

Bedford Corners Schoolhouse Memories

Growing up on a farm on the Y-Ba-Dam

Last summer PHPS members Tom and Ronda Pollock realized that they were going to be a few miles from Louise Holcomb Eckelbarger Bailey when they attended a family reunion near Emlenton, PA.

With an introduction by Mrs. Donna Best of the Red Brick Inn Bed and Breakfast they paid her a visit on August 19, 2004. And what a treat it was to spend an hour with a lovely lady who had many fond memories of growing up on the farm of her parents Earl and Rose Holcomb on the Yu-Ba- Dam Road in Portville, the Bedford Corners Schoolhouse that she attended as a girl and her experiences as a young teacher. With her permission we taped the conversation. The following is from that conversation.

Asked to recall what the school was like when she attended, Louisa Holcomb Bailey asked if the two doors were still there. The boys entered the school using one door, the girls the other. The doors opened into little rooms where you hung your coats. One vivid memory was when the school had a special visitor. "I can remember when the district superintendent came. He came in so quietly, the latch going down and surprised the teacher. We were all frozen."

Louisa remembered the stove and raised platform, pull down roller type maps and a very small library. They all faced the front of the room. She was surprised when told that the students faced the back of the room in later years.

"Miss Reitz was an excellent teacher. I don't know how she managed all eight grades. It was really something to get all that material in. Amelia Reitz was a very strong, wonderful person. She had good discipline. The children were more obedient than they are today. School was great; you didn't have other places to go. We were anxious to go to school." She said that

the blackboard was up behind Miss Reitz's desk and was used a great deal. "A very economical teaching tool and saved a lot of paper. We had to buy our own tablets so we were conservative. Not like today."



*Louisa Holcomb Eckelbarger Bailey in front of her house
Emlenton, PA, August 2003*

Louisa taught country school in Deer Creek for two years, but had only four grades and eight

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children. Miss Reitz had nearly 20 children to teach. She recalled that there were families with quite a few in each family.

“They didn’t have a kindergarten in those days. They just started reading. The children had to recite in front of the others. You know, they tried to downplay the country school and then they discovered that the younger ones were learning from the older ones. They try to put too much into the schools today that take away from the basics.”

Louisa didn’t remember any lights in the school. “Dark days were really dark.” Her family lived a mile away from the school and didn’t have gas. “We didn’t have running water at the school either. I don’t know where they got the water but that was one of the jobs. Someone would have to get a pail of water.” They had their own cups and a dipper to dip the water out of the pail. She didn’t recall that they washed their hands. They went out the front doors to use the outhouses that were two separate buildings for the boy and girls, boys going out their door and girls out theirs.

“I remember Arbor Day when we went out to the woods, dug up a tree and planted it. That was always a big deal” She said they planted it on the school ground and asked if there were still many trees there.

She recalled a game that they played during recess. “We used to play a game called “Anthony, Anthony Over” the schoolhouse.” They would choose up sides and toss the ball over the schoolhouse to the group on the other side, saying Anthony, Anthony over! “We always looked forward to recess. That was the most important part of the day!”

Louisa talked about other students who attended to the Bedford Corners Schoolhouse. “Dorothy Ryder was a friend of mine. She came from the Deer Creek area. I remember Kristis and Pockalnys.

Louisa said that her nephew Jim Holcomb kept her up on what was happening at the farm. “Several years ago we visited and Jim took us up to the head of the valley and we were amazed at the people that live up there now. There were few people there when we lived there. What a wonderful road now.” She recalled about how busy her parents were. She talked about making maple syrup on the farm and she remembered her Mother’s wonderful lunches. “Mother would poach eggs in the hot syrup and bake potatoes in the oven. She always had a can of her roast beef or pork to go with it and her homemade bread. It was a real treat and she had lot of company too. Every year Mother would let us invite our teachers. She was so busy, working in the woods and trying to be at home to make bread. We never had any boughten bread in our house. She stirred her own sugar to make the maple cream. She had chickens and a garden. I don’t know how she did so much.”

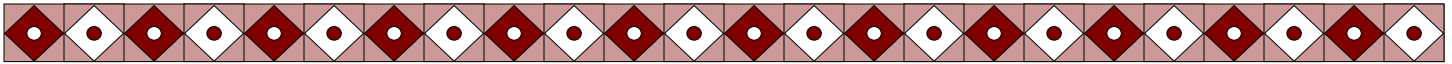
She remembered her Mother making switchel in the summer with vinegar and water and a sweetener. “It’s really thirst quenching on a hot day. I never make it any more. But I have the recipe. Lots of remedies in those days, they seemed to have a cure for everything.”

She vividly remembered when she got her first job teaching at the Deer Creek School. “I had to walk out across a field to Orson Frair who was a trustee of the school and put in my application.” She said that teachers didn’t have as much supervision as they have today. “I had teacher training in Olean under Miss. B____. She pounded a lot into us in one year.

“One of the hardest things I had to do at the Deer Creek School was keeping the fire going. We used coal part of the time and I just didn’t have much luck with coal. I could manage the wood but the coal was a problem for me. Then you had to take it all out.”

Louisa’s education did not end with the

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New York State Teacher's Training. After moving to Emlenton she earned a BS from Clarion State College and later a master's of education from Slippery Rock State College. She taught first grade for 25 years in the Emlenton Elementary School.

Louisa expressed her happiness that her old school was being restored and wished the historical society good luck in their endeavor.

We were very sad to learn that Louisa Holcomb Eckelbarger Bailey, 90, of Emlenton, PA died on November 4, 2003

