

Whatever happened to ... Palmyra's one-room schools? *Part I*

By Beth Hoad
Palmyra Historian

Soon, the school bells will ring in the start of another school year. Yellow school buses will be seen against the rural landscape and hundreds of children will flow down the various sidewalks in the village toward their assigned buildings. Paved parking lots at area school buildings will fill with the many colors and shapes of modern vehicles driven by school personnel and students who attend classes or work at the ever-more sprawling campuses. But, it wasn't always this way.

Through the words of Helen E. Wyncoop Guthrie in her *Courier-Journal* article of February 19, 1953, let's revisit the days of the one-room schools in and around Palmyra. Mrs. Wyncoop wrote specifically about the Armington School, corner Canandaigua and Armington Roads, and although the Armington School is located in the Town of Manchester, Ontario County, the students' families interacted with Palmyrans and their names are household words to many. No doubt, life was probably very similar in every rural schoolhouse of that time no matter where it was located.

"RECOLLECTIONS OF THE ARMINGTON SCHOOL IN THE DAYS OF 'USED TO BE'

...The big front door faces the play-ground, which was fringed along the lower border by a row of maple trees. Under them the little girls made play-houses by marking off rooms on the grass by small stones. Broken bits of crockery were brought from home for dishes, and everything that could be coaxed from mothers for furnishings.

Families were arranged, then being considerable rivalry for the position of 'Mother', with all the authority vested in it, for 'self-expression' was not yet in vogue.

The bell has rung, so we will go inside. The main room is long, with entries at the back. The teacher desk stands at one end, and facing it are the benches for the classes behind which are the desks. The first day of school was very important, not only for meeting friends, but for choosing seatmates.

In winter a big pot-bellied stove occupied a place near the center of the room, and one never-to-be-forgotten day it nearly caused a panic by belching forth when the teacher opened the door to inspect the fire. When her eyebrows and front hair were burning, there were lamentations and tears, but when school was dismissed for the day, the grief was somewhat assuaged.

Every morning school opened with a song and prayer. In the winter there were usually fifty pupils, more or less, from first grade to high school. How one teacher could manage so many classes was always a mystery, but she (usually she) always did, and prepared the older ones for Regents Examinations successfully. Discipline was expected and carried out.

There was one teacher who had a way of walking up and down the aisles when hearing classes. She carried a ruler in her hand and could end a game of tit-tat-toe very abruptly.” (...to be continued)