



Township of Melancthon
Heritage Advisory Committee
One Room Schoolhouse Project
S.S. #15
Riverview School
By: Member Dennis Scace



Background

The first school was built in 1892. The first teacher was Mr. Fraser and the last teacher was Bernice Cunningham. They taught grades 1 through 8. The school closed in 1966.

The exterior was cedar shingle on pine boards. There was a large bell on the roof that was rarely used. Instead, a smaller handheld bell was used to announce the end of recess and lunch. In the beginning, water was carried from the river but eventually they had a drilled well and pump for water.

As you walked into the sun porch of the school and up the two steps, you entered the cloakroom. It was about 10'x40' with two entrances to the main room at each end. Next to each was a one-hole back house toilet.

On the wall between the two doors (East & West entrance doors), two rows of coat pegs, one row at about 5' off the floor and a second row about 3' and above the top and bottom row a small ledge for your lunch box.

As you entered the well-lit 40'x40' main room there were three large, tall windows on each side. There were three rows of 12-inch globe lights that hung down on chains from the high ceiling. There were hardwood floors that were worn in places and plaster walls. On the back wall was the first aid cabinet and the big water crock, and a large cup shelf above the small basin. About 8' in front of the water crock was a large wood stove 2'x5' surrounded on 3 sides by a sheet metal guard. The front was open to the back of the school. The school was always warm in the winter and cool in the spring and fall. The Caretaker, Lorne Middaugh, made sure the wood box was full for the teacher and the fire was lit. There were eight rows of wooden and cast-iron seats and desks, big ones and little ones. On each side of the main room between the two front windows was a 4'x8' blackboard. The front had wall to wall slate black boards with printed and written alphabet above. The Teacher's desk was slightly left of centre.

If you entered the East door, to the right was the teacher's room, a 10'x10' storage for the extra school supplies, board games, plasticene, coloured pencils, crayons, books, telephone and 2" wide by 18" long and 1" thick rubber "strap". I only witnessed it being used once. You supplied most of your school needs,

pens, pencils, paper and notebooks etc. Some textbooks were supplied by the board as well as some art supplies, chalk and wipes.

The woodshed was off limits but sometimes a smoke, a kiss or a hooky happened there.

A Typical School Day at S.S 15

Just imagine getting up in the morning having breakfast, your mom preparing your lunch, setting out to walk to school, some having to walk up to 1.5 miles. If you were lucky, you had a bike, a horse or dad would drive you to school in really bad weather.

You had to be on time, or you would miss the morning play and be marked late. School started at 9:00 am sharp. First Recess was at 10:30 a.m. for 15 minutes, time to go to the washroom and play outside on a good day or inside on rainy or stormy days.

Lunch was 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Second Recess was 2:30 p.m. for 15 minutes

The lessons for the day were on the blackboards up front. You were expected to do your lessons on your own after the teacher had instructed you. Sometimes the older kids would help you if they got their work done.

The subjects studied were Geography, Literature, Math, English, Science, Phonics, History, Music, Reading, Spelling and Spelling Bees. After lunch the Teacher would read one or two chapters from a book of her choice, only if we all worked hard on our lessons.

Recess and Lunch Hour

During recess and lunch hour the games that were played were Baseball, Hockey, Soccer, Football, Tag, British Bulldog, Hide & Go Seek, Leap Frog and War. Everyone had to be outside on sunny days, winter and summer. On days when we couldn't go outside, we would play Chinese Checkers, Snakes & Ladders, Crokinole, Checkers, Hopscotch, Marbles, I Spy and Animal, Vegetable, Mineral.

We had bullies but their rein did not last long, until the rest of the kids dealt with them as a group. Most of the time older siblings and cousins would step in. It was not a good idea to complain to the teacher. Fights were rare and would be over baseball & soccer, no one got hurt very badly, just bruises, black eyes, torn shirts and some four letter words. There was lots of teasing at times, in fun. Girls were equals, the boys needed them for team and games.

New ball teams were picked every day. First pick would be by the best 2 players, a bat would be thrown up in the air by one of the captains and caught half way up. Then each one would put a hand on the bat one on top of the other and whoever got to the top of the bat got first pick.

SS#15 Riverview had the best baseball team, we would play SS #10, #6 & #14. Hockey was a different story.

Additional Activities

The principal would visit the school in the Fall and Spring. They would give a test in the morning before recess and then grade the tests. Sometimes depending on the results, the very clever kids would skip a grade. Riverview had many who skipped and some skipped twice. Then the rest of the day we played baseball and games.

Christmas was always fun, especially getting ready for the concert. Little ones had to sing solo and usually had to memorize a poem or recitation. We all sang Christmas carols. The older kids had at least two plays. We all dressed up in our Sunday best. Santa would come at the end of the evening and hand out gifts and candy from under the large Christmas tree the school kids had decorated. The school was packed, every seat and desk full. It was fun for parents and kids. The Christmas Concert brought all the people of the community together. You were only one door away from help if you needed it, village or countryside.

In June and September, the farm kids sometimes got a few days off to help at home with planting and harvest, no questions asked.

Valentine's Day was a day of teasing and red faces. Valentine cards were given out in the morning, and in the afternoon, we would jump on the bus for the Dundalk arena for an afternoon of skating and fun.

Movie Day happened twice a year. The school would get several National Film Board films and a projector and watch films all day.

Arbour Day was in the Fall and Spring. In the morning all hands cleaned and raked the school yard. In the afternoon we would play baseball against either SS #10, #6 or #14.

We would decorate the school for Halloween and Christmas.

Health Nurse Visits were when all students got vaccinations for Polio, Measles and Tuberculosis by needle and sugar cube. Special mobile trucks took x-rays for Tuberculosis. The needle was always fun to watch, a little rough to take the first time. It was always a good day for playing and fun.

There was one teacher for 35 pupils at Riverview. We had the best teachers you could have wished for. You had to earn a passing grade, or you would have to repeat the grade. This was rare in Riverview, but it was an incentive to do your homework almost every night. Most of the homework was checked or handed in. Daydreaming and window watching happened a lot. If you were bored with your work, you could always watch the other grade's lesson. The workload of the teacher was unimaginable by modern standards. In the 1960's Grade 7 & 8 students would be bused to Dundalk High School every other week on Thursday. The boys would take shop and the girls took home economics.

Graduation, High School & Beyond

When you graduated from grade 8 you had to pass an entrance exam to enter high school. There were no buses to secondary school until 1949. Your family would have to find you a place to board in town, with all of your food provided for you by your family. Highschool was grade 9 to 13.

Young men and women chose to quit in early years and went to work. Grade 10 Grads could apply to all the trades.

Graduates of grade 12 could do almost anything as it was considered a good education. Grade 13 was first year university.

The education we received in Riverview produced a host of leaders. Examples were Teachers, School Board Head, Top Executives, University Professor, College Football Players, Business Owners, Farmers, Police Officer and free thinking soles.