

Editor's Corner

This issue of *Heritage of the Great Plains* features articles and reminiscences about one-room schools, once ubiquitous not only in the Great Plains but throughout the country. According to a feature that aired on National Public Radio, the 190,000 one-room schools that once dotted the American landscape in 1919 had dwindled by 2005 to fewer than 400. Nearly half of that total was to be found in two Great Plains states: Montana with some 100 and Nebraska with 75. I don't know how many of these schools are in operation today, but I daresay it is far fewer.

My wife (as did her older brother and sister) went to a one-room school near Chanute, Kansas. Between the packrat nests in the outhouse, being the only student in her class, and, except for a couple of years, being the only girl in the school, she harbors no pleasant, nostalgic memories of that experience. That tends to be a minority opinion, based on my conversations with people who attended them.

My own educational experience at the elementary level took place in a two-story building at Cassoday. Three rooms were for classes (grades 1, 2, and 3 in one room; 4, 5, and 6 in another; and 7 and 8 in a third), and one was the lunch room. One of the rooms also had a small raised area that served as a stage for school programs. My sister and I lived a mile and a half from school; sometimes we rode the bus and sometimes we rode our horses, stabling them in the barn that, along with a coal house and two outhouses, comprised the buildings. We also had a playground on the west side of the schoolhouse and a softball diamond on the east. The playground held a merry-go-round and a set of giant strides that were a hazard to teeth, although I don't recall anyone ever being hit.

Our favorite recreations, however, were annie-over, mumbley peg (almost all the boys carried pocket knives), and blackman. This last-named game was a running-type of tag game that, as far as I know, had no racial connotation. Two people started out as ITs while everyone else, from first to eighth grade, lined up at the schoolhouse or the cable a hundred feet to the south that marked the parking lot. The object was to run from one base to the other without being slapped three times on the back. If you were caught, you joined those chasing runners until no one was left to run. The last two to be caught would be the first ITs for the next game.

As I look back on them, my memories of grade school days are pleasant enough. I hope readers will enjoy the memories that will be evoked in the pages that follow. If you feel like writing about them, send us your thoughts for a possible future issue on the one-room school.