

Facts and Fiction

A hundred years ago What was happening a hundred years ago? Abraham Lincoln was President, the nation was in the midst of the Civil War, and the Emancipation Proclamation had just been formalized.

The State of Kansas was two years old. More and more settlers were moving in, and were beginning to prove up their claims under the Homestead Law of 1862. The Kansas Pacific was starting to lay out tracks from Wyandotte (now Kansas City, Kansas) toward Lawrence for the first railroad in that direction.

1863 A hundred years ago. A few of your communities already had schools of one kind or another, supported by taxes or tuition or subscription. Some of your areas had no formal schooling at all, and a lot of your areas hadn't even been settled yet. But in that year, the second governor of the state, Thomas Carney, signed a bill passed by the State Legislature creating a teacher-training school at Emporia.

So *this* year, 1963, Kansas State Teachers College is celebrating its one hundredth birthday. For a whole century KSTC has been in existence for the purpose of training teachers.

Classes didn't actually get started for a couple of years, and *then* they were held in a borrowed room with borrowed furniture, with a faculty of one and a student body of eighteen. Now, of course, KSTC has its own buildings and furniture, a faculty of 269 ½ (!) and a student body of nearly 5000. Just as the public school system of Kansas has grown and changed, so has this college grown and changed to meet the demands for higher education and for more teachers.

Well, *Heritage of Kansas* wanted to celebrate this anniversary year in some special way that would be interesting to both current school children and to former school children (and aren't we all!). So we decided to compare school life of today with that of the last century. We asked a few teachers around and about to have their students write themes on contemporary school life; then we tried to find descriptions of what it was like in the years past.

In a lot of ways, school life has changed a great deal: school busses have replaced walking or horseback riding; hot lunches have replaced tin lunch pails; (more or less) sanitary drinking

fountains (wads of gum included) have replaced the old water bucket with a common dipper. Games like Drop-the-Handkerchief, Three Deep, Blackman, and Work-up are still played, but monkey-bars have supplanted giant-strides. Ink wells in desk tops have given way to ballpoint pens, but boys still carve initials in wood equipment and make airplanes out of notebook paper.

In many other ways besides carved initials and paper airplanes, school hasn't changed a bit: Readin' and 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic are still learned; recesses and vacations still seem like the best part of school; the teachers are still pretty nice sometimes, and awfully mean sometimes. Additional aspects of school life that remain unaffected by legislation or teacher disapproval or scientific innovations are the traditional songs, parodies, nicknames, secret languages, rhymes of the children. For example, who could ever imagine *this* going out of style:

School's out,
School's out,
Teacher's let the monkeys out.
No more pencils,
No more books,
No more teacher's dirty looks.



Sod schoolhouse, District No. 16, Scott County, around 1890. (Courtesy of The Kansas State Historical Society)