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Going to School

Elsa Anderson Eklund

In 1924, Harold and Hannah Anderson and family moved from New Jersey to Blenheim Hill. The family consisted of Pop, Mom, Harry, Inga, and Elsa.



The Cornell Hollow one-room schoolhouse was about a mile south of my home and was moved in the winter of 1952–1953 to partially replace the burned Brimstone Church. Photo courtesy of Clarence Hartwell.

We moved in with Pop's sister, Faster (the Swedish term for "aunt") Esther and Uncle Pete Ericson. Their children were Henry, Arthur, and Evelyn. Esther's brother, Uncle Leo, had two boys, Leonard and Walter, who also lived with Faster Esther, so there were eight children altogether. All the children attended the one-room school located about a mile away, between Ericson and the Pete Miller farm. We all walked to school carrying our books and lunches. When we got to school someone had to walk to the Miller farm to get a pail of water, that lasted all day. There was one dipper and everyone had to drink from that. While the chore of getting water was being done, someone had to carry in the wood for the stove. In winter during recess we would flatten out cardboard boxes and use them for sleighs to slide down the frozen stream.

In 1927 Pop bought the Egnor farm. Harry went to Stamford High School. Harry worked on the Easton Fisher farm for his room and board. He rode to town on the milk wagon in the morning to go to school. Inga and I went to Cornell Hollow's one-room school, a round trip walk of about 2 miles. We would ski in winter when the snow was deep. I didn't like it when Inga went off to school in Stamford. Inga worked at the lawyer's, Len Govern, for her room and board; it was a hard place to work. In 1930 it came my time to go to high school.

Pop decided that as long as the three of us were all going to the same school, Harry could drive the Model-T Ford, as long as the roads were open. That was great, not having to walk to school. We had our problems, though: sometimes we didn't have enough gas in the tank. The gas tank was under the front seat, one of us would have to hook the tire pump on the gas tank and pump air into the tank as Harry was backing the car up. This was on Welch's (Wilson's) hill. Winter seemed to come sooner and last longer in those days. No snow plows on the back roads meant deep snow in winter and sinkholes in the spring. Sometimes it seemed the road had no bottom. Snow came early and so did hard times. We had to get up at 5 o'clock in order to be on the road by 6. On the road meant with the horse and cutter (sleigh). Mom had a lit lantern which we put by our feet under the blankets. Of course it's dark at 6 o'clock in the winter, but the horse knew the way. We went through wood roads and fields to cut down on the miles. Then, when we'd finally get to Route 10, we'd find that sometimes the roads were bare—the plow had been through—and pulling the sleigh on bare roads was hard. Almost to town (at the point where the Conservation Department is now), the wind would howl as though you would blow away. It took us three hours to get to Stamford. Then Harry had to leave the horse at the livery stable that was on River Street. We had to walk up to school which was on Prospect at Academy Street. We were almost always late for school. School started at 9 o'clock. So in all, we spent at least 6 hours a day on the road. Mom would always have supper ready for us when we got home. Harry played basketball so after supper he would put a saddle on the horse and ride back to town to either practice or play basketball on the nights scheduled. One real stormy night as we got off Route 10 and got to South Jefferson, John T. Stewart stopped us and invited us in for supper. Of course we were some happy kids. J.T. took the horse in the barn and took care of him. Belle Stewart had a beautiful hot supper for us and then she asked us if we would like to stay all night. We had to call home and when Mom and Pop said we could, we were elated. That's the first time we had slept in feather beds. Inga and I thought we were floating in heaven. J.T. and Belle were the parents of Ardith Hamm. Here we didn't have to get up so early and travelled only half the usual distance. I'll never forget the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Stewart. It seems people were kinder and more thoughtful in the old days. The fall of 1931 came and school buses were introduced. We were assigned to the Jefferson Central School (1931–1934). Pop bought an old Buick touring car and got the job of driving the bus. Sometimes we had to walk to Cornell Hollow to meet the bus because Pop couldn't get the car up home, but that was a breeze for us. Inga and I were on the basketball team, so when we played on Friday nights, two teachers would invite us to stay overnight. We would have to walk home from Jefferson Saturday morning.

So from then on, going to school was not a problem for me. Inga still wanted to go to college. She enrolled at Oneonta State in 1934 and worked for her room and board for the four years. She lived on Chestnut Street and walked up to the college. That's the way many folks got their education years ago and that's why they appreciate it.



Elsa Anderson Eklund, born in New Jersey, moved to Blenheim, attended one-room schoolhouses on Welsh Road (Blenheim) and Cornell Hollow (Gilboa), and farmed on Cornell Road.

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