

Nellie writes: "When I taught at the Strange in 1927 I found I had a very good group of students for which I give Herbert Calhoun much credit. They were exceptional as they were good students and friendly. We sat in a group eating our lunches. Had one hot dish cooked by the children with a little aid. Had a one burner electric plate. Our meal could be bean soup, chile or whatever. Two children did dishes. As the children were interested and worked well at their studies, we would work on plays after lessons. The plays were given at P.T.A's."<sup>1</sup>

Nellie feels that the personal attention the teacher in country school could give, was a decisive and helpful factor. "At our school we worked hard with the kindergarten, especially as we could teach them to read.. That's the beauty of our one room school. No one to say "You can't do that!"<sup>1</sup> As she thinks of some of her former pupils who went out to make names for themselves in varied chosen fields, and others who remained in the home community and set a good example of sturdy citizenship, she feels that the school in our community has performed a fruitful service through the years.

One of the pupils here from 1928 to 1935, Alice Brunger Bouknight, has written her memories of "Strange School" during this period, as follows.

"Seven years of country school - I had Nellie Ireland 6 years and I remember the folks feeling so bad that she couldn't be my teacher all the way through. She let me take second and third grade in one year - very possibly because there wasn't anyone in one of the grades..

Recess - What fun to play pom-pom-pull-away with the sides sometimes being the fence and the road and I wonder how anyone got across without being caught especially after there was more than one who was "It". This would be played on the north side of the schoolhouse. Sometimes we played right in front of the building - (before the shrubs were planted). More exciting then this game tho was anti-i-over when you threw the ball over the schoolhouse roof and if it was caught the whole side came thundering or sneaking around the end of the schoolhouse to try and catch you. We sometimes played using the wood shed roof but it wasn't nearly as exciting. Also played baseball every spring.

Hot lunches - I don't know how long this was done but can still remember how good they would smell - especially the goulash. The students did the cooking while Nellie continued to teach which when you think about it was pretty un-usual. Of course there always had to be a dishwashing 'person' and I don't recall that as being so much fun. Don't remember any dish but goulash and bean soup but just that it was good. It would be so cold outside and all that steam and smell made the day seem more cozy and brighter.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Nellie Ireland to the author, April 6, 1979

Fun - to listen to the big folks recite...sure do remember Harry creating disturbances and getting Nellie to talk - most probably not on the lesson.

Excitement - of getting ready for special days - not only Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter but May Day and Mother's Day. This was done ONLY after the lessons were finished. We would finish our day's work early then everyone would work on making things or practicing the programs. We made simple things but we enjoyed it. (Never forget the orange crepe paper butterfly that I was allowed to paint around the edges with beautiful gold and then on Mother's Day creeping downstairs early to pin it on the curtain thinking it was so beautiful). We spend hours practicing for special programs and the day was pretty special when the big curtain was put up and it was pulled to show us 'acting'. I remember especially the hours spent on drills - around and across that stage over and over and of course the best time was when I became the leader. We made May Day baskets for flowers to deliver on that day.

Beauty - one year we had a county wide beautification project. We planted a semi circle of bushes in front of the schoolhouse on either side of the flag pole. That was exciting as some one came to look at it. The only problem there was we could no longer play in front.

Discipline - I don't remember Nellie had any problem with the younger children but do remember some disturbances with all the Hogle boys (Lee, R.V., and Albert) and Don Moist. She came out the winner tho because she was firm."

In the 1930's, the school enrollment was generally lower. In 1931-32 Nellie Ireland had 24 pupils, 15 of them boys. By 1936-37 under Hilah Perry, the roll was down to 12. Two years later it was up to 17.

About 1936 or 1937, the Strange School, the Canada Settlement School, and the Doane School, arranged for an exchange of parties. Three parties were planned for the year--Halloween, Valentine's Day, and Easter. Each school acted as host for one party. The host school prepared the invitations the program and the refreshments.<sup>1</sup> The children enjoyed it; the teachers felt that it was an enriching experience.

From 1935 to 1939, Hilah F. Perry was our teacher. The depression held its grip upon the people; Hilah received \$40 per month salary her first year, and \$10 per month janitorial fee. During this period with W.P.A. money, the school was modernized and extensively remodeled. The south windows were removed, and new windows put in on the north side to reduce glare in the school.

In the late 1930's, came a palace revolution in which the women took over the school board for the first time. Women had been very active in the Churches since the days of the Civil War. Only after

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1 Hilah Perry, The Canada Settlement, p. 18

years of feminist agitation, were then given the right to vote by the 19th amendment in 1920. Our school board had continued to be monopolized by the men. In 1935-36, the Board was composed of Simeon Cook, Erv Burman, and Keith Otto. By 1938-39, a change had come. Evelyn Strange was now Director; Ethel Brunger Moderator; and Nellie Ireland assuming a new role in the district, was Treasurer. Nellie served on the Board until 1945 when she returned to teach again.

In 1937-38 our teacher's salary was \$690; times were improving. The pupils that year were the following: Raymond Hener, Robert Hener, John Catey, Danny Catey, Chudleigh Strange, Esther Bradley, Edwin Arndt, Don Wolodko, Keneth Bodo, Raymond Eastman, Bruce Eastman, Richard Miller, and Betty Hale.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Georgia Studt of Grand Ledge, taught from 1939 to 1942. Her salary the first year was \$810. She had 15 boys and only one girl enrolled that year, with six grades to teach, no 6th or 8th grade. As she ended this year, school had been in session in District No. 3 for 100 years! The early large school record book purchased in the 1860's, had a section for the registration of library books which had never been used. In 1941 while Dora Reed was Director, an Accession Book for school libraries, was purchased.

This book lists the author, name of book, publisher, and year of publication, and the cost. Two hundred and thirty books are listed alphabetically in the first handwriting, evidently the library in 1941. The library was quite large, and evidently there was a strong interest in it at this time. One book on China was published in 1887. There were a number of books from the early years of our century, including books that I recognize as having been in our school library around 1920. These included the Carpenter Geographic Readers on Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, and Eurpoe, published in 1899. The library contained such old favorites as books by Louisa May Alcott; Carolyn Bailey's "Boys and Girls of Colonial Days" and "Boys and Girls of Discovery Days"; nature story books by Thornton W. Burgess; Frances Burnett's "Secret Garden" (which Miss Miles read to us serially in 1920-21); Eulalie Grover's "The Overall Boys"; Helen Orton's "Summer at Cloverfield Farm" and "Winter at Cloverfield Farm"; Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island" and a "Child's Garden of Verses"; Booth Tarkington's "Penrod", etc. Quickly other books were purchased including stories by Zane Grey, and Stefansson on his arctic travels, "Pinocchio", "Hans Brinker", "Story of Michigan", and five dictionaries.

By May 1943, the listed books numbered 300, some of which may have been discarded. Twenty-five books were added the next two years, 15 in 1945-46, and 14 in 1946. Most books ran in price from \$1 to \$1.50, few cost over \$2.00 at that time. In November 1947 for the first time, it was noted that a list of books were paper backs. They would not last so long, but they were cheaper. A long list of books

purchased at that time contains titles to attract children, such as "Little White Rabbit", "Molly, Pete and Ginger", "Two Little Tigers and How they Flew", "Little Lost Dog", "My Dog Laddie", "Hundreds of Turkeys", "Frisky the Goat", "Peanuts the Pony", "Donald Duck & His Nephews", "School Days in Disneyville."

Our school was larger in the 1940's, than it had been in the 1930's. When Marjorie Snavely was teacher in 1942-43, the enrollment was 24. Two years later Fern Clark reported 28. Nellie Ireland in 1946-47 again had 28, with 5 in kindergarten. Catherine Baker closed the decade with 27 pupils, 17 boys and 10 girls. Again there must have been enough children to manage ball games again. Let us note also that Nellie Ireland returned to teach in our school from 1945 to 1948. Altogether she taught ten years here; she holds the record in tenure by far.

The salary went over the \$2,000 mark first in 1948-49, when Anoma Pelton received \$2250, and reported that the school had an electric pump and inside toilets. No longer the brick toilets out back, so cold in wintertime, and often smelly, dirty, and abused. School was different now; the rising standard of living had come to the Strange School. Pauline Calhoun, wife of Herbert (who had taught here in 1925-27) came here in 1950-51 and received a salary of \$2475. She had 18 years experience, and was an efficient teacher.

By the 1940's, the Parent Teacher Association had come to South Oneida, in a countrywide endeavor to involve the parents more closely with the school. It is interesting that the teachers in their Attendance Record Books began to note the PTA Presidents, rather than the Directors. The first one noted is Wilford Catey, President in 1943-44. Leo Merrill was P.T.A. President the next year; Mrs. Otto Deer in 1947-48; Mrs. Merrill in 1949-50; Mrs. Mabel Nagel in 1951-52; Mrs. Richmond in 1953-54.

Abigail Cushing taught three years from 1951 to 1954; her salary increased from \$2700 to \$2925. Beulah Powell received \$3,260 in 1954-55; she had 15 boys and 6 girls enrolled. That year a series of books on the Childhood of Great Americans was added to the library, including Buffalo Bill, Kit Carson, Will Rogers, Ben Franklin, Tom Edison, Clara Barton, Lou Gehrig, Abe Lincoln, Molly Pitcher, Tom Jefferson, and Davy Crockett. The next year nine more in this series were added, including such women as Pocahontas, Jane Addams, and Amelia Earhart. In 1957 came a series of Anne of Green Gables books, and stories of the children of various nations. By April 14, 1958, the library accession list included 651 titles!

By the 1940's, the state Superintendent of Public Instruction and his office, were actively promoting school consolidation. School buses were sent out into the country to bus the school children to the larger schools in the towns. Larger schools were supposed to be

more efficient, and offer a broader curriculum than could be offered in a one-room country school, where one teacher had to teach many grades the basic subjects. Often country schools had such small enrollments that classes and recreation and the school fellowship, were not interesting to the pupils. The attraction of town schools was evident, and many country schools were closing with their consolidation into a larger district centering on a nearby town.

In the 1950's, the pace of consolidation quickened. More and more pressure was put on country schools to close their doors and consolidate. The people in our district had held out and wanted to keep their school. It was felt that the children did get a good basic education in country school. There was an economic motivation also; it seemed that consolidation brought higher taxes with the need of larger school buildings, more school bureaucracy, and more and more buses. Furthermore the Strange School with its programs, the PTA, and school meetings, had long served as a community center, along with the church across the road.

About 1957, the Grand Ledge School District put the screws down and endeavored to force the holdout schools to quickly consolidate, by decreeing that pupils from independent districts could not longer be received for high school, even if they did pay tuition. The school board of our school held out, and made an arrangement with Sunfield, that our pupils could go there for the higher grades. Some eighth-graders were sent to Sunfield that year. But Sunfield was really too far away, for families to be interested and involved in school activities. There was a great deal of dissension over the issue. Some felt that a large school would indeed have advantages. Some were frightened over the prospect that their teen-agers could not go to Grand Ledge High School. They began to utilize subterfuges, putting their home and a strip of property running to land that was already in the Grand Ledge District, into that district so that their children could go to Grand Ledge. Oneida District No. 3 was being chopped down and reduced in size, and tax base.

Our school board tenaciously held out against the pressures of the state officials, and their evident displeasure. The enrollment in our district fell, since some families with children were now in the Grand Ledge School District. Beulah Powell came here as the teacher in 1955, and she taught for a long term. The school board showed creativity, in moving toward cooperative arrangements with neighboring school districts. In 1957-58, the Sixth and Seventh Grades from the Wetmore School (south of the Thornapple on Otto Road) came to our school. From 1958 to 1960, our school building was closed (but not the district) and the Strange pupils all went to the Earl School, where Beulah Powell was teacher.

In 1960 a Union School was established by the adjoining districts. The kindergarten children and first and second grades went to the Earl School, and were taught by Urcie Powers. Beulah Powell taught again at the Strange, the third, fourth, and fifth grades. A Ms. Laturzel taught at the Doane with only sixth and seventh grades

attending. Soon there was a shift, and the third grade was at the Earl. In 1961-62, Ursie Powers at the Earl had a good sized school of 27 pupils. She had 10 beginners, 5 in first grade, 4 in second grade, and 8 in third grade. Her salary between 1960 and 1964 ranged from \$4,000 to \$4400. Beginning in 1963, Crystal Buxton taught at the Doane. In January 1965, Ursie Powers left the Earl, and was replaced by Margaret Loveless.

It would seem that this Union School plan was a good idea. Even the state officials rather liked it. There were enough children in each grade to make the classes more interesting. The teacher only had to teach two to four different grades; her task was much less complicated than it had been traditionally in country schools.

In the fall of 1966 there was no school at the Strange, until the Earl School burned in November. Then the school for kindergarten, and grades one, two, and three, with Margaret Loveless as the teacher, moved to the Strange School for the rest of the year. From 1967 to 1971, there was no school here. But the district remained alive, ready to care for the education of children when they appeared in the district.

In the year 1971-72, three students moved into the district. School was resumed again with three students, and Max O'Neil the teacher. He remained and taught until 1975. The next year the teacher was Dawn Williams; the following year Carol Shubinski. In 1977 Nancy Green came here as teacher. She had 13 students in 1977-78. This past year she has had 11 students, as we have completed the first century in the brick school.

Oneida School District No. 3 has had a long and notable history. One hundred forty years ago the district was organized. School has been held here regularly, with few interruptions, since the summer of 1840. We have now completed a century of education in our brick school. We cannot predict the future. But looking back we see that our South Oneida School has given a good basic education to a small host, to hundreds of boys and girls, and served this community well.