

Post on door 25-1
for Aileen

Aileen R. Rubo

Problem Centered Paper

One-Room Schools in Northwestern Adair County, Kentucky

Folklore Fieldwork Class

Dr. Lynwood Montell

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The goal of my research on one-room school houses in Adair County, Kentucky was to learn what a typical school day was like for the children and teachers. On March 14, 1998, I visited Adair County and interviewed Minnie Corbin Rubarts and Ora Lee Jones in their homes, in the County Seat, Columbia.

Minnie Rubarts grew up in Adair County, attended one-room schools as a child, and as an adult, taught at several of these schools. She went on to have other positions such as counselor.

As a child, Ms. Rubarts attended Bull Run School, which was a large weather boarded building, whose foundation was limestone rock. A door on the side allowed you to get underneath the floor. Outside, there was a baseball diamond for the children. Inside, they sat in double seats before the blackboards. A pot-bellied stove, in the center, dominated the room. Her fondest memory of this school was running over a hill to a big spring for cold water. The children would see who could get there first. She also remembers ice skating when the ice was thick enough.

Ms. Rubarts favorite teacher was Faline Balloo. Mrs. Alley Cumbee is another of Ms. Rubarts old teachers. Mrs. Cumbee is still alive and lives in a nursing home in Columbia. Ms. Rubarts' parents thought so much of Mrs. Cumbee, that they named one of their daughters, Alley, after her.

Before going to school, Ms. Rubarts did chores. When her mother was in bed with a new baby, her responsibilities increased. She would get the other children up and ready for school. She would also have to do laundry because she was the oldest girl. Ms.

Rubarts did canning and freezing also. After she got home from school, she usually had to wash diapers at the spring with a big, old, black kettle.

Ms. Rubarts' best girl friends were Francis Pelly and Elizabeth Hutcheson. Ms. Rubarts and her friends would exchange visits when they were children. Francis and Ms. Rubarts exchanged nights because Frances lived farther away. Elizabeth lived just across the field.

The school day started with a roll call, which was answered by quoting a verse out of the Bible. They would receive stars for being at school. Next they went from reading to spelling to writing, then to arithmetic assignments. In the afternoon at Ms. Rubarts' school, they would have language, science, art, and social studies. Geography played a big part of social studies. This included a lot of map drawing.

Ms. Rubarts and her siblings rode a horse to school in the winter. They would pack corn for the horse to eat for lunch. They would tie him up to a tree behind the school building while they were in class. Ms. Rubarts recalled a bad experience on that horse. One day a mischievous boy, named Benjamin, came by and kicked Ms. Rubarts horse in the tummy, while Ms. Rubarts and three of her siblings were riding. Ms. Rubarts fell off the back of the horse. She was not hurt too much, but she did not talk to Benjamin, in her words, "for ages."

Ms. Rubarts brought apples to lunch as a rule. They buried these apples in the hill. After taking ripe apples off the trees, Ms. Rubarts' father would then show the children how to mound up the ground. Then they would put straw down inside the hole and fill it with bushels of apples. They would leave a hole where they could reach in and get the

apples out when they wanted one. Over the mound, they would lay some type of roofing shingles to keep the apples dry.

She also brought homemade bread in her lunch, as well as meat. Ms. Rubarts was able to bring canned items from her father's grocery store. This lunch did not differ much from what other students in her school brought. She said that some children did not have the fruit, but they always had good food.

When Ms. Rubarts was a student, the girls would sometimes sit under a tree away from the boys during recess. The boys sometimes picked on the girls, but they were punished. Ms. Rubarts recalled the only time she got a whipping was when she got in trouble over a boy in eighth grade. Joe Collins was flirting by throwing a rubber ball at her. Ms. Rubarts said, "He'd just burn me to death with that big old rubber ball." One day when he threw it at her, she grabbed it and threw it over the fence. There was a rule that if you threw a ball off school grounds into the farmer's field, you were punished. That was the only time Ms. Rubarts, "ever got a lick with a switch."

Ms. Rubarts traveled two miles to school every morning. She recalls the dust being so thick in the summer time that she would be covered with it by the time she got to the school. In the winter time, they wore knee high boots that snapped on and off.

Once, while Ms. Rubarts was a student at school, some children played a prank on her. Joe Collins flirted with her and started writing her love notes. He would stick them under one of the corner posts under the school building floor. The other kids found these notes and started reading them. Another prank the boys played was turning the girls

outdoor toilet over. She said they would have to get the men to come and set it upright back over the hole.

Discipline was mostly making the children stand up at the black board. A few teachers drew a ring on the board and made the child stand still with their nose in the ring for five or ten minutes, never very long. She said the other children would get a kick out of that punishment. Children would also have to write reports or just write a lot for punishment. A few times the switch was used, but not a lot.

The most celebrated holidays at school, according to Ms. Rubarts, were Thanksgiving and Christmas. She said they always had a Christmas program. Children quoted poems and sang songs, and all the parents came to see. This event was for the whole community.

Ms. Rubarts said the school building was also used for revivals and Sunday school. They would also use the school house for family get-togethers. Another social event at schools was pie suppers. The last pie supper that Ms. Rubarts attended was the one where her husband's friends made him pay forty some dollars for her pie. He was older than Ms. Rubarts, so his friends teased him because he was dating her. The typical price paid for these pies, which were carried in decorated boxes, was around five or six dollars. Ms. Rubarts said that the pie suppers were a way of making money to buy things for the classroom.

The school that Ms. Rubarts first taught at was Bloomington. When asked her fondest memory from that school, she recalled it as not being very much fun. She had one especially bad experience. The parents of the children told Ms. Rubarts, when she started

at Bloomington, not to let the children leave the school ground. Green River was not too far away, and the parents were afraid the children would get out there and drown in the deep water. So, as a rule, Ms. Rubarts said that if you leave the school ground you would get a whipping. Ms. Rubarts had 49 students in that one room school. One day the boys decided to test her. All 23 boys left the school grounds to go to Green River during lunch, while Ms. Rubarts and the girls were inside. About the time the boys were out of sight, one little girl, who had been outside, came in to tell Ms. Rubarts that the boys had gone. So the girls went out and gathered their teacher a handful of switches. She told the girls to stay in their seats while they finished their language unit and then she would take care of the boys. Sure enough, after the lesson, Ms. Rubarts lined the boys up and gave them a whipping from smallest to biggest, getting harder as she went along. She did this because she said the bigger boys should have known better. The boys had run off to test the new teacher to see if she would actually whip all 23 boys. Ms. Rubarts said that the parents were behind her one hundred percent.

Ms. Rubarts said that she had more training when she started teaching than the teachers she had as a child. She also had more material to work with. She also spent about half of what she made to buy things for the school.

When I asked Ms. Rubarts what about her childhood molded what she is today, she answered that it would be her parents. Also, being the oldest sibling made her responsible. She took care of her siblings a lot. She had an older brother, but he was never very strong, so she was responsible.

Ora Lee Jones also attended one-room schools in Northwestern Adair County as a child. She also taught in one-room schools as an adult. Ms. Jones lives in Columbia, Kentucky today, the county where she grew up.

Ms. Jones attended Little Cake School, which is located not far from Neatsville in Northwestern Adair County, as a child until she was ten years old. Then she moved to Campbellsville. Ms. Jones' fondest memory of school was her teachers. Especially Ms. Annie Sanders who lived to be 93. Ms. Sanders gave Ms. Jones a six inch tall percolator when Ms. Jones was eight or nine years old. Ms. Jones still has the percolator. Ms. Sanders was left handed and Ms. Jones remembers wishing she was left-handed like Ms. Sanders.

The Little Cake School building had windows on both sides, so they had cross ventilation. In front they did not have a porch, but they had a step. In the yard was a drilled well with a pump from which they drew water. In the middle of the school yard was a large sycamore tree. Ms. Jones said this was a place where they all gathered around for playing and talking. Inside the school, up front, were chalk boards and a long recitation bench. The teacher's desk was near this bench up front. There were also two or three sections of students' desks. There were 25 to 30 students who attended Little Cake while Ms. Jones was a student there.

The students at Little Cake studied spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, health, and writing. Their writing lessons did not start with printing, but rather cursive writing. Ms. Jones had trouble picking a favorite subject, because she likes them all so much, but reading was her favorite.

Before school, in the mornings, Ms. Jones' mother would always prepare breakfast. They always lived close to school. All they had to do in the mornings was get ready and walk to school. After school Ms. Jones had to do chores. If it were in the spring time she would help with some gardening things and take care of the chickens. She also had house work to do. When they were not busy doing chores, the children would play.

Ms. Jones' would spend the night with her close friends. Sometimes they would just get off in a little place to themselves and talk. Ms. Jones said it was just mostly being together having fun.

The school started at eight in the morning and closed at four in the afternoon. They had a morning recess, a lunch period, and an afternoon recess.

For lunch the children brought cooked vegetables, beans, potatoes, and corn. They also brought cookies sometimes. Some children brought milk, but not many because the milk might have gone bad if it got too hot. Ms. Jones brought apples out of her own orchard. Others brought peaches, pears, and grapes which they had on their farms. The children could also go into the woods and get chestnuts. Cookies were a special lunch treat. Some had watermelon and cantaloupe to bring when they were in season. Sometimes they would come home for lunch, but if it was cold or snowy in the winter time, they could bring their lunch to school, which was a treat for them. Ms. Jones said that sometimes children would exchange lunch items very much like children still do today. Most children ate lunch as quickly as possible so they would have time to play ball. She said that sometimes they would just want to sit around and talk, but most of the

time it was play time. Inside, during winter, they would sometimes pop popcorn for lunch.

At recess, the boys and girls would usually play together, but sometimes the boys would want time to themselves and the girls would want time to themselves. The girls would talk about their boyfriends in little groups. Other than that, all the children played together.

Christmas was the most celebrated holiday in school. Thanksgiving was celebrated also, but not as much emphasis was put on Thanksgiving as Christmas. On Thanksgiving they dressed up like pilgrims. They did skits and plays which the parents were invited to come see. At Christmas there was a Christmas program which started early. Children would recite poems and the birth of Jesus was emphasized in it all. There were also readings of different kinds.

Ms. Jones also spoke of the pie suppers where girls would bring pies in beautifully decorated boxes and the young men would bid on them. She also said that sometimes boys would run each other up on the cost of the pies. They would also have prettiest girl contests where the girls were suggested and the men would place money down towards the girl that they thought was the prettiest. The money was tallied up and the one with the most money was chosen to be the prettiest girl. The pies would go as high as fifteen. If times were not so good the pies might have gone for two or two and a half dollars.

Ms. Jones taught at Tabernacle, Miller Field, Whites, Spout Springs, and other local schools. Spout Springs is in the Knifley/Neatsville area and is the school that Henry Giles attended as a child.

Preparing the children for their future is Ms. Jones' fondest memory of teaching. She said wonderful boys and girls came from those schools. She had love and respect for her students and they had the same for her. It was a wonderful experience for her.

Basically, she taught the same materials as what she was taught as a child, but she said she had more to teach with than her teachers had. Naturally, as time goes on, more subject matter is presented to be taught. Ms. Jones said that if she were to go into a school now, she would see differences just like her teachers could see differences when Ms. Jones started teaching.

As an adult, Ms. Jones would prepare breakfast for herself and her husband and get ready for school in the mornings. She liked to get to school earlier than her students and she did not rush home after school either. After school, she had to do things around the house and prepare meals for her and her husband. Sometimes they would go and visit friends. She also would have a lot of paperwork to do at night.

Ms. Jones' favorite sandwich is peanut butter and banana. She would bring sandwiches and fruits for lunch. When she taught at Spout Springs they would buy drinks from the nearby store. They would keep these cold in the spring water and then take them out at lunch time. She described her lunches as typical.

When Ms. Jones was a teacher, the girls would play ball right along with the boys; although, sometimes they would want to play by themselves. The children would also jump rope and play baseball. They also had a basketball goal. They played a lot of running games, which Ms. Jones considered good exercise for the children.

Children in Ms. Jones' schools also played pranks. Sometimes they would hide each others hats and coats and then act innocent as to the whereabouts of the missing items. She did not remember there being to many pranks though.

When Ms. Jones was teaching they also celebrated Halloween. They would have a Halloween play. They would dress up like spooks and witches. They also celebrated Valentine Day. The children had Valentine Boxes and brought cookies to school.

In conclusion, I found most everything Ms. Rubarts and Ms. Jones described as being very similar. The school days were set up the same. Children had responsibilities before and after school. Teachers also had a lot of responsibilities. The subjects taught in schools have remained constant over the years and one room school houses were set up in basically the same manner, at least in Northwestern Adair County. Children played games together and acted up once in a while. Ms. Rubarts and Ms. Jones were very nice ladies and were probably fantastic school teachers. I learned a lot from them.