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## Attending School at Shew Hollow

*Betty Matalavage*

I'm an eighty-one-year-old who grew up on the farm in Shew Hollow. I attended a one-room red schoolhouse that stood on the corner of Shew Hollow and Souer Roads.

Our farmhouse was the big one that burned down on the corner of Shew Hollow and Decker Road (presently called Starheim Road). Our farm has been in the Shew family and their descendants for over two hundred years.

The older boys took turns coming over to our house every morning to get the ceramic jug filled with water. Each pupil had a cup, brought from home, which hung on hooks near the water jug.

In the winter the big boys would bring in wood for the potbellied stove and start the fire. On a cold day, you kept your coat on until it got warm in the schoolhouse. The stove would sometimes get red hot and often the older boys would have pine-pitch balls in their pockets. When they placed them on the red-hot stove, they'd explode with a loud noise. The teacher would scold, but she was never certain which one was guilty so they got off with no problem.

The morning started with the older students putting the flag out on the pole. Then we'd all pledge allegiance to the flag, say the "Lord's Prayer," and end by singing "America."

The teacher would hand out the assignments to the students to be done at their desks. Our desks were stationary wooden ones with attached wooden seats. You had to be very careful doing your paperwork, as the desks all had carved mementos from past students and your pointed pencil could puncture the paper you were writing on. The desks were smaller toward the front of the room. The ones in the center aisle held as many as three students and the ones in the side aisles held one or two. My feet never touched the floor all the time I was in the various grades. In my early years, there were as many as fifteen pupils in grades one through eight. I attended this school until the fifth grade, when I went to the Jefferson Central School.

One grade at a time would go up front for a reading lesson. When it was time to recite, you went up to the front seats where it was nice and warm. The whole front wall was blackboards and a lot of our work was done up there—for example, writing and arithmetic.

The school had a small library on shelves under the chimney. We read those books over and over. We also had a big leather case that contained maps of the world, the continents, the United States, and New York State. Another big leather case contained stamps of the alphabet and small pictures, which the teacher used to make up worksheets for us.

You might say I was one of the first preschoolers to attend class, as I used to run across the street at the age of three or four and “go to school.” The teacher at that time was Mrs. John Becker and she would let me stay, giving me a pencil and paper or a slate and chalk, and I would stay until my mother came for me. Mrs. Becker walked to school and back home every day from the John Becker farm (which is now 630 State Route 30, north of the sawmill).

I can remember going on nature study walks with the whole school at that age; when I got tired the big boys took turns carrying me on their shoulders. We looked for fossils in the shale banks and in the creek beds. The pupils also made collections of the wildflowers in the spring and the leaves in the fall.

I got my first and only spanking in the first grade because, at five, I insisted on getting out of my seat and running to the doorway to wave at whoever was going by. You see, I was very friendly and at that time you knew everybody who was traveling by the schoolhouse. My teacher then was Adeila Maybe and that afternoon, after school, she told my mother that she’d spanked me. My mother said, “Let me know if she doesn’t sit still.” Needless to say, I sat!

Later on, when I was in fourth grade, my mother, Jessie Hamilton, was the teacher. She would make me stay in at recess time if I didn’t have my lessons done correctly. One day, as I was sitting dejectedly redoing my assignment, one of the mothers came in to visit and I remember her telling my mother that she was “the meanest woman” she’d ever seen!

Recess was a big deal. We played “Hide and Go Seek,” “Tag,” and “Anthony, Anthony” in the spring and fall and, of course, baseball. Our bat was usually a piece of old lumber that was narrow on one end for the handle.

When I was seven, I got hit in the face with the bat, as I was the catcher. My nose was broken and I had a gash in my cheek. The doctor was concerned with the cut but ignored my broken nose!

In the winter, we rode on our sleds down Souer Road beside the school. On a good sledding day, you could come down the hill, cross Shew Hollow Road, cross the meadow on the other side of the road, and continue under the fence to the bottom of the hill. Otherwise, you could take a left on Shew Hollow Road and then right down Decker Road. One pupil would stay at the corner of Shew Hollow Road and Souer Road to direct traffic—if a car was coming, we’d ditch our sleds.

In the fall we’d go into the third floor of our barn and jump into the hay mows. My grandfather usually came along and would send us back to the school yard to play, as he was afraid we’d get hurt.

At the most, there probably weren’t more than ten to fifteen pupils attending the school, but in my last year, I was the only pupil from May to June. Olive Franklin was my teacher. She had just graduated from college and we’d get all our lessons done in the morning and play the rest of the day. Many a day, we’d ride horseback on the farm team up to the field where my grandfather was cultivating and wade in the brook that ran down through the meadow.

I remember the year that the state mandated TB tests for all dairy cattle. Many of the farms in our valley lost

both cows and bulls and there was a mass cattle drive down Shew Hollow Road. All of the pupils and our teacher went out on the steps of the school to watch them go by. There must have been at least sixty head just from our valley alone. The farmers replaced some of their cows with Canadian cows, but it was quite a while before their herds were back up in numbers.

At the end of my fifth grade, the one-room school closed and I went by bus to the Jefferson High School. But that's another story . . .

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