

Blaine School Information Sheet
by Robert Browning

Robert sent this information to Nestucca Valley Middle School during the school's work on the Heritage Project. This information was then typed by a Nestucca Valley Middle School student as part of the student's technology grade. Who was the student who typed this so well? At this moment the student's name is not listed on the typed copy, but I believe that the name will be found. It will be posted here. Note that having the students do "real" work in technology instead of simply practicing keyboarding was such a terrific experience . . . and work . . . for the students. The time period that Robert is referring to in this writing is during the 1940s. DB

A. TEACHERS

Teachers at the Blaine School taught primarily from a "teacher edition" of the textbook and developed craft activities for the lower grade students. Teachers taught within the context of a historic Judeo-Christian world view and from a basic foundation of clearly defined reality, truth, moral principle, and ethical conduct. The Marxist-Leninist and Secular Humanist world views, that are prevalent today, were considered a marginal viewpoint and were not a part of the teacher's classroom discussion in those days. The method of teaching was generally simple, understandable, and designed to test the student's understanding of what was taught. The teacher I had, for a great portion of the elementary years, emphasized phonics to enable the students to sound out words and develop pronunciation skills. I remember this teacher standing in front of the class with large white flash cards with black letters and special underlines to emphasize the long and short vowel sounds. It was because of her emphasis of the need to read well, that gave me the desire to read books all of my adult life. The teachers not only presented facts from a text book, but made certain that those facts were understood. Students were expected to answer classroom discussion questions, solve problems, and present oral and written reports. Individual help was given to those who needed more explanation and time to understand. The teacher would even come early or stay after school if a student needed the extra time.

2. Discipline- Discipline was applied promptly when needed and where needed. It was usually acknowledged afterward, by the recipient, that the action was justly deserved. I do not recall any of the teachers using a method of discipline that would be considered severe enough to break the student's spirit. I specifically recall a time that I received discipline when I had been disrespectful to the teacher and fellow students. I uttered some words that were considered very inappropriate and was ushered out to the utility sink on the side porch where my mouth was "washed out" with a bar of Ivory soap! It seemed to prove the point, and I do not recall having to go through that process again. Discipline was usually connected with disobedience to a teacher, student conflicts, and use of profanity. The school events making today's news headlines were non-existent. No one heard of the "drug scene" in those days and even tobacco was not a factor at the grade school level.

3. Interaction- Student to teacher interaction was expected. When students were asked to read a portion of a textbook in front of the class, they were graded on the presentation. It has already been stated in a previous section that individual assistance was given when needed. Most students respected the teachers and did not feel intimidated when called upon in class to demonstrate their skills.

4. Teacher Memories- Of the three teachers I had during my Blaine School years, one in particular left a lasting memory in my life. Fannie Smith, whom many lovingly referred to as

"Auntie Fannie", was a person who could not avoid creating a special place in one's heart. On more the one occasion, teachers came out or retirement to teach at Blaine when no other teacher could be found that would come to a small country school. My parents had engaged the services of Fannie to home tutor me before I even entered the public school system. I viewed her as a "grand motherly" figure and apparently responded to her instruction well enough to be accepted directly into second grade the following year. In the classroom she rarely seemed flustered by the many antics of students who often tried to get the best of her. She maintained order and would not tolerate an overuse of noise or nonsense in the class room.

5. Number of Teachers- There was only need of one teacher each school year for my entire eight grades; however, after World War II had ended, a second classroom was built. The lower grade levels then occupied the new classroom.

6. Names of Teachers- I am not entirely sure on the years that each of the respective teachers were employed by the Blaine School District; however, I can give a general time frame. Others may be more precise. The 1940-41 school year was taught by Fannie Smith. The Blaine School was closed for the 1941-42 school year and all students were transported to the Beaver School. The Blaine School re-opened for the 1942-43 school year and a teacher by the name of O.B. Manley taught for that year and also the 1943-44 year. All the remaining years from 1945-46 through my eighth grade in 1948-49, were taught by Fannie Smith, except one, or a portion of one. My recollection seems to produce a name of Mrs. Robertson, but that may be incorrect.

B. STUDENTS

1. Clothing- Student's clothing was rather basic and simple in the 1940's. the "fad culture" of the large cities had not reached South Tillamook County. The boys wore jeans and generally a shirt with a button front. It was not uncommon, by the end of school year, that the boys had at least a patch or two sewed over the holes in their jeans. I recall that I had great anticipation for the arrival of new jeans, from the Sears catalog, to begin the new school year. The girls generally wore full dresses with hem lines well below the knees. There was no written dress code; however, it was understood that the students would dress sensibly and modestly. I do not recall of a student ever being sent home for inappropriate or suggestive clothing.

2. Class Size- Classes were arranged in learning groups that included several grade levels. The subjects were taught to the group in a way that would sometimes be a review to those who were advancing ahead. Individual help would be offered either during class or arranged for another time. The upper grade levels would be working on their own assignments and activities while the teacher was working with the beginning and lower grade levels at the opposite end of the room.

3. School Size- I do not recall the total enrollment figures. Shortly after my eighth grade year, enrollment began to drop and the school was closed before I graduated from high school. Children of the area residents usually moved away to metropolitan areas once they were on their own. I think that my eighth grade consisted of four boys and one girl.

C. GENERAL

1. Inside & Outside Appearance- The Blaine school, on the outside, was an attractive building with its white board siding, high pitched roof, and white belfry tower on the front peak of the

roof. A sign was located above the porch entry to the building with the name, district number, and date of construction.

Just inside the main door was an entry area where the bell rope hung through the ceiling hole. Small cloak rooms were on both sides of the walled entry area. The boys had the left cloak room, when entering the building, and the girls had the right cloak room. There were places in the cloak rooms to hang coats, a shelf for books, lunches, and a small number of library books. The remainder of the building was an open room with the teacher's desk near the blackboards that were along the south end and west side. Desks had a wood top with a hole for an ink well, and a wooden seat. The wood parts of the desk were attached to a wrought iron framework. You may often see these old desks for sale in the antique stores at a rather large price. Toilet facilities were of the "pit" variety on the south side of the property and later the inside ones were constructed. A side exit door was located on the far right of the room that went to a porch area that contained a sink and a wood-shed building attached. Steps led down from the back porch area to the school play yard. The school room area was heated by a large wood stove near the exit to the wood shed. Electricity did not come to the school until the end of World War II.

2. Grades- It was previously mentioned that all eight elementary grades were in the one room until the construction of the second classroom.

3. School Grounds & Play Area- The school yard was bordered by the Upper Nestucca River Road on the west side and the Moon Creek road on the North side of the grounds. A row of large Big Leaf Maple trees bordered the Moon Creek road. Until the swamp was drained in the mid 40's and its willow trees removed on the south side of the school yard, there was not a large amount of open grassy area to play. There was a large size covered play shed, with a board floor, on the east end that would serve for a rainy day activities, roller skating, and game activities. In the mid 1940's a small teacher's residence was built between the play shed and Moon Creek road.

4. School Hours & Year- School usually started the first Monday after the Labor Day Holiday and dismissed for the summer about the 15th of May, when approximately 174 days of school had been attained. I do not recall the exact starting time each day, but I think it was 8:00 AM and the day was finished at either 2:30 or 3:00 PM.

5. Vacations and Holidays- Most of the holidays that are in today's school year were observed at Blaine School. Some of the presidents birth dates, such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were observed rather than one day honoring all past Presidents. Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays were about the same length as today. There was no "spring break" in those days, but school was out in mid May rather than mid June.

6. Behavior Rules- Students were expected to be quiet and attentive in the class room while the teacher was instructing and also during times of individual study. If there was a departure from the teacher's expectations, the student or group was subject to some form of discipline. Often the consequence of in-appropriate behavior meant staying after school and writing, "I will not (name of misdeed inserted) again," one hundred times. Students were expected to sit in their assigned seats until asked to work at the blackboards or be excused for some specific reason. Profanity was not tolerated and when the teacher learned of any, there would be appropriate discipline. There were no drug or substance abuse problems in school and use of tobacco was even a rarity. About the worst that might happen is a couple of boys get in a

argument that ended in a scuffle. Parents were notified in those instances and usually corrected.

7. School Lunches- There were no school lunch programs during those days. Each student was responsible for bringing his or her own lunch. Most of the students had metal "lunch boxes" as there was a paper bag shortage during the war years.

8&9. Recess Activities and Toys- Recess activities would be outside except on very stormy days, in that case there would be some inside activity to do. Some brought toys from their home. I recall that some of the boys brought metal trucks or some home made wooden toy to play with outside. There was not an abundance of toys on the market, especially during the war years. Some of the games played include "Red Rover", "Red Light Green Light", and "Mother May I". These games would be played outside in good weather or in the play shed on rainy days. Another game played called "Rock, Paper and Scissors" that is sometimes played today; however, most of the other games we played have faded into history with the introduction of so many other games and activities.

10. Club Activities- There were no after school clubs during those days. Most of the students had their own farm chores to do after school. Some of the farm students were involved in "4-H Club" that was designed to be an individual project to be displayed or shown at the Tillamook County Fair each year. I had a garden vegetable project for a couple of years and a registered Jersey heifer I showed another year.

11. Student Learning- The subjects taught were very simple and basic during that time. There was emphasis on language fundamentals, writing skills, basic math, history, civics, science, and literature. There were no elective studies available and most of these subjects were limited to theory due to the absence of laboratory equipment.

12. Parent Groups- There were no organized Parent Teacher groups that met and planned activities. Parents were interested in their child's progress and met with the teacher any time there were either parent or teacher concerns. Some individual volunteer assistance was given by some of the families that live close to the school. Most of the parents' homes were at least two miles or more away from the school and not many mothers drove during those days.

13. Classroom Organization- The concept of the one room serving as the grouping of the various grade level activities was not altered much over the years. Student work would often be displayed on either a table or bulletin board. The basic decor of the room consisted of framed wall pictures of President George Washington, President Abraham Lincoln and the President in power at that time. They were quite large and impressive looking portraits and I recall the awe I had when looking at President Dwight Eisenhower's portrait. With World War II having ended, he was my hero! The room would be festively decorated with student made crafts for various holidays. Contrary to current trends, we always had wonderful Christmas nativity plays which the entire community attended to support their children's participation.

D. SPORTS

1. Sports Contests- The size of enrollment at the Blaine School did not present enough interest in a particular sport to have any competition with other schools in the area. There was an occasional softball game between a group of students during noon hour or recess; however there was always a shortage of interested players. Girls and boys usually participated together

in such an activity. Sports activity were voluntary and unorganized as far as the school district's involvement. No mascot was thought of in those days.

E. TRANSPORTATION

District number 27 did not own a school bus. Most of the students either walked to school, rode bicycle, or were brought by their parents. Alma Spidell, who live in the Blaine Post Office building across the road from school, transported some of the students that lived up the Nestucca. I distinctly recall one winter afternoon it began to snow rather hard. Alma was driving up the river road with the snow coming down with such a rapid rate that her windshield wipers just couldn't handle the amount. I remember that she got out several times to clean the wipers only to have them immediately plug up again. She finally resorted to rolling down the window and frequently sticking her head out of the window to see if she was still on the road! We did make it through OK!

F. OTHER INFORMATION

The Blaine School days contain some of the most vivid and precious memories I have. I will elaborate on only a few:

1. Fall School Days- I always looked forward to those, often warm clear, September days at school. The first order of play was to climb as high as possible in those large Big Leaf Maple trees lining the road in front of the school. There was something about those big yellow leaves in the fall that made those trees magic. Perhaps it was a case of trying to get the girls attention that also drove a number of boys to climb those trees. The rambling willow trees growing in the swamp presented a "jungle gym" , but it resulted in some soggy clothing occasionally.

2. The Wednesday Ice Cream Truck- The Sheridan Creamery made a weekly trip into the Blaine area during the mid 40's and would stop in front of the school for students to buy ice cream. For twenty cents I could purchase a pint of ice cream and have it eaten before the end of lunch bell rang calling us back to class!

3. A "slug sandwich"- Then there was the year at the Beaver school. That year did not fit into the pleasant memories, but it stayed in my mind as a memory. The Blaine students were not well received and were classified by some of the Beaver School kids as intruders. A group of boys were noted for their tendency to be the playground "bullies". They cornered me one day and proceeded to pin me to the ground and forced me to eat two graham crackers with a small slug sandwiched between. It was much later in life that I learned that, in some parts of the world, this would have been considered a "delicacy." I did not view it as that at the time!

4. The Day of The "Big Crash"- School life was never so serious that it could not be disrupted by something exciting going on. Such was the case of the loaded log truck crashing through the decking of the bridge across Moon Creek. The loud crash was heard in the school room, so teacher and students all went outside to view the logs, trailer and the tractor hanging at a precarious angle downward into the creek. Fortunately the truck driver was not injured, but the bridge had to be totally rebuilt.