

The Reed Ranch School From Past . . . to Present

When the pioneers first moved into this area . . . about the turn of the century. . . first things had to come first. They needed shelter – for themselves and their animals. Wells had to be dug, forage gathered, and land prepared to assure some source of income for the following year. However, the early settlers fully realized the importance of their children’s education.

The first Reed Ranch School, with eight pupils, was held in one of the houses on the Ranch itself. Mr. Grant was the first teacher. Soon the downstairs room became too small so classes were moved to a larger area upstairs. The house still stands on the Harry Unger farm.

As was the case in all of the little country schools, the students managed to get there in any way they could. Some walked, others rode horses, large families arrived by horse and buggy in the summer . . . and horse and cutter in winter. The most common lunch container was the Roger’s Golden Syrup pail . . . or a lard bucket. It was quite an event . . . and source of envy . . . to some in sporting a brand new one! During the winter months the horse’s bridles were brought into the school and hung in the cloakrooms. This was to make sure the bit did not stick to the animal’s mouth and tongue when it came time to return home. Girls NEVER wore slacks . . . in fact I can’t recall if they even made them when I was little . . . if we had to wear ‘pants’ to ride a horse we wore those made for boys. We were warm though. O yes. Long underwear was a must! When the leg band got ‘floppy’ we simply had to wrap it around the ankle and pull our heavy brown stockings over the top. Most of us wore dresses a size or so bigger than we were (they would wear longer) and many of us wore boy’s shoes . . . they would wear longer too! Oh, how girls looked forward to the warm spring days so we could stop wearing that wretched underwear. It was so frustrating when our mothers would say, “You better wear it a little longer Dear, you might catch a cold.”

Students bought their own books and supplies. Basic books were accessible, though research material was scarce. Occasionally, later on, a ‘traveling library’ would go from school to school from time to time, and that helped. However, we made do. Those boys and girls, and men and women, were hammered on the anvil of adversity and shaped into solid citizens, which the soft living of today could never accomplish.

School days were more than classes with reading, writing, and arithmetic. who could forget the Nature Study Hikes, when we walked and walked for miles and miles? The Christmas programs and the last-day-of-school picnic, the happy memories associated with each one will never be forgotten.

There is a conflict of opinion as to when the first Reed Ranch School was built. One statement maintains that Reed Ranch and Huntcliff were built in 1926, and the other states that Reed Ranch was built in 1929. Nor can I find the exact location. As I recall,

it was situated about a half mile south of the present site, surrounded by a large grove of trees. All of the rural schools were used for church services, and many other community functions as well. Esther Kuhn was the last teacher. Some time after the existing school was in operation, the old one was moved to the Betchton District where it still serves as a community centre today.

In 1959-1960 the present four-room school was opened at Reed Ranch. It consolidated the surrounding districts of Mayton, May City, Poplar Creek, and Betchton.

The last year that our five separate community schools were in operation, our Superintendent, Mr. Hooper, decreed that the five of us get together at least once a month, weather permitting. We met on a Friday afternoon, after our own school day was completed, at the old Reed Ranch School. I think it was good for us to compare notes and get better acquainted. When the new school opened the following fall, Esther Kuehn was the principal, Inga Dodd taught grades five and six, Irene Edgar had three and four, and Ivy Weiss took over one and two. I was the substitute and when I couldn't make it, Inga Fobes cheerfully filled in. Later that fall Inga Dodd became ill, so I took over five and six for the rest of the term. Ivy Weiss once said, "I will never forget that first year we were at Reed Ranch, we worked so hard but we had so much fun." We all got along so well. Irene's favorite subject was not health, but she was a fantastic artist. I had trouble drawing stick men, we asked Esther if we could trade. That was fine with her so we did just that. I knew Irene detested mice, and had a fear of them as well. The first time she took over my class I placed a rubber mouse in my desk drawer! My lands, we were as bad as the kids!

Teaching can be fun and rewarding with scarcely a dull moment, unless we let it. Which reminds me of the time Esther came and informed me that some of my boys had been caught squirting water in the boy's washroom during the noon hour. I promised that it would be taken care of, and that it wouldn't happen again. When classes resumed, I confronted those involved, calmly, and they accepted their reprimand in the same manner. They were basically 'good kids', we understood each other and they knew I was fair. Of course there is often an exception. One boy bounded out of his seat and in complete indignation stated, most vehemently, "Mrs. Hansen, I did NOT squirt water at noon hour, I squirted it at recess, but I did NOT quirt it at noon hour!" Somehow I was not impressed.

A Brief History of Mayton School

Mayton School, No. 743 was first established in 1903. The first meeting to discuss this matter was called July 5, 1902 by Henry Townsend, I. J. Brubaker and ?? Curtier, Mrs. Ross Dalgetty, mother of Hugh Dalgetty and Ruth Gaetz (nee Dalgetty) was the former Flossie Townsend. Henry was her father. The school was first situated on S.E. of Sec. 9-33-27-W4th. The land was bought from I. W. Francis for three cents an acre. The first teacher was Ida Barnhill and her salary was \$50.00 per month, for nine months.

They could not afford to pay her for ten months. In 1906 it was moved to the site I remember, the NW corner of Sec 11-33-27-W4th.

It was the typical 'Little Country School House'. I have a picture of one; I think they were all built from the same design with the two little 'out houses' out back; one for the girls and one for the boys. My little grandson studied the picture and he asked, "Where was the gym?"

About 1937-1938 a debenture of \$1,800 was negotiated for and given to the chairman, Clarke Bennett, for the building of a new school. Whether or not that was sufficient for the completion of same, I have no idea. Lorna Camp was the teacher at the time. She coped with the constant pounding of hammers and the other building construction noises (practically next door to the old school) in her usual cheerful way. When we moved in everything was worth it. The indoor chemical toilets, such as they were – I have never seen the like before or since. A small child could have fallen right on through the huge opening in the bowl – right on down to the holding tank, far below the basement level. They were frightening. However, the hardwood floors were beautiful and so was the large new globe which hung from the ceiling. We could pull it down and study it, and then push it back up out of the way. Most comforting of all was the new furnace which kept us warm! We had the basement to play in on cold and rainy days. It had never been finished and by the time recreation time was over we were in a thick cloud of dust, which went through the whole school. However, it was so much better than anything we had ever had, that no one complained. We had never had it so good.

I came back to teach Mayton School during the last two years of its existence. There was talk of closing it if a teacher could not be found. I had a daughter going there at the time and wanted to avoid an upheaval if I could. I must admit that after thirteen or fourteen years of absence from the profession, I was slightly rusty to say the least. However, I prepared my lessons well and I learned right along with my students. As far as children are concerned the teacher must know everything. When I was asked a question of which I was ignorant, I would try to cover up by saying "Let us all look it up, and then we'll remember it better."

Somehow the humorous aspects made it all very interesting. Like the time I had to leave my pupils for ten or fifteen minutes. I left the oldest boy in charge and this is what I heard later via the grapevine. The minute I crossed the road one boy got up and started roaring around. The oldest boy I shall refer to as 'Tom' and the other one I will call 'Jack'. Tom said, "Jack get back in your seat." To which Jack replied, "You can't make me!" Tom retorted, "You wanna bet?" Whereby he grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and set him down in his seat, hit him over the head with a book and said, "Sit!" Episode over. Then one of the little ones asked him how you spelled 'gopher', to which he replied, "Let's see 'goffer'". He was serious. When I returned, all was peaceful and serene.

We would have little celebrations whenever they worked in. They took very little time and were a pleasant break in the normal routine. One of these was an Easter egg

hunt. My one stipulation was that the 'prizes' be hidden INSIDE the schoolyard. The children drew names and on the appointed day 'the hunt was on'. Wayne Flinn had drawn Peggy Haase's (they were cousins). Poor Peggy! She looked and she looked. Everyone else had found theirs and she was still looking. I finally told Wayne that he had to show her where it was. What he had done was crawled on his tummy and dug it into the ditch edge. Well, it WAS in the schoolyard! I didn't reprimand him. Technically he had followed the rules. What would you have done??

A Brief History of May City School

The first year that May City School came into being was 1905. The first trustees were: Moses Ortwein, Fred Schafer, and Sam Cummins.

The school was situated on the SE quarter Sec 33-27-W4th. It was named by Moses Ortwein, who came from May City, Iowa. The first teacher was Lizzie Barnhill, one wonders if she was a sister of Ida Barnhill, the first teacher at Mayton. The last teacher was Irene Edgar.

When Reed Ranch became operational, the May City School was moved into Didsbury.

This had nothing to do with the school, but as a matter of interest it has been brought to my attention that the old trail to Innisfail passed between Gordon Ortwein's house and the barn. He and I were talking about it the other night and he remembers walking in those same ruts as a boy and how they must be over a foot deep. That same trail passed a few hundred yards from the road that goes by here. I think the traces of them are still there. We were commenting on the fact that they were so DEEP and why did they keep driving in the same ones? Why didn't they straddle them??? I wonder. Surely there had to be a reason.

Compiled by Mrs. Hansen