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REFLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY TEACHER'S KID

I graduated from Sykeston High School in May 1958 (Sykeston's 75th anniversary)

A gift, probably from my parents, was a small camera and a roll of color film, which I proceeded to use to 'document' the town I had lived in from 1946-51 and again 1957-58. The photos have survived all these years, and are enclosed – just snapshots, part of a day in the life of a small North Dakota town as seen by an 18-year-old who had just graduated from high school. (see pages 6&7)

I'm a "teacher's kid". At 83, I can honestly say that I have spent my entire life up close and personal with schools. My parents taught many years in North Dakota small town schools, Mom beginning in 1926. Dad in 1929, both retiring in 1972. In all they taught about 42 years (Dad) and 30 years (Mom)– Mom's time off from 1939-52 was for raising five kids to school age. Snapshots at time of their wedding Aug. 9, 1937, on p. 5.

Mom's first year ended early and not well. She was only 17, and some of the school kids were near her age and bigger than she was – farm boys in the Rugby area.

Dad was nearly two years older than Mom, and may not have planned to teach, but financial problems made it impossible for him to go to the University of North Dakota as planned in 1927. Dad had to repeat First Grade (for him, English was a foreign language); Mom skipped a grade (not uncommon in country school). After a year or two of alternative employment he started teaching in country school in 1929-30, and never left public ed. From 1940 on he was the local Superintendent in small towns: one-year contracts, no glory, plenty of grief. I'd say he was the lightning rod for each town.

Every year, they both attended summer school at Valley City Normal, where they met. Dad proposed to Mom in his country school near Thompson in about 1936 – they were in Grand Forks for the Teachers Convention. They married in 1937, taught their first two years together at Amidon, living in a vacant classroom. In 1939-40 they came back to Valley City where Dad completed his degree, and where I was born May 4, 1940.

Life being a schoolteacher's kid was in most respects no different than being a kid, generally. As part of the cohort "kid", we probably didn't stand out. Just kids.

But there were differences, that I have noted over many years of life experience.

We lived a whole life of being, in effect, always strangers in town. My "hometown" is North Dakota, rather than a specific place. In my first 18 years, we lived in eight

different communities, twice in Sykeston, all but two for only one or two years. (Sykeston was home 1946-51 and 1957-61, and Antelope 1954-57.)

In all our growing up years, through high school, the family lived in ten different towns, in 14 different dwellings over 26 years. Many of these dwellings were “teacherages” which by most any community standards of the time would be considered inadequate. Two of the schools (Rutland Consolidated and Antelope) were literally country schools.

A result of this was limited opportunities to fit in anywhere, thus “strangers in town”. By the time we fit in, was about the time we moved again.

I don't recall any elementary school (through grade eight) where I was part of only a single grade in the classroom. Usually, there were two or three grades together.

My mother was my classroom teacher in grade 8. (My first six years were in Catholic schools in the town. Religion mattered in these small towns, primarily, but not exclusively Catholic/Protestant. There was not much love lost. My parents were devout Catholics and a town with a Catholic School was desirable, even if they were public school teachers. Sykeston and Karlsruhe had Catholic elementary schools.)

In my high school years (grade 9-12) I don't recall any more than two teachers in any year, one of whom was my dad, who was also Superintendent. One year there were only two seniors. My senior class is listed as 10, but one dropped out mid-year.

Because the schools were so small, there was zero flexibility. The curriculum was minimal, of necessity. I never had algebra in school. Several times I took a class by correspondence...and got Ds in each. It was an old day's equivalent of a Zoom class, only much more primitive. There was no lab for chemistry, no personal contact with a teacher. Just workbooks and perhaps reel-to-reel tapes.

Because we moved between my junior and senior year, there were virtually no classes I could take as a senior. I was more familiar with Study Hall than anything else.

Things like library and band and such were only occasionally and very minimally available. I had a certificate which indicates I used the ND State Library at times. In my case, at Ross, there was a teacher who apparently could teach enough band to have a small school band, but that was the only place.

There was always a basketball team, and I played basketball, and most all the boys were enlisted to be on the team – they needed them. Some of the basketball players could be pretty good. Almost never were games played on regulation size courts.

Colleges, particularly the teacher's colleges, adjusted their curriculum to deal with ill-prepared students from tiny schools. The first college year was probably like a regular high school in a larger city. Prospective teachers were trained with a presumption that they would have to teach classes outside their majors and minors. It was as it was.

My younger siblings have somewhat similar stories, I would guess.

This is not criticism of our parents. They did what they could. Both, and all five of us, ended up with at least a bachelor's Degree, and very productive lives, generally, including at least a few days in all 50 states and over 80 countries.

THE FAMILY LEGACY ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION

Everyone has an inheritance, sometimes obvious, sometimes material, other times not noticeable or obvious until later, if at all.

The family that followed Henry Bernard and Esther Busch seems to have inherited a value which is education.

Henry Bernard is the only person I know on the French-Canadian side who made education a career. His "side" went different routes. His Dad's root family had a tradition as millers, going back to France. His mother's family seemed well rooted as well. He had a cousin who was a career Catholic Bishop (Raymond Lessard); another who was a very prominent banker (Marvin Campbell); another who was a State Senator, and so on.

Esther Busch's family seemed more oriented to public education. Her paternal grandfather, Wilhelm Busch, was an obviously educated man; Her mother – Rosa Berning – was said to be headstrong as teenager but was absolutely a leader when it came to schooling. She insisted that the two oldest – both girls – attend a Catholic Boarding school in Jamestown, St. John's, which they did from about 1921-26, both graduating from there.

I think the death of Verena at 15 (1927) and general farm economic downturn beginning by the 1920s followed by the 1930s, changed plans for the rest.

In a day when finishing high school was not a given, all eight surviving children completed 12th grade. Verena, who died at 15 in 1927, did not.

The oldest, Lucina, became a country schoolteacher in the usual way. She attended Clarke College in Dubuque one year about 1930, but the Great Depression nipped that in the bud. In the 1930s, she was a teacher in the Berlin school. The family story is that her wages paid the taxes and saved most of the farm during the dark years of the 1930s. She met and ultimately married another teacher, Duane Pinkney, who had graduated from Ellendale Normal. They married in 1939. He taught in Munich for a while, then they migrated to Minnesota where both taught an entire career, ending their careers with many years at Hancock.

The next, Esther, is described in the preceding pages.

Verena, the third, died of appendicitis in early May 1927.

Mary, the fourth, became a career Country School teacher in Wales ND. She had all her kids in her elementary. Her husband was a farmer.

George, the fifth, was the farmer designate, and stayed on the farm until age 22, when he went to college in Mayville, met his wife to be Jean Tannahill, also a teacher. He became a Naval officer for the entirety WWII, and after the war taught two years in Sykeston, then about a dozen years in Rugby, ultimately teaching the rest of his work career in Babbitt MN.

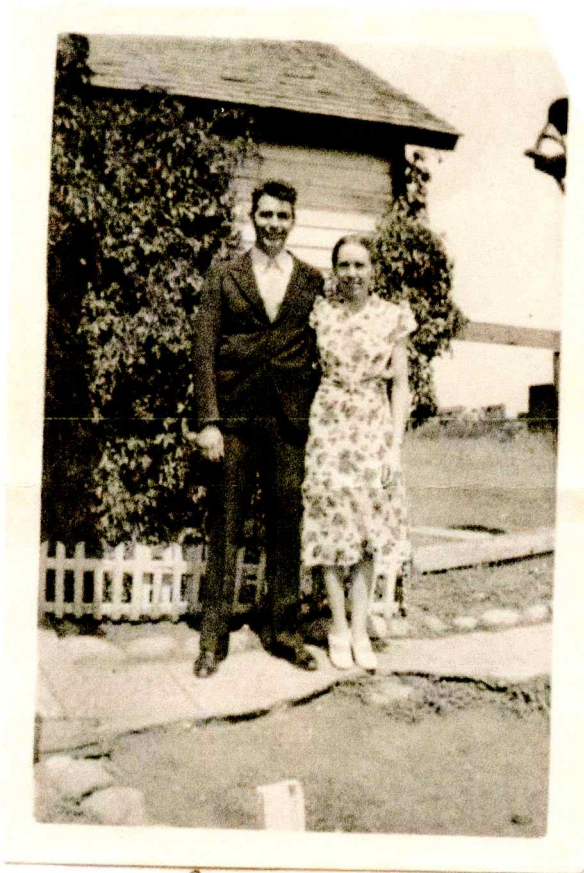
Florence, the sixth, initially went to the College of St. Benedict for a year; then taught in country school at Dazey and ended up marrying a farmer in the Dazey community, Bernard Wieland.

Edith graduated from high school, did not go to college or marry, and stayed on the farm till she died. Vincent, her brother, was next and similar life trajectory. He owned the farm ultimately, and was last sibling to die, at 90, in 2015. Arthur, the youngest, got a degree in Electrical Engineering and was a sales engineer for General Electric.

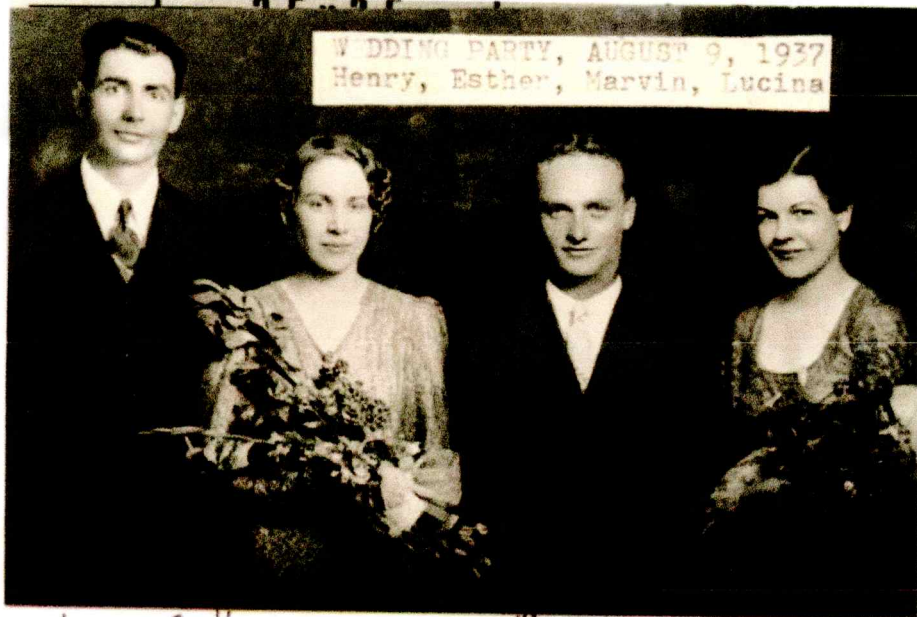
The succeeding generation has had its share of teachers. Lucina's Ron retired as a math teacher; son Jim was a college professor of psychology. Esther's oldest Richard, taught school for nine years and represented teachers for 27. One of his daughters is a long-time school principal, another a long-term substitute in special education.

One of George's daughters became a school social worker.

One of Florence's kids, Mary, spent a career as a teacher.



Henry Bernard and
Esther Busch at Busch
farm probably some time
before their marriage
ca 1936 or 37



Henry + Esther
Bernard.

Marvin Lucina
Campbell Busch

Aug. 9, 1937

SYKESTON N.D. 1958
DICK BERNARD



WATER TOWER.



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ST. ELIZABETH SCHOOL



AT THE PARK, JOHN BERNARD
IN CENTER.



SWIMMING HOLE
LAKE HIAWATHA



ALONG THE
SHORE OF
LAKE HIAWATHA.