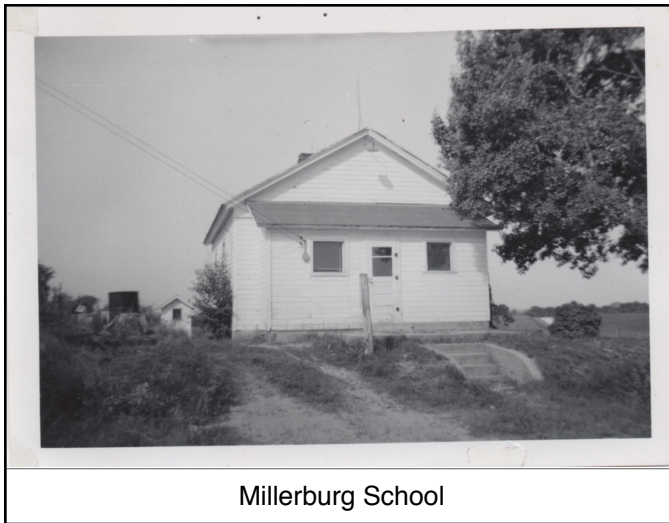


Chapter3

Middle Farm Years - Millerburg District 98

I loved school from the start. This may be the reason that my entire life, until retirement, has revolved around the academy. My teacher for grades 1 and 2 was Mrs. Lola Woods. I don't remember what she looked like, except that she was an older, gray-haired lady with whom I got along pretty well.



Millerburg School was a typical rural, one-room school with two outhouses and a hand pump for water. The boy's two-holer outhouse is shown on the left-hand side of the school and the girl's outhouse is behind. On the right side of the school is the silver maple in which we would climb and carve our initials. I attended this school from 1943-1951, grades one through eight. This picture was taken in 1959, some seven years after consolidation had occurred with the school having

been sold to a construction company. More recently the Stephenson County Historical Society, in search of a "typical one-room school", bought the school. They did some remodeling, removing the clothes and lunch bucket lean-to entrance on the east side and adding a bell tower. This school is available for tours in the Stephenson County Museum in Freeport.

Mrs. Woods was my teacher for the first and second grades, Joseph Genant was my third and fourth grade teacher, and Evelyn Tippitts taught the fifth through eight grades. Mr. Genant had a Ford in which he removed the back seat, put in small chairs, and took us all to Madison to tour the capitol during my third grade. Here we are on the steps of the capitol. I'm in the first row, far left. Mr. Genant also took the whole school in to Chicago to tour



Madison Capitol Steps

the Museum of Science and Industry. It was my first visit to that great city.

Mr. Genant was also a veteran of the Spanish-American war. Since we had a coal-fired furnace with a cylindrical shield around it, on cold mornings in the winter the air at the top of the room would be hot while that at the floor would be freezing. So Mr. Genant would appoint someone to be the leader, and we would march around the room while he played *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* on our piano. The effect would be to stir the air in the room to equalize the temperature. It worked!

Of course the most popular parts of the school day were the 15 minute morning and afternoon recesses and the half hour lunch break at noon. In the winter we would go sled riding on the adjacent roads which were often snow packed and slick. In nicer fall and spring weather we would mainly play soft ball. We played "batter up" in which we had three batters, a catcher, pitcher, basemen, and the rest playing outfielders. Batters continued to hit till they were put out. They then went to the outfield; the outfielders moved to the bases; the first basemen moved to be pitcher; the pitcher moved to be catcher; and from there he or she became a batter.

I say "he or she" because we eventually got girls in the school. My first two years we had only eight boys. Then Janice Cooly moved in and, in the following year, Nancy Putnam started first grade with my brother Douglas and Ronnie Prasse.



My Fourth Grade School Photo

This school photo is on prominent display in the reconstructed Millerburg school on the Stephenson County Historical Museum. Brother Doug is in front in this picture, and I am the middle student in the third row. Our teacher is Mr. Genant. By this time we were up to ten students!

Our library is shown in the above photo, next to the right-hand blackboard. It consisted of four shelves, each about three feet wide. By about the sixth grade I had read all the books in the library. Mrs. Tippetts, my teacher for the last four years of grade school, realized that I liked to read and would stop at the Freeport public library to sign out and bring me books. We had a reading score board on which, for each book we read and reported on, we would receive a star. I quickly filled my row on the board and was only challenged by Nancy Clark, a really smart girl about four grades behind me.

Mrs. Tippetts was a good soft ball player and would frequently pitch for us. She recognized that we were getting pretty good at baseball, so she challenged one of her teacher friends who taught at a school on Pearl City road. We visited their school, played them, and won quite handily. It was the only game in which our school played another school.

I was often questioned by people who asked, "Wasn't it an awful handicap to attend a one room school?" I remind them that, although we did not have all the modern equipment, we did get a solid education. We had a recitation bench in the front of the room, right in front of the teacher's desk. The teacher would call each class to the recitation bench to answer questions and discuss each subject. So as first grader, I would hear the second grade, third grade, up to the eighth grade recite. As a second grader, I would hear all the other classes recite, and so on. Often I would hold up my hand to answer questions other classes failed to. Not all classes had students, but by the time I graduated from the eighth grade I had heard every subject discussed many times. This is why I was well prepared for high school.

By about the sixth grade, Joan and Juanita Sager moved into our community. Joan was my age and Juanita a year younger. So now I had a classmate - I had been alone in my class until then. Our last year in grade school, Jackie Nutter joined our class. So now we had a class of three! I never saw Jackie again during high school, but during my first year in college I got a phone call from my parents. It seemed that Jackie and a friend had stolen a car in Freeport and driven to Iowa where they were arrested for speeding. While in the police station, Jackie had requested to go to the bathroom. There he slipped out a window, got a gun out of the policeman's car, and reentered the station where he shot a policeman. He was subsequently tried and hanged. So I tell people who complain about the crime scene that one third of my class was hanged as a cop killer.

Our school had a hand pump and a bubbler for drinking. The big kids got to pump several pails full of water to fill the bubbler. By raising our hand we got to go to

the bubbler for a drink or the outhouse for the toilet. Incidentally, the outhouse also served as the “men’s club” for the big kids. There we told jokes and got our first sex education.

One of the more interesting and slightly gross incidents occurred during my early years at Millerburg school. The Watson family had several boys, Karl, Bob, and Oscar among them. Oscar was only a year ahead of me, but Karl and Bob were several years ahead. It turns out that their farm had a gravel quarry on it. Karl had discovered a blasting cap one day, and, not knowing what it was, began pounding on it. It exploded, leaving only the little finger and thumb on one hand and destroying one eye. He had a glass eye to replace the destroyed one, and, if you were one of his friends, he would pop the glass eye out for you. It was really shocking!

In general the whole school got along well with each other. One slight exception occurred when Richard Meyers and I got into a wrestling match fight. Gene and Richard Meyers were Catholics living on the road Doug and I walked every morning and evening. My parents were quite open minded about Jews, noting only that they were sharp cattle traders. However, they did have certain opinions about the Meyers. Some of it may have been that they were Catholic - some of it may have been that they thought Meyers were drinkers and smokers. In any case some of this discrimination rubbed off on Doug and me. This may have been some of the reason Richard and I got in a fight. I won, and in general Gene, Richard, Doug and I got along pretty well.

Another incident occurred that affected Doug and me. Donnie Walters, the big eighth grader, was becoming a discipline problem for Mr. Genant. It was becoming a health issue for him, and so he took some time off. The superintendent of schools appointed Mom to fill in for him. So for several weeks my brother and I had our mother as our teacher. She made a special point of showing us no preference.



Millerburg School at Present

After eight years at Millerburg, I finally graduated in a nice ceremony with about thirty other students from rural schools in Stephenson County. Douglas never did graduate from this school - he attended the new junior high school for his eighth grade. It was designed for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. So as I entered Freeport high school, mine was the last Freshman class.

Life went on with farm work. My main tasks included carrying corn and oats from the granaries to the chickens, slopping the hogs, and throwing down silage and feeding the cows. Dad recognized my desire to do well academically and often let me off with minimal chores. However, the field work

never let up. By age ten I was driving the John Deere GP tractor to plow, disk, and drag the fields to get them ready for oats and corn planting. I also drove the team of May and Flory to haul manure and make hay. Later I drove the Massey Harris 101 Jr. to plow corn and cut, rake, and bale hay.

Our nearest 4-H club was south of Freeport - the Florence Flitters. So Dad and our neighbor due east of our farm, Clarence Altman, decided to form our own club. It became the Harlem Helpers, and Dad and Clarence were the leaders. Geese were my first 4-H project and I later turned to sheep.



Harlem Helpers 4-H Club

Dad is in the second row, left, and Clarence is right. I am in the first row next to my classmate, Joan Sager. The purpose of 4-H was to teach young people responsibility in raising and caring for animals and carefully recording our activities. Each August we would "show" our animals at the Stephenson County fair. Mom and Dad would enter geese and chickens, Doug would enter his turkeys, and I entered sheep and geese. We would generally come home with many ribbons, mostly blue.

Our social life continued to revolve mainly around the church. Mom continued to give talks and book reports to the Ladies's Aid. Reverend Fike offered a church membership class which I took. This led to my baptism, along with my friends Emmert Johansen, Bertha MacAdam and Nancy Hoefle in 1948. Later that year Reverend Fike resigned and the church called David Fouts to be pastor. It turned out that Reverend

Fouts and my parents had serious differences as to their philosophy and the practices of the church. These differences led to a split in the congregation with about half of them



Church Play in 1948

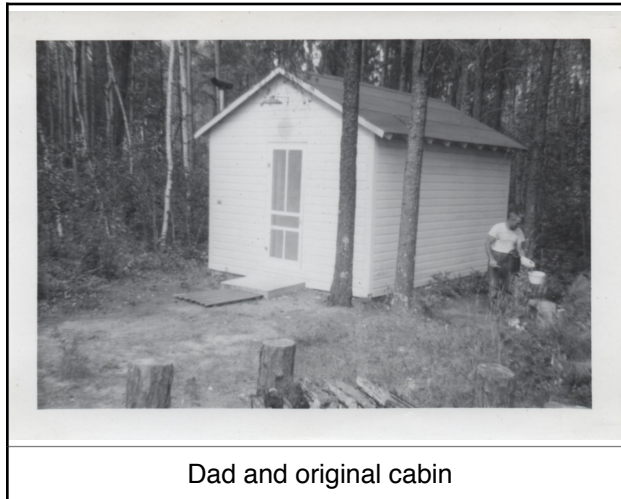
going to other churches and our family attending the Baptist Church. The church could not continue to function with half of the congregation missing, and soon Reverend Fouts left to become pastor for the Embury Methodist church in Freeport. The divisiveness and animosity generated by this split caused my first doubts about organized religion.

One of the customs in both church and school was the recital or play. In 1945 I recited my first piece for the church and by 1948 we were acting in plays. In the photo above, the three girls are Nancy, Bertha, and Mavis Christionsen. The three boys on the right are Emmert, me, and Doug. We also had Christmas performances at school featuring memorized pieces and plays. I remember, with some embarrassment, our production of a minstrel play with blackfaces and very corny (but non-racists) jokes about my fifth or sixth grade. How times and political correctness have changed!

In spite of the heavy workload farming demanded, our parents introduced us to the joys of traveling. Early adventures included a trip to the State Fair in Milwaukee, a day spent at the Railroad Fair in Chicago, a fishing trip with our friend Art Simpson to Lake Mendota in Madison, and the church's Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. By 1950 we even took a trip to Denver to visit our friends Harold and Frances

Miller. We had been their friends when they lived in Illinois, but their doctors had recommended a drier western climate to alleviate their asthma problems. When they moved to Denver we inherited their dog, Donnie. Donnie was a good farm dog who we had for years.

Beginning in the early 1950s our family began regular fishing trips to Northern Wisconsin. We explored a number of lakes but, because of the good fishing, settled in on the Townsend Resort on Island Lake eleven miles north of Spooner, Wisconsin. My parents used the inheritance from Mom's deceased parents to buy eight acres and the former ice house from a boys camp on Island Lake.



The cabin burned to the ground in the huge forest fire of May, 1980. But Doug, Audrey, and my parents rebuilt it in a week, using the \$5000 insurance money. It has since become the social center of our family. Fishing, sailing, wind surfing, kayaking and swimming consume the 4th of July weekend every summer.

A wonderful addition to our farm life was the addition of Inky, a quarter horse. George MacAdam suggested that if we

would keep and feed his horse Inky we could ride her as much as we wanted. Not only would we have a good riding horse for free but we could have Inky bred and have the colt as our own. Inky was not only a great riding horse but also extremely useful on the farm. We always rode Inky to get the cattle from the back pastures for milking, but also for very enjoyable trail rides.

George bought Inky so that his daughter, Bertha, could ride. Berty was my age and we became fast friends. Eventually we would do trail rides together - Berty on Inky and Doug or I on Inky's daughter, Princess.

By May, 1951, I had completed eighth grade at Millerburg school. The Stephenson County school system arranged graduation exercises for about thirty eighth graders from all the outlying school districts in the county. The superintendent of schools spoke, and we all graduated into Freeport high school.

