavy black shoe-lace, doubled, which looped first thru the hasp on the stem of the watch, and then thru a button hole in the overalls.

The ringing of the program bells, and the timing of them, was just one of the incidentals of Mr. Wilford's job. Of primary importance during the winter months was the furnace, which, in addition to being coal-fired, was also hand-fired, and, as such, required shaking down and ash removal very early in the morning, stoking at a couple of times during the day, and a final "banking" of the fire late in the evening. This factor alone, during the months of November thru March, must have expanded his normal 8 hour day to about 16, and his work week from five days to seven.

In the winter there was snow to be shoveled and sidewalks and steps at the two entrances to be kept clean and free of snow and ice. Mr. Wilford kept a number of brooms, about 7 or 8 at each entrance, and every kid was required to take a broom, sweep both of his shoes or boots free of snow on all sides, and then give the soles a good wiping on the cocoa mat, before entering the door. To the best of my knowledge, the kids were very conscientious in following this rule. These winter-related duties were, of course, in addition to his normal janitorial routine of sweeping, dusting, sanitary maintenance of the washrooms, etc., which was always accomplished on a daily schedule.

For Mr. Wilford, the spring months, as well as the months of early autumn, were probably the least burdensome of the entire school year. Extra duties during these months consisted mainly of keeping the playground equipment in good repair, establishing and enforcing discipline on the school grounds, and in meting out punishment (always verbal) to any violators.

The story of Mr. Wilford would not be complete without relating how he handled one of the most unusual tasks ever assigned to him. During the very cold winter of 1924, an outbreak of smallpox occurred which threatened to sweep the entire country. To prevent the possibility of a disastrous epidemic, the Federal Government decreed that all school children in all organized school systems everywhere in the United

States, were to be vaccinated with an anti-smallpox vaccine. The government was to supply the vaccine, and to meet all costs of the program. Scheduling of the program, and the actual vaccinating, was, of course, to be done at the local level.

The day scheduled as "vaccination day" at Sibley, arrived. The morning was bitterly cold. The doctor arrived at the scheduled time, bringing with him all the necessary materials: vaccine, needles, sterilizing materials and a large carton of sterilized protective caps.

These caps were made of celluloid, (the forerunner of all modern plastics) they were shaped in the form of a flat bubble, about 1½ inches in diameter, with two tabs, about 1 inch in length, on opposite sides of the bubble. The purpose of these tabs was to permit the protective cap to be taped to the arm, directly over the vaccination point. The bubble portion was perforated with several small holes, to permit some circulation of air to assist in the healing process.

The doctor set up his station in the small office on the second floor, and explained to the teachers exactly how the project was to be carried out. It was to be an assembly-line type of operation. The children were to be sent to the station on a continuous basis, starting with the youngest, in the first and second grades, and proceeding upward. As each child neared the station, he was to roll up the sleeve on his left arm as far as he could, all the way to the shoulder, if possible. In the cases of left-handed children, the right arm would be used. As each child appeared before him, the doctor would first disinfect an area on the upper arm near the shoulder. Second, a small drop of vaccine would be applied in the center of the disinfected area. Next, with a sterilized needle, the doctor would make two parallel scratches in the skin, about ½ inch long, and ¼ inch apart, thru the drop of vaccine. Then two similar scratches, at right angles to the first two, would be made, exactly like the set-up of a tic-tac-toe game. Each child was then to proceed to the doctor's assistant, a registered nurse, who was to tape the protective caps in place over the vaccination, to prevent any scratching, (the spot became very itchy after a day or two) or irritation by clothing, from causing any infection of the area. Everything was set to go — except the doctor's assistant had not arrived. (She never did arrive!)

Time passed. The doctor began to get anxious; he had another school to take care of in the afternoon. Miss Weber, wondering about the delay, checked with the doctor, and was made aware of the situation. She immediately sent one of her sixth grade boys to the basement to locate and summon Mr. Wilford to the office. Within a minute or two, Mr. Wilford arrived on the scene, and the situation was explained to him. He nodded in assent, and, holding up his hands, which were black from coal dust, (he had been stoking the furnace) asked for a few minutes to clean up, and disappeared down the stairs.

In about five minutes he returned, his hands now clean. Giving them one final wipe on the front of his bib overalls, he took his place beside the doctor, and, for the next couple of hours, he applied more than 150 protective caps to a like number of arms of a like number of children, taping each one securely in place with the bubble precisely over the vaccination. Just one more not-quite-routine assignment in the career of Mr. Wilford.

The doctor returned in about 10 days, to inspect the vaccinations. He announced, after the inspection, that all vaccinations had "taken" 100%, and not one had developed any sign of infection. I might add, here, that during the 1924 smallpox outbreak, not one Sibley child contracted the dreaded disease.



My first teacher at Sibley was Miss Canniff, and of her I have just one vivid recollection, and that one is of a very negative nature. In the school year of 1922-23, Sibley had what might be called a No-tardiness Incentive Program. What it meant was that if a classroom (this included both grades and about 40 to 45 kids) could go thru an entire month without one tardiness, then that room could be excused at noon on the final Friday of the month. In other words, a half-day holiday for a tardy-free month. In January of 1923, our room was within a day or two of achieving this goal, when disaster struck. It was a cold morning. Snow had fallen during the night, and the wind had drifted it to knee-deep in many places. Jim Klingel lived a long distance from the school, on West Annapolis St. near Manomin Ave. and the water tower. Jim arrived in school that morning, breathless, his face beet-red from exertion, and — thirty seconds late!

He had tried hard — his exhaustion showed this — but the drifted snow had been just too much. Miss Canniff did not permit Jim to take his regular seat. Instead, she directed him to stand in the corner of the cloakroom, facing the wall, to reflect on his sin of being tardy. Jim did as he was ordered, and spent the entire morning in the cloakroom corner. Noon came, and everyone, including Jim, went home for lunch. Jim did not return to school for the afternoon session. Neither did his brother Tom, who was in the second grade. We found out later that Jim's mother had immediately arranged to transfer both of her boys to the Douglas School. Mrs. Klingel was a determined individual; she had a great amount of respect in the community and she chose not to let the matter rest. One morning, a few days later, our class was greeted by a woman who announced that Miss Canniff would not be returning as our teacher, and that we would have a substitute teacher until a replacement could be found.

About a week later, we were greeted, one morning, by a very pleasant motherly person, who told us that she would be our teacher for the remainder of the school

year. This was Irene Bosserman, the wife of the Rev. Everett Bosserman, who was pastor of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, in the St. Paul's Riverview district. She had been a teacher some years earlier, and had retired from teaching to be married. At the urging of the West St. Paul School Board, she had agreed to teach our classes for the rest of the year. She was always warm and friendly, and was well aware of the old adage, "You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar". Mrs. Bosserman made the remainder of that school year a very pleasant and memorable one.

The departure of Miss Canniff also signaled the end of the "No-tardiness Incentive Program"; we never heard of it again.

September 1923 arrived, and with it the return to school for the 1923-24 school year. In the fifth grade at Sibley there was, that year, some over-crowding. As a result, my brother, Carl, along with a few others, was transferred to Emerson School. There being no overcrowding in the fourth grade, I was to remain at Sibley.

The new teacher for the third and fourth grades was Myrtle Fosberg. She was a rather short woman, not more than an inch or so over five feet in height. She had a round face, with plump, rounded cheeks, which gave the impression that she was plump all over, which she really was not. Miss Fosberg proved to be very adequate as a teacher, and stayed at Sibley for about 9 or 10 years. She was, for the most part, fairly well liked by her pupils. One of her teaching specialties was English. (At Sibley, in those days, it was called language.) She encouraged us to read and appreciate the works of the better known American poets, such as Longfellow and Whittier; also in the reading of the more elementary of the American classics, books such as *Black Beauty* and *Beautiful Joe*. It was here in the fourth grade, that Tom Long and I, in a sort of friendly rivalry, both memorized Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride," in its entirety. I can still remember about 95% of it after 60 years.

Another of Miss Fosberg's strong points was her ability to teach arithmetic. We learned the multiplication tables, learned how to multiply compound numbers, and we learned long division. The latter could not have come at a more opportune time. It was just about this time that my Dad, who was a brakeman for the old Chicago and Great Western Railroad, came home from work one day feeling very dejected. The company, he told us, was giving examinations to senior brakemen, to find qualified men to be promoted to the rank of conductor, which also meant a raise in pay. These exams were to be held the following week. Dad was scheduled for the exams, along with the rest of the senior brakemen, but he knew that his chances of passing were very slim, because of his lack of knowledge of arithmetic. (Dad had left school before completing the third grade, back in 1890s.)

Addition and subtraction he understood, also simple multiplication but long division, he knew absolutely

nothing about. And he knew that there would be problems in long division in the examination.

The following day I brought my arithmetic book home from school. After the supper dishes had been cleared from the table, I put the book on the table, along with some tablet paper and pencils. Dad was sitting in his rocking chair, reading the newspaper.

"Dad," I said, "Come over to the table."

He looked up, "Why?" he asked.

"I want to show you something." I said.

"Show me what?" he asked.

"Long division." I answered.

He laid down his newspaper, and with a very quizzical look on his face, he came to the table, and sat down beside me. For a couple of hours that evening, and again the following evening, we drilled in the rudiments of long division. Dad was a good pupil. With the book for a guide, and me to explain, he learned very quickly. On the third evening, I set up a few fairly difficult problems, which he worked smoothly and accurately. He was ready.

On the day of the examinations, Dad went down to the office, oozing confidence. When he returned, a few hours later, his confidence was undimmed. It was about two weeks before the results were returned, and when Dad got the news he was really elated! He had passed, and with flying colors. Also, and here he gave me a little pat on the back, he had scored very well in the arithmetic portion of the examination. I guess it was really Miss Fosberg who deserved the pat on the back!

There were two items on which Miss Fosberg and her students were in disagreement. Disagreement seems to be too mild a term. Completely at odds, describes the situation somewhat better. One of these items was the pronunciation of the word "pretty". There were 45 of us in the 3rd and 4th grades who had never heard the word pronounced in any way other than to rhyme with "kitty". Miss Fosberg pronounced it to rhyme with "Betty", and insisted that we pronounce it that way also. "It is spelled," she said, "P-R-E-T-T-Y! There is no I in the word. Therefore it is pronounced to rhyme with Betty!"

We did not accept her explanation. To all 45 of us, the word rhymed with "kitty". Whenever the word came up in our oral reading, we pronounced it our way. We were immediately halted and were made to reread the word, pronouncing it her way. It became a war of nerves; a clash of wills. Several of us "did time" in the cloakroom because of it. But we were fighting a losing battle, and we knew it. In the end we capitulated. We pronounced it her way as long as we were in her room, but immediately we were out the door, "pretty" rhymed with "kitty" again.



In the fall of 1923, the teachers of Sibley got together, and decided that one of the things that Sibley

needed most was a phonograph. Some excellent phonographs were being produced by the Victor Talking Machine Company. These were being made especially for school use, and were known as the "School Model". They featured a large laminated wood "Morning Glory" type of amplifying horn, nearly 2 feet in diameter at the large end, which gave this model volume far in excess of anything that ordinary phonographs of the time, could produce. It must be noted here, that electronic sound amplification, as we know it today, was, in 1923, still about 10 or 15 years in the future.

So the phonograph was agreed upon. There remained one rather knotty problem: How do we pay for it? Neither the City, nor the School Board had any funds for items of this kind. Sibley must raise its own money.

In those days, there was really only one way for a school to raise money. This was by means of a paper sale. It was decided, therefore, that Sibley would have a paper sale, and that this would be the granddaddy of all paper sales. Every kid in the school got into the act. First, we bundled up the old newspapers in our own homes, and brought these in either by the arm load, or in coaster wagons.

When these had all been collected, we went to our neighbor's houses, asking for their old papers, and getting whatever was available. Day by day the pile grew. We ranged farther and farther afield, knocking on doors in neighborhoods where the kids went to Emerson; even going into the area served by the Douglas School. If we were asked where we went to school we lied glibly; anything to get the papers. Sometimes we got only a few. Several times we hit the jackpot, getting a coaster-wagon full. By the end of the week, the pile was a veritable mountain, taking up almost the entire first floor hallway, stacked nearly to the ceiling.

Early the following week, the Waldorf Co. truck arrived, along with a couple of workmen. The truck was backed up to the front entrance, and the men spent several hours loading our pile into the truck. A couple of days later we got the good news. We were "Over the top", the sale had brought not only enough to get the phonograph, but there was enough extra to buy a selection of records to go with it. Loud applause rang thru the building when the announcement was made.

About a week or so later, the phonograph arrived, and it was everything that the sales brochure had claimed for it. It was about the same height as the home phonographs or victrolas that we knew of, but the length and depth, about half again as big. The cabinet was made of oak wood, and was finished in a light color, which, thirty years later, would be known as "blond oak". The amplifying horn, of the "morning glory" shape, was nearly 2 feet across, and was made of the same oak wood, laminated, and was finished to match the rest of the cabinetry. A hinged cover could be closed down over the turntable compartment when it was not being used. There was enough room underneath for storage of

the horn, as well as a compartment for storage of records. Like all other phonographs of the era, there was nothing electrical about it at all. The power that turned the turntable was of the spring wound type, and it had to be wound up with a hand crank before each record was played. Because of the great amplifying horn, the volume was loud enough that when the phonograph was placed in the first floor hallway, it could be easily heard throughout the entire building.

Some of the records that came with it were marches by John Phillip Sousa, composed by him, and played by the great military band which he conducted. The favorite of these were *The Stars and Strips Forever*, and *Under the Double Eagle*. These were the marches which were played for our daily recessional march out of the school building, at afternoon dismissal time each day. A couple of minutes before the bell, we were given the order to go to the cloakroom, and don hats and coats. We did this, then returned to the classroom, and stood beside our desks. Thirty seconds before the bell, the phonograph was started, and the sound of march music filled the building. At this point we were given the order, "Mark Time, Left, Right, Left, Right!" When the dismissal bell sounded we were ordered to "March, Left, Right, Left, Right!" We marched out of the classroom, thru the hall, and out the front door, not breaking the march step until we were on the sidewalk in front of the school.

So the day ended on a high, morale-building note for everyone. For everyone, except the students in Miss Fosberg's room. For those poor kids, it was the low point of the day, a time to hang heads in shame. It was here that the *second great dissention* between Miss Fosberg and her students took place.

When Miss Fosberg gave the order "Mark Time, Left, Right, Left, Right," we did not do as everyone else did, namely, pick the left foot straight up, return it to the floor, pick up the right foot straight up, return it to the floor, etc. Quite otherwise. When Miss Fosberg said left, we *kicked* left foot straight out in front of ourselves, about 12 or 14 inches, returned it to the floor, then *kicked* the right foot out a similar distance, returned it to the floor, etc. These kicks always being made with the toe pointed. We felt silly doing it this way. We looked silly and we knew it. Miss Fosberg looked extremely silly as she demonstrated it in front of the class. Also, it was very difficult to maintain one's balance while doing this. We protested vainly. Miss Fosberg shook her head, and told us firmly that this was the *way* to mark time. All we could do was hang our heads, and hope that no outsider looked in the door while we were so engaged.

The "pretty-pritty" argument paled in comparison to this. This was beyond comprehension; no one in the world (or so we thought) would mark time in the manner that Miss Fosberg insisted upon.

The explanation came for me about 6 or 7 years later. I was in a theater seeing a movie about World War I. Suddenly, there came on the screen a scene, showing a

company of soldiers of the German Imperial Army, complete with the iron spike helmets. The soldiers were standing at attention. Their commander gave an order, and the men began to mark time. Each man *kicked* first his left foot, then the right, directly out in front of him, exactly as Miss Fosberg had insisted that we do. The commander gave another order, and the soldiers marched on down the street, the kicks much more exaggerated, now that they were marching. As the scene faded from the screen, the light dawned. Somewhere in the past, one of Miss Fosberg's forebears, perhaps an uncle, maybe a grandfather, had been a soldier in the German Imperial Army, and had marked time and marched in that manner.

What she had tried to teach us was nothing less than the *goose step* as practiced by that army, and later, in the late 1930s adopted by Hitler for his Elite Corps.

The phonograph was moved from one room to another each day, with each room having it at least one day per week. On these days, we would sometimes have a "music period" when we did nothing but listen to the records. One of our favorites was *The Clock Store*. This was orchestra music, played before a background of dozens of clocks which ticked on and on, in a great variety of pitch and volume. The music gradually worked up to a climax, at (on the record) 12 o'clock, when all the clocks began to strike, chime, ring, bong, and cuckoo, all in one great crescendo! Another record in a similar vein was *The Hunt in the Black Forest*. This one was a very fast-moving music, and featured, at its climax, the sound of guns, and the loud baying of what must have been a large pack of very large hunting dogs. One record that I remember not very kindly, was of Sir Harry Lauder, singing old Scottish Ballads in a brogue so thick that no one, neither student, nor teacher could understand a single word.

Those students whose families had phonographs at home were urged to bring favorite records to school on music days, that they might be heard and shared by the rest of the class. This was done quite often.

About every second week, we would have a session with the exercise records. These records featured a peppy masculine voice, which first explained the various arm, leg, or body exercise that we were to do, then led us thru the motions to the measured cadence of "one—two—three—four". All being done to the sound of *Over the Waves* or *The Skaters Waltz*, in the background. Everyone enjoyed the exercise sessions, and those of us who tended to be class clowns had an opportunity to act up a bit while Miss Fosberg pretended to look the other way.

So, one of the most memorable school years at Sibley gradually came to a close, and one Friday morning, in early June, 1924, we goose-stepped, and marched out the door of Miss Fosberg's room for the last time.

Summer vacations were always looked forward to during the winter months, and yet, after the first few

weeks of freedom, everyone began to have just too much time on his hands, and the days began to get boring. In those days, people traveled very little, and scarcely anyone ever took an away-from-home vacation. Kids who were in the 10-years-and-older group usually found odd jobs with the truck farmers in the area, picking beans and peas, or perhaps strawberries or raspberries, in season. Usually, by the last week in August, the average kid had had enough vacation, and was pretty eager to get back to school again.



There were always plenty of outdoor activities that centered around the school. In the morning, before "third bell", during the morning recess period, and again during the corresponding periods of the afternoon, the kids were free to enjoy themselves as they wished on the school grounds.

There was playground equipment at hand to keep lots of kids busy. In the front yard of the school, was a merry-go-round, kid powered, of course, large enough to accommodate about 15 or 16 kids. On the west side of the yard were teeter-totters, 4 of the conventional kind, plus a special one which I will describe farther on. In the back yard there were swings in the west side, and on the east side, a Maypole.

When one thinks of a Maypole, one envisions a gaily decorated pole, about 12 feet high, festooned with about a dozen pastel colored ribbons. At the end of each ribbon is a young girl, dressed in a matching pastel dress. The girls then skip around the pole, to the tune of some light skipping-around music, until the ribbons are all wound around the pole, and the girls are all gathered about the bottom of the pole. Not so with Sibley's Maypole.

Sibley's Maypole was a Maypole in name only. It consisted of a steel pole, about 5 inches in diameter, 15 or so feet in height, with the bottom firmly imbedded in concrete. At the top was a hexagonal frame, made of sturdy angle-iron. This frame was attached to the top of the pole by means of some kind of a bearing, which was kept well lubricated, so that the frame rotated very freely on the pole. From each point of the hexagon a chain hung down. At about 5 feet above the ground, each chain branched into 2 smaller chains, with short pieces of pipe fastened between them, to form handles. These handles were about 3 or 4 feet off the ground. The idea, of course, was that the kids could hang onto the handles and skip and swing themselves around the pole. The planners of the playground had not taken into consideration children's, natural inclination to take something of a mild nature and transform it into something quite lethal.

It was the Sibley girls who invented the most popular game for the Maypole. This game was known variously as "Swing", "Sail", or "Ride", and it had all

the safety features of a game of Russian Roulette. One kid would be the swingee, and 5 would be the swingers.

The swingee would hold his handles at high as he could reach, and as far away from the pole as he could. While he was in this position, two or (even better!) three of the swingers would with their chains, cross under his chain, so that they were now positioned ahead, instead of behind him. At a shouted signal, the 5 swingers charged ahead as hard as they could, to get the upper frame moving as quickly as possible. As it gained speed, the swingee would take one big leap outward and upward. By this time the 5 swingers were running fast, and centrifugal force would take over the job. The effect was similar to being the end man on an ice-skating crack-the-whip. The swingee's chain would go almost to the horizontal, his body about 12 or 13 feet off the ground, and the ride would continue until he had gone about 2 or 3 orbits around the pole. Then it would be the next kid's turn, and the process would be repeated.

I don't remember anyone falling off at the apex of his flight, although there were some who let go a little too soon, in their eagerness to return to earth. Also a few who chickened out at the beginning, and never took that initial leap. Of course there were always plenty of skinned knees and elbows, plus an occasional sprained ankle or wrist, but I cannot recall a single instance of a serious injury, although the potential was certainly there.

The other piece of playground equipment which had all the necessary ingredients for disaster was the special teeter-totter, which I mentioned a few paragraphs earlier. This item sat by itself in the west side of the school yard. Nothing else was located close to it, and for a very good reason. The plank of this teeter-totter was like any other, with a place to sit at each end, and a handle to hold onto. However, unlike the others, it was mounted on a steel pedestal about 3 feet high, the bottom of which was firmly anchored in concrete. The plank was attached to the pedestal by means of a hinge-swivel arrangement, (always well lubricated) which permitted the plank to be rotated horizontally, as well as up and down. The idea, of course, was that 2 kids, of about equal weight, could go up and down in the usual way, plus, by using their feet and legs to push sideways, could make the plank go around in circles, as well.

This was not quite the way the Sibley kids used it. The way it was really used is as follows: two kids of about equal weight would mount the plank, and grasp the handles. Two other kids, not necessarily matched for weight, but having good sturdy legs would be the pushers. The pushers stood on opposite sides of the plank, near the hub, and start pushing. As the pushers increased their speed, the ends of the plank speeded up at a really fantastic rate. Here, again, centrifugal force made itself known. Soon the kids on the seats, fearful of losing their grip on the handles would start to yell at the pushers to ease up. Naturally, the louder the yelling, the

harder the pushers pushed. The usual result was that one, or often both of the kids on the plank would lose his grip on the handle and go sailing off into space, sometimes for a considerable distance. One boy, about 10 years old, and weighing about 65 pounds, sailed all the way out of the school yard, over the fence, and ended up in the back yard of Haider's store. This, I believe, was the all-time distance record.

Being a pusher, however, was not without its accompanying perils also. If a pusher lost his footing, and fell to the ground while the plank was rotating at a fast clip, he had best remain on the ground right where he was, for to try to get up and attempt to escape the whirling plank, was to invite decapitation, or a skull fracture, or at least a big lump on the head, depending on the speed of the rotation.

Here, again, despite the few square yards of skin lost over the years from knees, elbows, shins, and various other parts of the anatomy, plus a few teeth knocked out, and a few fingernails torn off, I cannot recall any really severe injuries having occurred.

Just south of the playground equipment area was the softball field. (It was known as kittenball, then. The name softball did not come into use until about 1930, or thereabouts.) To the best of my knowledge, this was a regulation-size softball field; at least it seemed so to the 12, 13, and 14 year olds who played on it. During the good weather months of April, May, and early June, as well as the autumn months of September and October, there was a perpetual game of three-o-cat going on. Or perhaps, more properly, a perpetual series of daily games, since each morning started out with a new game, but with essentially the same players.

To those of you who may have forgotten, three-o-cat is very similar to the conventional softball game, except that there are no teams, and no innings. Every man plays for himself only, and for the batters, the object is to keep one's position as a batter for as long as possible, the scoring of runs being only incidental to the main objective.

The line-up for a three-o-cat game consisted of 11 players, distributed as follows: 3 batters (1st up, 2nd up, and 3rd up), catcher, pitcher, first, second, and third basemen, (there was no shortstop), left, center, and right fielders. The line-up was determined at the end of each day's game by "hollering for position". At the first sound of the end-of-recess bell each afternoon, all the players hollered for the position each one wanted for the next day's game, such as, 1st up, 2nd up, 3rd up, catch, pitch, and so on. It was strange that only the voices of the 8th and 7th grade kids could be heard during this hollering. A 6th grade kid might holler his lungs out for 1st up or 2nd up, but when the game started the following morning, the 8th graders, as usual, would be the ones swinging the bats, with the 6th graders, as usual, relegated to the outfield. Needless to say, nobody ever hollered for one of the outfield positions.

When one of the batters was put out, either by being thrown out at one of the bases, or by being tagged out, that batter then went out to right field, the right fielder moved over to center, and so on, with all of the other players advancing one rung up the ladder. Since the batters were always the biggest and best players, this did not happen very often, so the outfielders were almost certain to spend the entire day's play shagging grounders, with little hope of making it to the charmed circle of the batters box by that type of advancement.

There was one other way to get to be a batter, and that was to catch a fly ball. If one of the infielders or outfielders caught a fly ball, he then immediately changed places with the batter who had hit it. This, again, did not happen too often, especially in the case of the outfielders, since they were the littlest kids, and had a good deal of trouble hanging on to anything hit their way.

Once in a while an out-seam ball would be used in the game. This type of ball was stitched together with the seam raised about one-eighth of an inch over the ball surface. This gave the smaller kids something to hang onto, with the result that a few more fly balls were caught and a few more of the littler kids had a chance to bat.

As autumn gave way to fall, and the weather grew chillier, the daily game of softball gave way to a game more suited to the colder temperatures. This was a game played by teams. The size of each team was not too important, anywhere from 2 to 20 per team was not uncommon, as long as there was a reasonable balance between teams. This game was known as "Shinny" and had certain elements that were similar to the game of hockey. For one thing, a stick was required. Just about any kind of a stick could be used, a handle from a worn out broom or rake, a lath, or, the best kind, was one cut from a tree branch, with another branch growing out at about 45 degree angle. Properly cut, this could be made to closely resemble a hockey stick. It was always preferable to have the heavy end on the bottom.

Shinny could be played on just about any surface. Frozen ground was excellent, fresh snow was not good at first, but after about 15 minutes play by a couple of good sized teams it became nicely packed, and added a pleasing uncertainty of footing to an already zestful game.

Two goals were set up on opposite sides of the field about 100 feet apart. Rocks were used to mark the goals, with an opening of about 4 feet between. There were no sidelines boundaries; none seemed necessary. A Carnation Condensed Milk can, the small size, was used for a puck. There were very durable, and were always in plentiful supply.

At the outset of a game, the puck (milk can) was put into play without ceremony; it was simply tossed into the middle of the field and every player on both teams started whaling away at it. The idea, of course, was to knock it thru the opposing team's goal. Failing that, it

was perfectly permissible to whack a member of the opposition of the shins with the heavy end off your shinny stick, at the same time yelling, "Shinny on your own side." Of course, many more shins were whacked than goals scored. Since the teams were usually quite large, very often in the heat of the contest, identities were lost, and teammates were whacking teammates as often as they were the opposition.

There was one unwritten rule that was carefully observed. That rule was, "No whacking above the knee."

There was no set penalty for violation of the rule, however if you got careless and hit someone above the knee, it automatically gave the victim license to do the same in return, and he would almost always swing one at your head. Since, in the wintertime, everyone wore long underwear, as well as long, heavy stockings, the shins were much better protected than they would have been in the summer.

Another wintertime game, somewhat less strenuous than Shinny, was known as "Cut-the-pie". This game could be played only after a fresh fall of snow. The kids would tramp out a large circle, perhaps 60 or 70 feet in diameter, in the new snow. Then another path would be tramped out bisecting the circle into 2 equal parts. Following that, another path, at right angles to the first, would be made, dividing the "pie" into 4 equal parts. A game of tag was then played, in which all players had to remain on the paths. Anyone who jumped out into the unmarked area was immediately disqualified. This game was good for about one morning only. By noon, so many footprints were in the area, that the "pie" was just about obliterated.

I cannot recall any skating activities associated with Old Sibley, and I do not believe any skating rinks were flooded there until after the Harmon Field was established on the area adjacent to the Sibley grounds.

With the waning of winter, and the emergence of spring, many new activities appeared on the Sibley scene. For the girls, it was rope jumping, and hopscotch. For the boys, marbles and tiles. On rare occasions, there would be an interchange of the sexes into the games. Marbles, at Sibley, was a game more akin to bowling, than it was to the conventional style of marble-playing. For the most part, 2 types of marbles were used, Emmies and Crockerys, (also known as Cuggies, or just plain Crocks). Emmies were very pretty marbles, made of glass, and made to simulate a natural agate. They came in all colors, blue, green, red, yellow, with sworls, generally white, running thru the interior. Emmies ranged in size from 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter, the size having a direct bearing on the game.

Crockerys were ugly marbles. They ranged in size from 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter, like Emmies, but here the similarity ended. They came in 2 colors, a dull blue, and a dismal brown. In addition, Crocks were never truly round, like Emmies. I have always had a feeling that Crockerys were never intended to be marbles, per se,

but were some kind of by-product of the pottery industry.

Crockerys could be bought at the corner store for as little as 5 for a penny, whereas Emmies, depending on size, could cost as much as a nickel each.

To start a marble game required a minimum of 2 players, although as many as 7 or 8 could participate. A boy would place an Emmie on a sidewalk division line, and then he would sit down on the sidewalk, about a foot behind it, with his legs outstretched, and spread wide to form a "V". If the Emmie was about 5/8 inch in size, it was a 4 square Emmie, and those desiring to bowl at it would back up until their toes were behind the line of the 4th sidewalk square. Then they would proceed to bowl Crockerys at the Emmie. This continued until someone hit the Emmie with his Crockery, at which time, the one who hit it won the Emmie, and the one who had originally sat down, reaped the profit of all the Crockerys that had been bowled at it.

Upon occasion, the Emmie was not hit, even though four or five kids might be bowling at it. If this occurred, and the bowlers had run out of Crockerys, or desire to keep on, then the sitter was entitled to pick up his Emmie, along with his harvest of Crockerys, and have a substantial profit at absolutely no cost to himself. On the other hand, the Emmie might be hit by the 3rd or 4th Crockery bowled at it. This was considered tough, but was all part of the game.

The establishment of the number of squares an Emmie could command was directly dependent on the size as well as the quality of the Emmie. A 1/2 inch Emmie with plain coloration, was never worth more than 2 squares. With nice, pleasing coloration, it would be worth at least 3. 5/8 inch Emmies were always worth at least 4 squares. Especially nice ones were worth at least one square more. 3/4 inch Emmies, being rare, could always command at least 6 squares, and, if particularly colorful, as much as 7 or 8.

The square rating of an Emmie was based on the normal 2 foot square of the standard sidewalk. On sidewalks of different line configuration, adjustments had to be made. For example, on Sibley's walk leading up to the front steps, the squares were about 4 feet. Here, the rating had to be halved. This was always accomplished by mutual consent of the players, and never caused a problem.

The "overboard" rule was an interesting one. When a game was in progress, there were usually as many kids watching as were playing. Any Crockerys that were bowled and missed or hopped out of the "V" of the legs of the boy sitting down, were "overboards", and could be legally grabbed by anyone of the bystanders. Thus, a boy might come to school in the morning without any marbles, and by diligently grabbing "overboards", could go home at the end of the day with a substantial haul of Crockerys.

Occasionally, someone would show up with an "Aggie" or a "Steele". An "Aggie" was a true agate,

which, through a complicated grinding process, was ground into a perfect sphere. These were truly beautiful marbles, and, even in the impoverished days of the early 1920s, might cost up to 50 cents for one of about 5/8 inch size. A "Steele" was a steel ball which had originally been intended to be a ball-bearing in some large piece of machinery, but which had never reached its intended use. Both "Aggies" and "Steels" were very difficult to evaluate, in relation to the normal Emmies and Crockerys, and, as a result, their use in the games was distinctly frowned upon.

The game of "Tiles" was a direct spin-off of the game of marbles. Somewhere on the lower West Side of St. Paul, (I never did find out where) was located a factory which manufactured the kind of ceramic tiles which were used for bathroom floors in the 1920s. The tiles that found their way to Sibley, must have been rejects, for some reason or other. They were divided about half 5/8 inch squares and half 3/4 inch hexagons. About 90% of them were white, and the rest colored in a variety of colors, green, blue, red, yellow, etc. Naturally, the white ones became Crockerys and the colored tiles became Emmies. The two sizes and shapes of the Emmies dictated the square rating. All the rules of the marble game, including the "overboards are free" rule were applied to the tile game.

By the time the boys had tired of the tile and marble games, and the girls had become fed up with hop-scotch and rope skipping, spring would have arrived. The ground would be sufficiently dry for the daily three-o-cat game to be resumed. The swings would be swinging, kids would be sailing around the Maypole, and the year would have come a full circle.



At Sibley, and I am sure this was also true of any other "semi-rural" school during the same era, the classes tended to get smaller as they progressed from grade to grade. For example, a class of 25 children, entering the 1st and 2nd grade room, might be reduced to 22 by the time they entered the 3rd and 4th grade room, and might be further reduced to 20 by the time they entered the 5th and 6th grade room, and so on.

One of the reasons for this, and a very sobering one, was the number of very serious illnesses, some fatal, which occurred every winter. Diphtheria, scarlet fever, meningitis; these were dreaded diseases which could strike anyone, but most particularly children. Medical science of the 1920s was just beginning to make breakthroughs. The smallpox vaccination program of 1924 was a giant step. Inoculations against diphtheria were still 15 years in the future; against polio-meningitis, 30 years. There being no penicillin, no antibiotic drugs, some of the respiratory illnesses could become very serious, even fatal. Today, these would be checked by a couple of dozen pills. During the three and one-half

years that I attended Sibley, there were three deaths of school-mates from one or the other of the aforementioned diseases. All of these were in the 4th grade or lower. There were also several others, who had been so very ill for such a long time, that it became necessary that they remain out of school for as long as a year or more.

Just about forgotten now are the "Quarantine" signs which appeared every winter, signs which announced the presence on the premises of one of the communicable illnesses. MEASLES, MUMPS, CHICKEN POX, SCARLET FEVER, DIPHTHERIA, were the common ones. When a doctor (they made house calls in those days) found evidence of one of these illnesses, he was required to report this to the County Health Officer who would then send someone to tack the proper sign to the front of the house. It meant, then, that those within the house were to remain there for the duration of the quarantine period, and no one not belonging there was to enter. The only exception was the bread-winner of the family, who was permitted to go back and forth to his job, regardless. The quarantine period usually lasted about 10 days. I am sure that just about everyone who lived in West St. Paul in those days at one time or another had one of those signs on the front of his house.

The second reason for the attrition of classes was failure. Failure meant to fail to be promoted to the next grade. The word flunk did not enter our vocabularies until high school. At Sibley, you did not fail in one subject for a term. At Sibley, if you failed one subject, you failed them all, and for an entire year. There were no special classes for those who had difficulty in learning; there was no remedial reading. At Sibley, you had better just get with it, or you would be back in the same seat again, next year. Failure, of course, had different effects upon different people. To some kids, it was an incentive to get cracking so that it would not happen again. In others, it created a loss of interest that grew upon itself.

There was a boy in the 4th grade, Frank. Frank was a raw-boned, lanky kid. Not only was he the biggest kid in the 4th grade, he was also the biggest kid in the school. Not many 4th grade boys find it necessary to shave. Frank shaved twice a week. On the days that Frank did not shave, he looked like he should have. The teacher placed Frank in the rear desk, with a vacant desk in front of him, so that he could let his legs and feet stretch up the aisle, on either side of the vacant desk. Frank had failed the 4th grade twice. He had also failed several times in lower grades. Frank had absolutely no interest in what was going on in the schoolroom, he was simply waiting it out. By law, he was required to attend school until age 16. Also by law, the city was required to provide education for him until age 16. The magic number finally arrived. Frank simply announced that, since he would be 16 the next day, he would not be seeing us again. He then took a couple of pencils from his desk, leaving everything else, and, with the dismissal bell, marched out of our lives forever.

Several years later, I heard that Frank had gotten a job with the United States Postal Service, driving a mail truck. This may, of course, help to explain why, instead of 2 days, it now takes 5 or 6 days to send a letter from West St. Paul, to South St. Paul, and instead of 2 cents, it now takes 20 cents, and rising [in 1986].

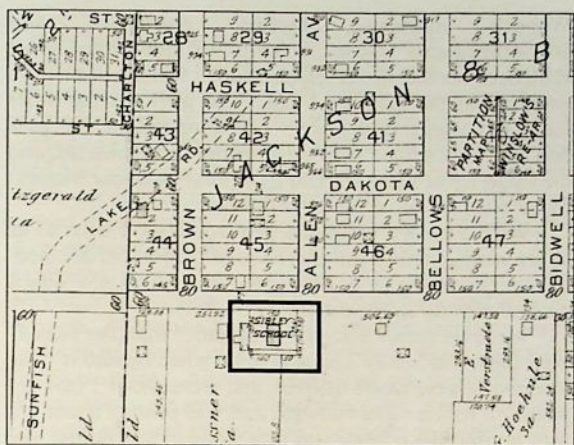
Frank was not, however, an isolated case. There were also the Rundle brothers, Joe and Ed. Joe and Ed were about a year apart in age, but just about dead even in learning ability. When I first enrolled at Sibley, Joe and Ed were marching in and out of Miss Gunderson's 1st and 2nd grade room. Three and one-half years later, when I was transferred to Emerson, the two of them were going in and out of the 3rd and 4th grade room, having advanced one grade in the three years that had elapsed. By that time, they were just about the biggest kids in the school. I am sure that neither of these boys attended school beyond his 16th birthday.

Also, there was Annie. I got to know Annie when we were together in the 4th grade. This was Annie's second year in the 4th grade. She had also spent two years in the 3rd grade, and, like Frank, was thoroughly fed up with school work, and paid little attention to what was going on. Unlike Frank, however, Annie was very talented in one item on the school agenda. Annie was excellent in penmanship. She was able to do the writing exercises in the Palmer Method book exactly as the pictures showed them to be done. While the rest of us were struggling with the system of rolling the arm on the muscles of the forearm, making weird smears and many ink blots in the process, Annie wrote effortlessly, her letters and words beautifully formed, and with never a blot or smear.

At the end of our 4th grade year, Annie was promoted to the 5th grade, along with the rest of the class. I am sure that Miss Fosberg was only too happy to turn her over to Miss Weber. Annie's tenure in the 5th grade was, however, short lived. About two months into the school year, Annie announced to one and all that she was leaving school "to get married". Since Annie was still about a year short of the required 16 years of age, this raised a question of the legality of her leaving school. The School Board, however, in a wise and monumental decision, agreed to waive the 16 year requirement in Annie's case, thus paving the way for her leaving school, and her forthcoming marriage.

Of course, West St. Paul being a growing community, there was a constant influx of new faces into the schools. This factor more than offset the attrition of failures, and kept the classrooms filled to capacity. It also kept Mr. Klinker busy shifting students back and forth between Sibley and Emerson schools, in a never-ending battle to keep the school population in balance.

When we recently promoted 5th graders entered the 5th and 6th grade realm of Miss Weber for the first time, we did so with considerable misgivings. Older kids had told us tall tales about Miss Weber, what a tough teacher she was. That she was an ogre who ate little 5th grade



The 1916 atlas shows Sibley's location on Bernard Street in relation to Bidwell, Bellows, Allen and "Sunfish Lake Road".

kids for lunch. Nothing could have been further from the truth. What we found instead was a warm and generous person who looked forward to the challenge of teaching each new class of 5th graders as they were promoted to her room.

Miss Weber presented an imposing appearance at the front of the classroom. She was tall, fairly slender, with raven-black hair. While she was no beauty, she was nevertheless a very nice-looking woman, with regular features, a warm smile, and a pair of twinkling blue eyes that revealed a good sense of humor.

Miss Weber was one of two great teachers that I encountered in my years in the West St. Paul schools. The other being of course, Clara Krueger, of the Emerson School. Both of these wonderful women were completely dedicated to their teaching profession, and to the children that they taught. Their careers closely paralleled each other. They both taught thru the 1920s, the '30s, the '40s and well into the 1950s, before retiring. In many cases, including my own, they taught, in the 1940s and '50s, children of the children that they had taught in the 1920s.

Miss Weber's approach to the teaching problems were different than any we had previously experienced. While other teachers (so it seemed to us) looked for reasons to *fail* their students, Miss Weber looked for reasons to *promote* them, and if the reasons were not there, she did her utmost to see that they got there. In the 1920s, kids had reading problems, the same as we have now in the '80s. Miss Weber's solution to this was unique, direct, and certainly effective.

In our fifth grade, there were 3 or 4 students who were outstanding in their reading ability. About a dozen or so read at a fair to good level. The remaining 5 or 6 were those whose who could read only haltingly, one

word, or even one syllable at a time, and without understanding. The 3 or 4 outstanding readers, were designated as "reading monitors". When the time came for reading study, each monitor took 3 or 4 of the average group, went off to a corner of the room, for "group reading study". Here, each monitor acted more or less as a teacher, doing no actual reading himself, but following along, as each of his charges read in turn, assisting, explaining, and correcting where necessary. The monitors reacted to this challenge very positively. They were proud to be so chosen, and each one did his very best to do a good job. This left Miss Weber with the 5 or 6 "hard core" cases, and she was able to concentrate her entire effort on these few, making at least average readers out of them. I am sure that no one was ever promoted out of Miss Weber's room without being able to read and with complete understanding.

Since I spent the entire 5th grade school year, as well as half of the 6th grade in Miss Weber's room, these two grades tend to run together in my memory. Some of the events that I recall as having occurred during the 5th grade, may well have happened in the 6th grade, and vice versa.

In the 5th and 6th grades, our knowledge of arithmetic was greatly expanded. We learned fractions, and the applications of them. We learned all the fundamentals of the decimal system, as well as its corollary, the figuring of percentages. We learned how to deal with problems such as: "Farmer A sows 40 acres of wheat at a seed cost of X dollars per acre, and reaps a harvest of 25 bushels per acre, which sells for \$1.25 per bushel. Farmer B plants 80 acres of corn at a seed cost of X dollars per acre. The corn crop gives a yield of 20 bushels per acre, which Farmer B sells for \$.75 per bushel. Which farmer has gained the greatest profit on his investment, and what are the percentages that each farmer has gained." Problems such as these became easy for us with Miss Weber's instruction.

The study of English was, at Sibley, known by two different titles, Grammar or Language. In the Grammar portion of the study, we learned the parts of speech, how to identify nouns from verbs, adjectives from pronouns, where and how to use prepositions and conjunctions. We learned how to construct sentences, and how to use basic punctuation. The study of grammar was, of course, continued on an ever-expanding basis thru our remaining grades and up to and including our junior year in high school.

The Language part of this study, was the study of literature, both poetry and prose. Miss Weber had a particular fondness for these studies, and did her best to instill a similar feeling among her students. At her recommendation, we all read Mark Twain's great classics, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. Also, about this time I read and enjoyed the Booth Tarkington books, *Penrod*, and *Penrod and Sam*, among others.

In poetry, we read and enjoyed in particular the works of Longfellow. Especially interesting were: *The*

Village Blacksmith, The Wreck of the Hesperus, The Childrens Hour. These three were memorized verbatim by most of the class. Also memorized, were some of the poems of Whittier, among them were the very nostalgic *In School Days*, and certain selected stanzas of Whittier's extremely lengthy work, *Snowbound. The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers*, to which I cannot recall the author, was learned, and recited during the Thanksgiving season. As the Christmas season approached, we learned Edgar Allan Poe's *The Bells*, and another (author unknown to me) entitled, *The Bells of Christmas*. These latter two were often recited in unison by the entire two classes during the last few minutes before dismissal on the final few days before Christmas vacation. Miss Weber encouraged those of us who might be interested, to try our hands at the writing of verse. I submitted a few. The very first one, which I remember word for word, was written while I was in the 5th grade, and went exactly like this:

The Brook
There is a brook, a-flowing down,
Past the hill, and past the town.
Swiftly it flows, and you can send
Boats down to its very end.

The last line was not particularly well conceived, since brooks seldom just end, but enter into, and become part of a larger stream, or watercourse of some kind. Still, Miss Weber gave me an "A for effort" on my first verse.

If anyone has, up to this point, gained the impression that all was sweetness and light between Miss Weber and her pupils in general, or between Miss Weber and myself in particular, please be advised that this is quite far from the truth. One great stumbling block, or bone of contention, between us, was the second of the "Three Rs", writing. More particularly, *Penmanship According to the Palmer Method*.

In the earlier grades, up until the middle of the fourth, I had acquired a small amount of skill in handwriting. True, it was a rather round, childish type of writing, a combination of finger and wrist movements, but it was legible writing. I could read it, the teachers could read it, anyone who had the ability to read, could read it.

Then, about halfway thru the fourth grade, came the force-feeding of the Palmer Method of Penmanship. Page after page of "ovals" and "push-pulls" were ground out, or rather rolled out on the muscle of the forearm. Somewhere near the same time we were introduced to the intricacies of writing with pen and ink. In the face of this double-barreled onslaught, my meager writing ability collapsed like a punctured balloon. My handwriting became an illegible scrawl, ink smeared, and liberally punctuated with an assortment of ink spots, blots and fingerprints.

During my stay in the 5th and 6th grades, my ability in the Palmer Method improved only slightly, despite Miss

Weber's numerous threats, entreaties, and encouragement. Also in spite of numerous short sentences served in the cloak room. Most of the boys fared about the same as I did. The girls, on the other hand, did a great deal better. For some reason, the girls had better coordination of the arm and hand muscles, and the majority of them learned to write the Palmer Method fairly well. Most of the boys did not.

What a boon a ball-point pen would have been to us as we struggled thru the exercises of the Palmer Method. Of course, in the mid 1920s, the ball point pen was a quarter-century in the future.

Whoever said, "The pen is mightier than the sword" must have had Sibley's pens in mind when he said it. The pen points were made of steel, and were about 1 and 1/4 inches in length. The rounded end was pushed about 1/2 inch up into the bottom end of a wooden pen holder, the two parts together becoming a complete pen. The sharp end was split up the middle for about 1/2 inch, with the split ending in a hole punched thru the pen point. This hole acted as an ink reservoir, holding a drop of ink, and feeding it gradually down the split, so that, properly used, about eight or ten words could be written with one dip of the open into the inkwell. Improperly used, it spelled disaster. If too much pressure was applied on a push or thrust stroke of the pen, the point would dig into the paper, and, as more pressure came, it would break loose and the ink supply being held by the pen point would snap out and create an irregular pattern of small ink drops across several square inches of paper. This always meant, - start over.

Another idiosyncrasy of these pens was their ability to scrape off a tiny bit of the surface of the paper as one wrote along. The scrapings gradually built up into what was locally known as a "goober". If the "goober" was not removed, it would continue to build up until the written line became very wide, even resembling the type of writing which we do today with a marking pen. This style of writing was, of course, unacceptable. All in all, the pens which we used at Sibley were not much improvement over the goose quill.

The inkwells were located in the upper right-hand corner of each desk, just to the right of the cut-out slot where we laid our pencils, to keep them from rolling down and off the desk. The level of ink in the wells had to be maintained at the proper level, which was about 2/3 full. Any less than this, only about one or two words could be written with one dip of the pen, any more than the required depth, the lower end of the penholder would become covered with ink, which would then be transferred to the writer's fingers, thence to the paper, or to the writer's clothes or face. In other words - it became messy.

One of the sixth grade boys, Frank Eberhard, was a master of the art of filling inkwells, and it was he who Miss Weber called upon about every other week, to check and refill the inkwells. The ink refill bottle was kept on

a shelf in the cloakroom. This was a large bottle, about a quart in size. The top of the bottle was fitted with a rubber cork or plug, through which two metal tubes protruded. One of these tubes was straight, the other curved to about 90 degrees. In filling an inkwell, Frank held his forefinger pressed to the end of the straight tube, while he tipped the bottle until the curved tube was poised directly over the center of the inkwell hole. He then removed his finger from the straight tube. This permitted air to flow into the bottle, which, in turn, permitted ink to flow out of the curved tube, and into the inkwell. When the prescribed level was reached, Frank replaced his finger on the air inlet tube, thus closing off the flow of ink. Any stray drops which escaped during the process were immediately wiped up. Frank operated in a very efficient manner, and the entire process required only a few seconds per inkwell.

Frank always followed the exact same procedure. At Miss Weber's signal, he walked into the cloakroom, picked up the ink bottle and wiping cloth from the shelf, then proceeded out the back door of the cloakroom, across the back of the room to the first aisle on the west, or fifth grade side. He then proceeded up the aisle, filling inkwells as he went. When he reached the front of the room, he crossed over to the second aisle, and worked his way back, and so on; the entire operation taking about ten minutes.

The one time that the inkwell-filling was not routine was on the day that Frank wore a new pair of shoes. These shoes had extremely thick soles, and large bulby toe caps, and were of the type that we called "policeman's" shoes. As Frank walked, the shoes clumped – loudly; they also squeaked – both of them. By the time Frank had picked up the ink bottle, and had clump-squeaked his way across the back of the room, the kids in that area had begun to titter. As Frank made his way up the aisle, the clump-squeaking punctuated by the pauses at each desk, the tittering gave way to very audible giggling, and Frank's neck and ears began to turn a bright rosy red. As he started down the next row, Frank tried walking on tiptoe. While this softened the clumping somewhat, it did nothing to quiet the squeaking. Also, it made the situation even more laughable, since Frank now looked like someone doing a crude imitation of a ballet dancer. The entire room was giggling by now; even Miss Weber had trouble suppressing her merriment, and several times had to bring her handkerchief to her face to hide it.

To Frank's everlasting credit, he finished his job (and in near record time) even though his face, neck and ears were glowing a bright, rosy red. By the time he returned to his seat, the laughing had pretty well spent itself.

Thereafter, Miss Weber always took a quick look under Frank's desk, to see what footwear he was wearing, before giving him the order to fill inkwells.

As I recall it, the sixth grade was the last grade in which the heavy pressure for learning the Palmer Method

was used. By that time, those who had the ability to learn it, (mostly girls) had already done so. During the seventh and eighth grades, we were encouraged, but not required, to use the Palmer Method. Those of us who would never be able to write by that method, (mostly boys) were allowed to write by whatever means we chose, as long as it was fairly legible.

Also, by the latter part of the 1920s, fountain pens began to be mass produced, and become much cheaper in price. As a result, more and more kids began to use them, and the inkwell-dipping style of writing began gradually to phase itself out, to the regret of no one.



One of the minor subjects on which we were graded was also one of the more difficult to teach. This subject was physiology, also known as hygiene. The teaching of this subject consisted mostly of encouraging each pupil to form habits of personal cleanliness: face washing, hair combing, brushing of teeth, taking of baths, etc. In regard to the latter, it must be remembered that West St. Paul, in the mid-1920s, was still largely an agricultural area, just beginning its emergence as a suburb of the city of St. Paul. Many of the city's streets existed only on paper. Very few streets were graded any farther south than Bernard Street. This meant that relatively few of West St. Paul's citizens knew the luxury of city water and sanitary sewer service. As a result, a large portion of the population still "enjoyed" outdoor plumbing. Consequently, the ratio of bathtubs per capita was extremely low. In fact, it is doubtful that, in the area served by Sibley School, there were more than 25 or 30 bathtubs.

Most West St. Paul families followed the time-honored system of the Saturday night bath. This was done, usually in the kitchen, in a round galvanized wash-tub placed on the floor in the middle of the room. The water was heated in tea-kettles and pails on wood-burning or kerosene-burning stoves. In most of the homes that were located south of Bernard Street, the water had first to be pumped by hand from the outside well. In the winter, this part of the job was, in itself, a sizable chore.

Families with just 2 or 3 kids, usually worked out the bath situation without any particular problems. However, in larger families, with 5 or 6 or more children, it became somewhat more complex. It was just not practical, especially in the wintertime to heat enough water to bathe each child separately. It was, therefore, a common practice to bathe 2 or 3 kids, one at a time, but all in the same water. Mothers, faced with this situation, usually started by bathing the littlest kids first, reasoning, of course, that the smaller skin area of the littler kids would tend to contaminate the water the least. By opposite reasoning, the smaller kids were usually the dirtiest, so, by either way of reckoning, things tended to

level themselves out. I was fortunate in that, being in a family of only 2 kids, I never had to face this problem.

In the teaching of hygiene, the greatest stress was put on the care and brushing of the teeth. This was something that was discussed and stressed just about every day. Miss Weber even went so far as to compose a little rhyme which she taught to her classes, and had the students recite in unison every day. It went exactly like this:

“Brush your teeth both morn and night,
And they will shine so pearly bright.”

Or

“Brush your teeth both morn and night,
Until they shine so pearly bright.”

Both versions were used, and were considered correct.

It was just about the middle of the 1920s that dental hygienists began to advocate an up-and-down method of brushing teeth, rather than the old side-to-side method. (Sixty years later, in 1984, the present generation of dental hygienists tell us that the up-and-down method is harmful to the gums, and advise a return to the old side-to-side system.)

One day during my stay in the 5th grade, Miss Weber showed the classes an advertisement brochure which had been mailed to her from a company that manufactured toothbrushes. This company, the North Ridge Manufacturing Co., claimed to have developed a new style toothbrush which made the new up and down brushing technique very easy to do. Their special introductory offer, which Miss Weber was showing us, offered these toothbrushes, in large quantities, such as for an entire school, at the ridiculously low price of five cents each! A toothbrush for a nickel!

Thus began *the great toothbrush scam of 1925*. Although the word “scam” was not coined until the 1980s, it describes perfectly what happened here.

There were in the 5th and 6th grades, a few kids who did not own, nor had apparently ever owned a toothbrush. These kids had teeth which were a kind of greenish yellow in color. It was at these few that Miss Weber took particular aim, although, the entire enrollment of Sibley had to be included in order to get the special introductory price. A toothbrush for a nickel sounded like a great bargain. In 1925 toothbrushes were not really mass-produced. There being no plastics, the handles were usually made of either wood or bone, into which the bristles were laboriously inserted. Even in those depressed times, the price of one was about 25 or 30 cents. So – a *toothbrush for a nickel* became a battle cry!

A week was set aside to give every student time to get his nickel turned in. At the end of the week, all money was gathered together from all four rooms of Sibley. Any nickels not turned in, were made up for out of the purses of the four teachers, and the toothbrush order was placed.

In due course of time a large carton was delivered to Sibley. The toothbrushes were individually packaged in a non-transparent wrapper. With a great deal of ceremony, each room was dealt its quota of the packaged brushes, and, in turn, each child had one placed upon his desk. I can still hear Ann Schreckenbergs’s dismayed voice as she opened hers, “Why – It’s a little bottle brush!” Which is exactly what it was.

The brushes were made of a piece of wire which was bent back upon itself. A row of bristles about were then placed between the halves of wire, at the looped-back end. At the end opposite the bristles, a round wooden handle, with a lengthwise hole drilled in it, was pushed on over the twisted wire. The entire assembly was about 6 inches long, with bristles covering the first 2 inches, a gap of 2 inches of twisted wire, and the handle covering the remaining 2 inches.

The instructions sheet which accompanied each “toothbrush” instructed the user to: “hold the bristles firmly against the teeth, then rotate the handle between the thumb and first two fingers of the hand. This will impart the desired up-and-down motions against the teeth.”

Needless to say, there were four red faces on the teachers of Sibley, and Miss Weber, being the prime mover of the project, had the reddest face of all.



One subject which was universally enjoyed by all the kids, both girls and boys alike, was, strangely enough, music. Music meant, of course, singing, and the singing was of the acappella style, since we had nothing to accompany us other than Miss Weber’s pitch pipe. There was, I believe, a piano in the Sibley building, kept in Miss O’Brien’s room, but its use was limited to very special occasions.

If I remember correctly, our songfests, which today might be called sing-a-longs, were held usually on Fridays, during the last hour of the school day. Of course, there were other days and other times of day when we sang, but the really enjoyable times were on Friday afternoons. Song books were passed out to every student, little brown-colored, paper-backed books entitled, *I Hear America Singing*.

I can still see Miss Weber standing at the front of the room, an imposing figure, pitch pipe in hand. She raises the pitch pipe to her lips, blows a note: Fuuuuuuuu – The entire class responds, singing: Doooooouuu – Miss Weber makes a gesture with her hands, and we are off and singing. Generally it is Miss Weber who has chosen the first one or two songs to be sung, but after that it was strictly a request program. A girl raises her hand. Miss Weber nods in her direction. “Let’s sing *My Country ‘Tis of Thee*,” the girl says, giving also the page number. We sing the song. At its conclusion other hands are raised a boy says, “Let’s sing *Marching Through*

Georgia, page 29.” We sing that song. At its finish, more hands are raised. One of the hands belongs to a very bashful boy. Whose family has only recently migrated to the United States from some central European country. Miss Weber nods toward him.

“Let’s sing the one about Special Skiis,” he says. Miss Weber looks puzzled, “You don’t know the name of the song?” she asks. The boy shakes his head, his eyes downcast. “It’s about Special Skiis,” he says. The class is beginning to giggle. The boy looks miserable, sorry that he dared to raise his hand. Other hands are up and waving. Miss Weber ignores them. There is a short pause, then she announces, “I am going to choose the next song.” She thumbs through her song book. “Let’s all turn to page 42, *America the Beautiful*.”

She gives the starting gesture, we all sing, “Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain.” Halfway through the opening line, the bashful boy is beaming, and in a loud stage whisper he says, “That’s it! That’s the one!”

Miss Weber smiles. The whole class smiles, and we all try to sing just a little bit better than we had before. More songs are sung, and all too soon, it seems, the clock has reached almost to closing time, and we have just time enough to go the cloakroom for our hats and coats before the dismissal bell. Almost reluctantly, we leave the building, most of still humming to ourselves as we go.

Many of the songs that we sang in 1925 were almost a reflection of our country’s 150 year (at that time) history. *Yankee Doodle*, commemorated our declaration of independence from England and the subsequent Revolutionary War. *The Star Spangled Banner*, at the time unofficially our national anthem, (it did not become official until an act of Congress declared it to be so in 1931), celebrated our defeat of the British attempt to retake our country in the War of 1812. It was just as difficult to sing then as it is now and many people felt (and still feel) that *America the Beautiful* would have been a better choice.

During the first half of the 19th century, and up until the outbreak of the Civil War, much of the music that was sung and enjoyed by the American people were songs of Stephen Foster. Foster composed the music, and wrote the words as well, to nearly all of his songs. There were a few of his lesser known works, written when he was nearing the end of his career, which he wrote in collaboration with a lyric writer. Among his best were the four beautiful and nostalgic plantation songs: *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Old Black Joe*, *Massa’s in the Cold, Cold Ground*, and *Old Folks at Home*. (The latter one known also as *Swanee River*) These songs were very popular with us at Sibley, and scarcely a songfest went by without one or more of them being sung. These beautiful songs retained their appeal for just about one hundred years, but seem to have pretty well disappeared during the civil rights movements of the last three decades. The only one that seems to have survived is *My Old Kentucky*

Home, which is sung publicly once a year at the annual running of the Kentucky Derby.

During approximately the same period of time, the “nonsense” songs also were popular. A couple of these were written by Stephen Foster: *Oh! Susanna*, and *Camptown Races* (also known as *Doo Dah*). Another one was *Turkey in the Straw*, although at Sibley we sang different words to that tune, and knew it as *Old Zip Coon*. Strangely enough, it was while we were kids at Sibley, that the “nonsense” songs began a return to popularity that was to last for a couple of decades or so. From the 1920s there was *It Ain’t Gonna Rain No More*. This song went on and on interminably. Any time a group of kids started singing this one, new verses were added on the spot, limited only by the ability of the singers to rhyme words. Another song from the ‘20s was *Barney Google*, although in this one, the original words were pretty much adhered to. From the 1930s there were: *I Faw Down and Go Boom*, *Three Little Fishies*, *The Hut Sut Song*, etc. From the 1940s: *Mairzy Doats*, *Chickery Chick*, among others. Needless to say, none of these latter-day “nonsense” songs were ever sung by us at Sibley.

The Civil War left us a great legacy of songs. Many of these were sad and mournful, almost dirge-like. Others were peppy, swinging marching songs. Undoubtedly, the most significant song to come out of that was Julia Ward Howe’s *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The great and inspirational words which she wrote, were set to music of a marching song, *John Brown’s Body*. This song, in its turn, was a set of war-inspired words, set to the music of a still older religious revival meeting song, titled (approximately) *Say Brother, Will We Meet Again Upon That Other Shore?* At Sibley, we sang a great many of the Civil War songs. *Tenting Tonight*, and *The Vacant Chair* were of the sad variety. *Marching Through Georgia*, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again*, and *Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean* were of the more cheerful type.

World War I did not leave us too much in the way of music. About the only songs that I recall from that war were: *Over There*, and *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag*.

Hidden in several places in our song book were a few of the real classic songs, under different names, and with grade-school words written for them. It was not until later years that we recognized them for what they really were. The song that we sang as *The Sunshine of Your Eyes*, turned out to be *O Sole Mio*. One that we knew as *One Fleeting Hour*, became *Baccarole*, from *Tales of Hoffman*.

Our song fests were certainly among the most memorable hours that we spent in the school room, and during them, we learned to really appreciate and enjoy music.



Holidays were always observed at Sibley, even the minor ones. The first one to occur each school year was Columbus Day. While not a holiday in the sense that we were out of school for the day, it was none-the-less an important day in our history, and was observed as such. Every October 12, or the school day immediately preceding if the 12th happened on a week-end, we had a study and discussion of Christopher Columbus and his great accomplishments. We learned that he had the theory that the world was round, and that one could reach the East by sailing West, a theory was not accepted by his peers; how he finally gained the attention of Ferdinand and Isabella, the King and Queen of Spain, and received their financial backing which enabled him to make his famous voyage of discovery. Since we, of Miss Weber's room, were very much a poetry-oriented group, someone always either read or recited the Columbus poem. I cannot remember the correct title to this poem, although I suspect that it may be *On! Said On!* All that I can remember of the poem itself are the last couple of lines which go:

"It grew. A starlit flag unfurled!
He gained a world, he gave that world
Its grandest lesson – On! Sail on!"

Halloween, next in order of occurrence, was not really celebrated very much at Sibley. We did, of course, decorate the room with orange and black cut-outs of pumpkin faces, black cats, and witches, but the main celebration of Halloween took place after school hours, in the evening, and should be, in itself, another story for another time.

Armistice Day, November 11 was the anniversary of the ending of World War I, in 1918. This was an out-of-school holiday, and was celebrated a day or two before November 11. There was always a patriotic program, the singing of war-time songs, and the recitation of patriotic poetry, such as *In Flanders Fields*. It always seemed remarkable to me that the war ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. During the 1920s, World War I was known as "the war to end wars". However, with the advent of the World War II, Armistice Day lost a great deal of its meaning. Following the Second World War, it was changed to Veterans' Day, to honor veterans of both wars. It is now one of several flexible-date holidays which are always celebrated on Monday.

Thanksgiving Day was one of our favorite holidays. Not only was it a two day out-of-school holiday, and a day of festivity itself, but it was also an advance herald of Christmas, which followed in just about one month. Our celebration of Thanksgiving was always held on the preceding day. There was always a review of the Pilgrim story, including the voyage of the Mayflower, the landing at Plymouth Rock, the establishment of Plymouth

Colony, and the celebration of the first Thanksgiving. Sometimes little playlets or skits were presented, depicted one or more of these events.

These programs also included singing of appropriate songs. The one of these that I remember best was, *Over the River and Through the Woods*. There were a couple of other songs about preparation for Thanksgiving, enumerating all the good food that would be eaten at dinner, and all the commotion that the day brought. One of these was sung to the tune of *Turkey in the Straw*, and the other to *Marching Through Georgia*. I am just about 100% certain that Miss Weber wrote the words to both of these, since I cannot recall every hearing them sung anywhere but in her room.

Poetry was also either recited or read. Best remembered among these was *The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England* by Felicia D. Hemans, beginning:

"The breaking waves dashed high,
on the stern and rockbound coast."

All in all, Thanksgiving was a festive time at Sibley.

Christmas, of course, was the greatest holiday of the year, not only for its great religious meaning, and all the gayety of the celebration, but also for the fact that we had a lengthy vacation from school. Christmas vacation always lasted until a day or two after New Year's Day, so, depending on the arrangements of the calendar, it always was at least 10 days, and sometimes even two weeks, in length.

Our celebration of Christmas began about the second week of December. We began rehearsing all the well-known Christmas carols: *Silent Night, O Come All Ye Faithful, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Joy to the World*, and others. In the 1920s, there was never a voice raised in protest that the religious meaning of these songs rendered them "unconstitutional" to be sung in school. We also sang the Santa Claus songs, such as: *Jolly Old St. Nicholas, Up on the Housetop*, among others. Of course, there was also poetry. As I mentioned earlier in the story, *The Bells of Christmas*, and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Bells* were recited in unison by the entire class each day just before the closing bell. The latter poem represented the only encounter of my entire life with the word "tinnabulation".

About December 15th, we had the name exchange. Each child wrote his or her name on a small slip of paper, and folded it so the name could not be seen. The slips were then all put into a box, mixed up, and then each one picked out a slip, being sure, of course, that he did not draw his own name. This was for the gift exchange, which would take place on the last day before Christmas vacation. The monetary expenditure for these gifts was limited to 10 or 15 cents, and was strictly adhered to. A variety of small trinkets or toys within this price range was available in any of the corner grocery stores in the

area, or, if one managed to get downtown in St. Paul, there was a very large selection in either of the five and ten cent stores, Woolworth's, or Kresge's.

A few days prior to Christmas closing, the Christmas trees were put up and decorated. There was a tree in each of the four rooms at Sibley. The decorating was done by the children of each class. Although there were a few manufactured ornaments for each tree, most of the decorations were home-made and handmade by the kids. Strings of popcorn, laboriously sewn one kernel at a time, and draped around the tree looked very festive. The same was done with strings of cranberries. Many-colored paper chains also festooned the branches. Also some of the tin-foil tinsel. There were no lights on the trees; strings of colored lights were just beginning to be available in the stores, and very few families in West St. Paul had them, even for trees at home.

The day after the tree decorating, all the kids brought their gifts for the exchange, all gaily wrapped, and placed them under the tree. Then, on the final day, we had our Christmas program. All the carols were sung one more time, the poems were recited again, and the gifts were distributed. There was a lot of giggling, many "thank you's" called across the room, and, of course, a few sounds of disappointment. School was dismissed about an hour earlier than usual, and all of us left the building amid shouts of "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas".

Since New Year's Day occurred during our Christmas vacation, it was not celebrated as a separate holiday.

The birthdays of President Lincoln and Washington were out-of-school holidays which were observed alternately, February 12 being the holiday one year, and February 22, the next. However, both birthdays were celebrated each year in programs befitting the occasions. For Lincoln, songs of the Civil War period were sung, always including *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Someone would read Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, and Walt Whitman's great poem, *O Captain! My Captain!* would be recited or read.

For Washington's Birthday, we sang *Yankee Doodle* and another song known as *Washington, Brave Washington!* which was sung to the music of *Maryland, My Maryland*. There was always a review and discussion of many of the events of his life. This review always included the cherry tree incident, with a great deal of emphasis being put on the fact that Washington never told a lie. One year I recited Longfellow's famous poem, *Paul Revere's Ride*, which I had memorized in the fourth grade.

Both of these birthdays have in recent years, been combined into what is now known as Presidents Day, one of the flexible-date holidays, and always celebrated on a Monday in mid-February.

Valentine's Day fell between the Presidential birthdays, and, while it was not a holiday, it was none-the-less a fun day. About a week prior to February 14, a

cardboard box was prepared, decorated with red and white crepe paper, and with a slot cut in the top. Then, during the ensuing week, every-one brought his Valentines to school, and deposited them in the box. Most of the Valentines were of the home-made and hand-made variety, some of which were ingeniously and cleverly cut out with scissors, and colored with crayons. Many more were of the penny variety, which could be bought in any of the corner grocery stores. Occasionally, some boy might be so enamored of one of the girls, that he might get carried away to the extent of spending a whole nickel on just one Valentine.

On the afternoon of February 14, the last part of the day was taken over by distribution of the Valentines. The box was opened, and two boys, appointed by Miss Weber as "mailmen", went up and down the aisles, delivering Valentines. Everyone received a satisfactory pile of them, there was a lot of giggling, a great deal of blushing, and everyone had lots of fun.

The arrival of Easter brought us our week-long spring vacation. While we did discuss and review the story of the Resurrection in the classroom, the main part of the celebration of Easter was left to the churches and Sunday Schools.

The last holiday of the year was Memorial Day. Originally called Decoration Day, it was established in 1866, as a day set aside to decorate with flowers and flags, the graves of those who died in the Civil War. After World War I, the dead of that war were also included. About that time, the name of the holiday was changed to Memorial Day, and it became a day to honor and memorialize all those who had died, either soldier or civilian. In former years, it was always celebrated on May 30. Now however, it is one of the flexible-date Monday holidays. In the 1920s, many people, especially the older ones, still called it Decoration Day.

The Memorial Day that I remember best, was the one in 1925, since it was observed in an unusual manner, the only time I remember it being done that way.

That year we were to have our school program on May 29, and then the following day, there was to be a march of all the school children of all West St. Paul Schools, from their separate schools to Riverview Cemetery for a ceremony there.

On the afternoon of the 29th, all of the kids of Sibley assembled in Miss O'Brien's 7th and 8th grade room. The desks in the room were larger than any of the others, and could accommodate two of the smaller kids in each. The rest of us, from the upper four grades, and including the teachers and Mr. Wilford, all found standing room at the back and both sides of the room, leaving the front of the room open. Miss O'Brien's desk had been pushed to one side, so that in the center of the space, there were just three chairs, which were for our honored guests. When all of us had found our places, and the room had quieted down, our three guests were ushered in, and introduced.

The first one of the trio was a very old man, 90 years

of age. He was rather stoop-shouldered, and wore a long gray beard. This man was a veteran of the Civil War. He was dressed in a long, dark-blue coat, and wore a black, wide-brimmed felt hat, which had the GAR emblem on the front of the crown. GAR, of course stood for Grand Army of the Republic. This was the veteran's organization which was organized following that war, the equivalent of what the American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars were to World War I and II.

The second man was much younger, not more than forty years of age. He was dressed in the khaki-colored uniform of an officer of World War I, and wore several very impressive looking medals on his chest. His bearing was very military, and he acknowledged our applause with a crisp salute.

The third member of the trio was already known to us. He was Mr. Hiland, who had been at Sibley for one or two previous Memorial Day programs. Mr. Hiland was a very patriotic citizen of West St. Paul, who always took part in this sort of observance. Being in the middle or late fifties, he was much too young to have been a Civil War veteran. However, his father HAD been a Civil War soldier, and for today's occasion, Mr. Hiland had dressed in his father's dark blue uniform, and exhibited a very erect and military manner.

The program opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. In those days the Pledge was done somewhat differently than it is now done. We placed our right hands to our foreheads in a military salute. And began to recite: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag" at the word "Flag" we moved our right hands from our foreheads, and pointed our hands directly at the flag, which was always alongside and above the doorway, while we continued with the remainder of the Pledge. With the rise to power in Germany, of Hitler and his Nazi party during the 1930s, it was found that the Nazi salute of "Heil Hitler", with the right arm extended outward and upward, bore a great resemblance to that portion of our Pledge. Therefore, at that time, our Pledge was changed to what is now done, with the right hand placed over the heart, and kept there during the entire recitation.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, everyone remained standing, while we sang *The Star Spangled Banner*. Those who had seats then sat down, while we sang the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *Tenting Tonight*. This was one time when we had piano accompaniment to our singing. One of the eighth grade boys, Willard Holmstine, was a fine pianist and did the accompaniment.

One of the older girls, from the seventh or eighth grade then recited the poem *The Blue and the Gray* by F. M. Finch, which ended:

Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the judgment day,
Love and tears for the Blue,
Tears and love for the Gray.

Next, one of the eighth grade boys recited Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. Following that, we all sang, *Over There*, in honor of the younger of our visitors. At its conclusion, he rose and acknowledged his thanks with a few words of a patriotic nature.

Mr. Hiland then rose to give the main address. He was not a particularly well educated man, and his speeches were rather homespun in content. Nevertheless, what he may have lacked in oratorical ability and vocabulary, he more than made up for in patriotic fervor, and his speeches were always inspirational. Also, he knew just when to stop, which he always did before the audience became restless. After his talk, there was a moment or two of silence, then everyone sang *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, and the program was ended.

On the morning of May 30, we began to assemble in the school yard at about 9:00. Since the day was a school holiday, participation in the march was completely voluntary. However, with the exception of the kids who lived way out on the Sunfish Lake Road, we had a high percentage of our students in the march. Many parents also joined in the march, my mother among them. There was a great sense of patriotism in America in those days.

The cynicism and disillusionment which was to arise during the last year of the decade, and continue through the depressions-plagued Thirties, had not yet begun to surface.

It was a rather long walk from Sibley to Riverview Cemetery, at least 2 1/2 or 3 miles. We got under way at about 9:30, marching east on Bernard Street. A small group joined us at Stryker Avenue, and, as we got to Livingston Avenue, our ranks were more than doubled by the addition of the Emerson School children. The march continued east on Bernard Street to Oakdale Avenue, where we turned left, heading toward the north. Along Oakdale Avenue we were joined by other groups of children, these from the McClung School. At Annapolis Street we turned east again for the remaining few blocks to the cemetery. By the time we arrived there, our ranks must have numbered at least 250.

We marched through the cemetery gate, to the highest part of the knoll, then assembled in a large semi-circle, with the open end nearest the gate. Within a few moments, a flag-bearer and a bugler marched through the gate. Following a few steps behind them was Mr. Hiland, who was to be the master of ceremonies for the occasion. He was again dressed in his father's Civil War uniform. Following Mr. Hiland was the Honor Guard, four uniformed men, carrying rifles.

While everyone stood at attention, we all sang *The Star Spangled Banner*. Mr. Hiland then offered a short prayer. Following that, we sang the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *Tenting Tonight*. Next, Mr. Hiland gave a short address, similar to the one of the previous day. Then the Honor Guard moved to the center, and, at Mr. Hiland's command of: "Load" "Ready" "Aim" "Fire", fired a three-shot salute into the air. The bugler then

came to the center, raised his bugle to his lips, and played "Taps". We all stood at attention until the sound of the bugle had faded away, then, led by the color bearer and the Honor Guard, we all filed quietly out of the cemetery gate, and made our various ways to our homes.

This turned out to be the last Memorial Day that I was to celebrate at Sibley. At the midpoint of the 1925-26 school year, in January of 1926, I along with a few others, was transferred to Emerson School, where I completed the grade school portion of my education.

I left Sibley with mixed emotions. There was, of course, the natural reluctance to leave all the good friends and fine teachers with whom I had been associated for 3 1/2 years. On the other hand was the anticipation of meeting new friends, and being part of a larger group, a few of whom I already knew. During the next couple years, I visited Sibley several times, after school hours, to continue my friendship with the teachers there, especially Miss Weber.

Looking back over the past 60 years, I felt that the years I spent at Sibley were among the happiest times of my childhood. To me, it was a great privilege to have been part of the group who attended that little red-brick schoolhouse on Bernard Street.

My story of *School Days at Old Sibley* would not be complete without a few words about Mr. Klinker. In the mid 1920s he must have been about 60 years of age, a very scholarly and conservative person. I am sure that in his younger days, he must have been a rather handsome man. Over the years, however, the skin had drawn rather tightly over the bone structure of his forehead, and cheek bones, giving the upper part of his face a rather gaunt, hawk-like appearance. His hair, while still dark, was beginning to get very thin, and what remained, he combed sideways, back and forth across his balding pate, to create the illusion that there as more there than there really was.

The word conservative also describes his manner of dress. He always wore very dark suits, charcoal gray or midnight brown in color, and always complete with vest. He wore white shirts, with the high stiff collars which, while beginning to lose popularity, were still worn by many prominent men, including President Coolidge and Hoover. A narrow dark necktie, either black or dark brown, completed his costume.

I am sure that he must have been a very lonely man. His home was in Lake City, Minnesota, but he went there only at vacation times. During the school year, he roomed in one of the downtown residential hotels in St. Paul. He had no car, but rode the streetcar to and from West St. Paul. When his duties required him to go back and forth between his headquarters at Emerson and other schools within his jurisdiction, he did so on foot.

Perhaps 3 or 4 times during the school year, Mr. Klinker would visit each of the class rooms at Sibley. While there, he would sit very quietly at the front of the room to make his observation of the class at work. If

someone happened to whisper or giggle, he would snap his fingers loudly, and point an accusing forefinger at the offender. In this manner, he gained the reputation of being somewhat of a tyrant.

My first personal contact with Mr. Klinker came about purely by chance. It was the early fall of 1925. I was taking a street-car to go downtown in St. Paul, getting on the car on Annapolis and Stryker Avenues, where the car made their turnaround. As I entered the car, I saw Mr. Klinker sitting about half-way back in the car. I was about to take one of the other seats, when, surprisingly, he smiled at me, and, with a gesture of his hand, invited me to sit beside him. I did so very timorously, but he immediately put me at ease by starting a conversation that lasted the entire trip downtown. He asked questions about places I had been, things I had seen, and experiences I had had, and seemed very interested in my answers. It was a pleasant conversation. As I said, "Goodbye," and left the car, I realized that he was not a tyrant at all, but rather a lonesome man, seeking friendship and companionship, even that of a 10 year old boy.

I had one or two other occasions when I had personal contact with him during the time I attended Emerson School. Also, on one occasion, when I was a sophomore in high school, returned to Emerson to visit Miss Krueger, I met and visited with him as well.

Mr. Klinker's tenure as Superintendent ended following the school year of 1929-30. It was then that he retired, and Herb Garlough, a fine man, and a great friend to two generations of West St. Paul kids, was appointed to the position of Superintendent.

I have a very keen recollection of the friends with whom I attended Sibley. A few, namely: Robert Kuehn, Alvin Jarvis, and Robert's sister, Della, have been and still are, lifelong friends. There are many other that I remember, a few of whom I have met occasionally over the years, but most of whom I have not seen since those days, I seem to have an ability to think of a name, and then, in my mind, a youthful face will appear to match that name, no face any older than it was 60 years ago.

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