

MEMORIES AT PLEASANT PRAIRIE

Ruth Stolen, a lady who spent most of her life involved with education, was born, grew up and raised her family in the same house that she lives in now in the Green Creek location. There were nine children in her family and she was the youngest. Mrs. Stolen went to grade school at the Green Creek School. Her father, Mr. Larson, donated a corner of the family land for the school to be built on. One of Mrs. Stolen's memories of the Green Creek School was that there was not a hot lunch program like there is today. The children that lived far away from school carried their lunches. Mrs. Stolen usually went home for lunch because she lived so close to the school. She carried her lunch when she wanted to because, "A lot of time I wanted to play with the other children. The only chance I had to play with some of them was at lunch time and recess, so I carried my lunch just for that reason," recalls Mrs. Stolen. Mr. Oliver Fuller was superintendent when she attended the Green Creek School. Mrs. Stolen then went to High School at National Mine.

For the first year, Mrs. Stolen had to walk the four miles to and from school. Dorothy Trewartha was a frequent walking partner during that year. In the remaining years, Mr. Wood, who had a team of horses and a sleigh or buggy, drove them to school. In National Mine, Mrs. Stolen remembers that Mr. Schutte and Mr. Pangborn were the superintendents.

Mrs. Stolen graduated from high school in 1925. She went to Northern Normal School in the summer and received her teaching certificate which allowed her to teach for three years. Today Northern Normal School is known as Northern Michigan University. This certificate was a limited certificate in those years. She was 18 years old when she started teaching in 1926.

Mrs. Stolen said, "I started out teaching at Pleasant Prairie School in Ely Township, that's just south of where the 581 store is now and I taught there for three years.

The one-room school house had classes from first grade to eighth grade, if there were enough children to fill all those grades. Usually there were only 9-12 students. There was also a chart class that was for the five year olds that were just starting school.

They started school at 9:00 and were through at 3:30. She had to make out a daily schedule every day and group the children according to what grades they should be in. When one class was reciting, the others were doing their seat work. They had a recess period in the morning and afternoon and a noon hour.

Mrs. Stolen taught geography, math, hygiene, spelling, reading, language and regular lessons of the Palmer penmanship method, and they also had art when she could crowd it in.

The eighth grade students were required to take a state test on all subjects at the end of the year. If they passed, they could go on to high school. This was a requirement for rural school students.

The Pleasant Prairie School was a portable building which means the walls were all put together with bolts so it could be taken apart and moved. There was no well so the janitor would carry water from his home in pails. There was a bench in the hall where children hung up their coats, and on the benches were the pails of water with a tin dipper for drinking and also a wash basin and soap and paper towels to wash their hands. "There was no plumbing just the little house out back" she said, smiling.

Mrs. Stolen said she and the children had so much fun. There were usually so few children, only 9 or 10, and they always wanted her to play with them at recess time, which she always did. The game they most enjoyed was hide and seek, and, of course, she had to hide too. If the weather wasn't nice, they used to play in the school building at recess, and again, their favorite game was hide and seek. Someone would blind their eyes and the rest would hide in different places, under someone's desk and cover themselves with a coat or crawl into some corner. "Then one day," Mrs. Stolen recalls, "While playing hide and seek, someone happened to peek out the window and he said, "There's a car coming," and sure enough, there was a car driving into the yard; so I peeked out from my hiding place and looked too. I saw that it was Mr. Gries, the County Commissioner of Schools!" He was the person in charge of rural schools. He would come out to the school and observe every now and then to make sure things were running right. "Well, there we all were, all the children were either under the desks or in corners, and I, too, was under a desk with a coat over my head," she said, laughing. So we all got excited and I said, "You better go to your seats," so they scrambled around and hung up

the coats and sat down quickly in their seats. Mr. Gries came in and sat down at Mrs. Stolen's desk. He stayed for the rest of the day! She said that was the longest period she had ever gone through, because he was sitting there listening to her. "Also," she said,

I was supposed to have a plan written out for every day in a book, and I hadn't written one for the day. Wouldn't you know, that would be the day I didn't have one written! The book was lying on my desk and he could have just opened it to see if I had written a plan for that day, but he didn't, thank goodness," said Mrs. Stolen. That was quite a day," she recalls.

The children and Mrs. Stolen, along with her niece, Ruth Brotten, who was living with the Larsons had to walk to school every day. The Larsons did not have a car. "I had no fear of animals, but often saw bear tracks, yet thankfully no "bears", said Mrs. Stolen. In the spring, the "red dust" on the road was terrible. When it rained, the puddles looked like tomato soup, red and thick with red, iron ore dust", she remembered.

There wasn't much traffic on 581 in those days like there is now, but everyone who went out, would always stop and ask the teacher if she wanted a ride. The people were always very friendly, and she appreciated every ride, even in the pulp trucks.

After she taught at the Pleasant Prairie School, Mrs. Stolen went back to college to get her life certificate. She had to go to school for two more years after that.

After she received her life certificate, she moved to Flint and began teaching there. She was around twenty-four years old at that time. She told me that schools were quite a bit different in Flint, but thought that could have been due to the fact that they were city schools.

Ruth Larson married Harold Stolen in 1942. They have two sons, Olaf and Basil. When her children were in Junior and Senior High School, Mrs. Stolen started teaching at the West Ishpeming School, and she continued teaching there for twelve years. She taught for a total of 28 years. Here children have moved away and have families of their own. Mr. and Mrs. Stolen now enjoy a quiet life and love when their two grandchildren, Jennifer and Andrew, come for a visit. They have a garden in the summer and keep busy by doing the chores that are needed to keep a household going. However, they are never too busy to stop for a friendly chat with the neighborhood children who stop by for frequent visits.

Michele Richards