
The One-Room School and Orleans High School Valedictorians, 1926–1975

Judith E. Toppe*

“The one-room school was the best school we ever had,” stated the prominent educational psychologist Bruno Bettelheim in an interview in 1981.¹ There was virtue, he believed, in the elements of a one-room education, elements such as emphasis on basics, individual instruction, and a deliberate mixing of grades and ages so that older students helped teach the younger pupils—and thus learned from repetition.² Bettelheim’s views helped spark new interest in the traditionally rural one-room schools, and in recent years a number of rural and urban school corporations have built and staffed one-room schoolhouses both to demonstrate early educational practices and to provide alternative educational experiences for modern pupils. Educators and historians who once damned the rural one-room schools as purveyors of inferior education have begun to take a second look.³

Typically an unimpressive white frame structure consisting of one or two rooms and a cloak hall, heated by a potbellied stove that radiated warmth from the center of each room and occasionally belched soot into the room, furnished with individual classroom

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¹ *Washington Post*, July 19, 1981.

² *Ibid.*; Elizabeth Hall, “Schools Treat Kids ‘Like Idiots,’” *Psychology Today*, XV (July, 1981), 38.

³ For a realistic appraisal of rural education in the Middle West, particularly that provided by the one-room schools, see Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West* (Chicago, 1982).

desks around its periphery, a teacher's desk near the center with a few bookshelves and a recitation bench nearby, its uninsulated, plastered walls camouflaged with slate boards at which generations of students stood to cipher, the rural schools still stand today in Northeast, Northwest, and Orangeville townships of Orange County, Indiana, as unpretentious edifices to those who have passed through their portals.

The grounds on which the schools sat provided plenty of opportunity to run and play although there was very little playground equipment except that constructed by a creative teacher with the assistance of energetic boys from the "Big Room" or provided with proceeds from the annual pie supper. Calls from Mother Nature necessitated a trip across the school grounds to the outhouse or, in the more primitive schools, across the road to the protection of a rock ledge. The type of outhouse reflected community standards. Some privies featured separate entrances for girls and boys but shared a dividing wall. Other communities, however, would not tolerate the indecency of such a common wall and insisted on separate facilities. A progressive day for students and teachers alike was the construction of "Roosevelt" toilets with concrete floors and vents during the 1930s.⁴

Water for classroom drinking and "washing up" before lunch was available from a spring, a neighbor's well, or an outside pump. Some of the schools boasted a tin sink, but, unfortunately, it could be used only for drainage purposes. Water buckets and common dippers for drinking were eventually replaced by individual tin cups that were hung on pegs at the back of the room or in the cloak room.

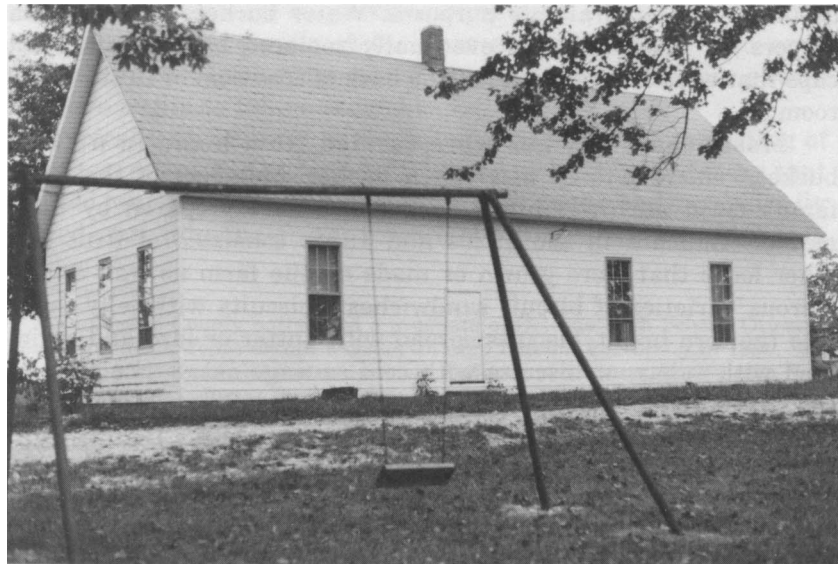
Most school lunches were carried from home in a "lard bucket," small pail, or new lunch bucket. Members of the same family often ate their lunch from one basket prepared by their mother. Lunches in the 1920s and 1930s consisted of fruit and other foods that were grown or made on the farm as well as numerous varieties of biscuit sandwiches: biscuits with jelly faded into the torn bread, biscuits spread with butter or lard and sprinkled with sugar, or biscuits with cold sausage cakes. Students in the 1950s and 1960s whose routine fare was leftovers envied students who unwrapped boiled ham and potato chips, "light bread,"

⁴ In two-room schools the "Big Room" housed the upper grades; *i.e.*, the bigger pupils. As part of one of the New Deal relief measures, improved sanitary facilities were constructed at many rural schools during the 1930s. Built basically as here described, the privies were frequently designated "Roosevelt" toilets. For descriptions of many aspects of rural education, including pie suppers and other forms of recreation, see Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Girlhood Days (Memories of Hoosier Homemakers series; [Indianapolis, 1987])*, 64, 108; Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Living Rich Lives (Memories of Hoosier Homemakers series; [Indianapolis, 1990])*, 15-21, 183-91; Fuller, *Old Country School*, 1-24, 59-78.



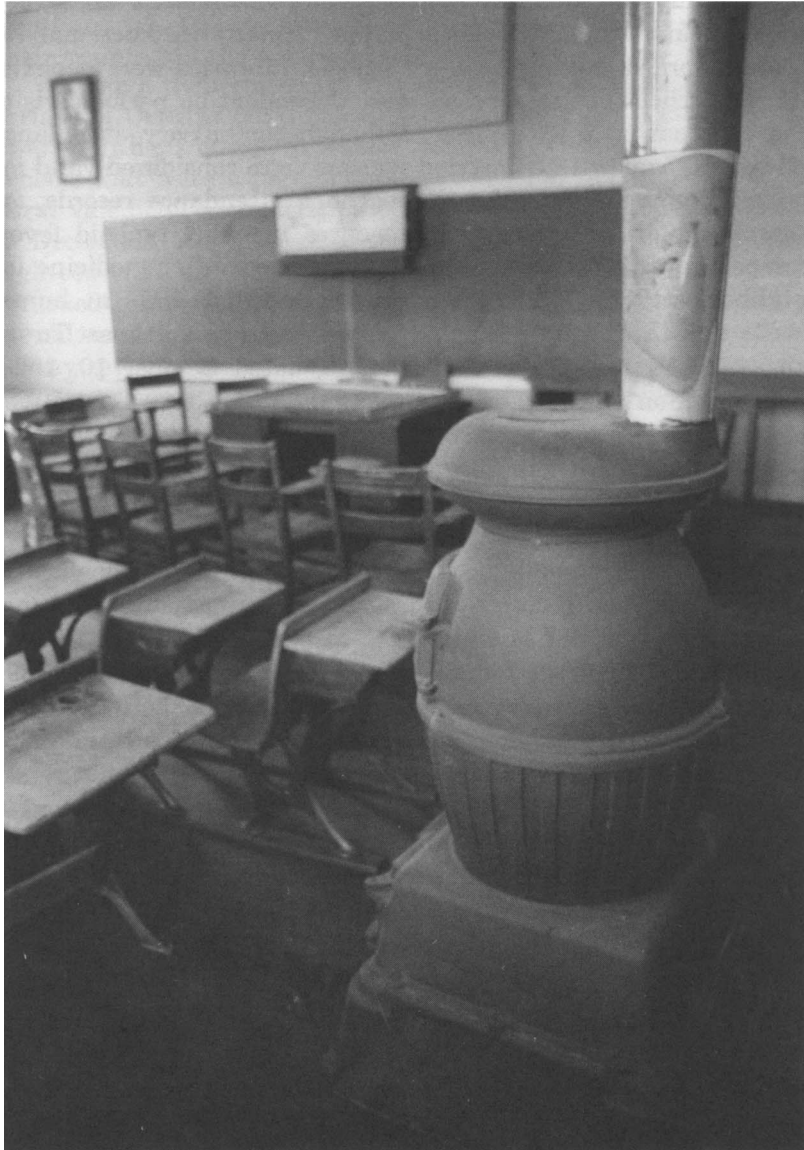
ORANGEVILLE SCHOOL, ORANGEVILLE TOWNSHIP

Courtesy Eleanor S. Himebaugh, Bedford *Times-Mail*.



LEIPSIC SCHOOL, NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP

Courtesy Eleanor S. Himebaugh, Bedford *Times-Mail*.



ORANGEVILLE SCHOOL, ORANGEVILLE TOWNSHIP

Courtesy Eleanor S. Himebaugh, *Bedford Times-Mail*.

“store bought” cookies, and graham crackers spread with icing. Cafeterias or hot lunch programs as such were not available.

Certainly the facilities in these one-room schools were very primitive, and students were deprived of many instructional resources afforded children in town schools. Libraries were nonexistent, and school health services were dependent on periodic visits from the county health nurse. Although compulsory attendance had become law in 1897, myriad reasons were considered valid for not infrequent absences. In one teacher’s attendance records, for example, notations for excused absences included typhoid fever, “croupe,” sore throat, creek up, no shoes, went after medicine for neighbor, stiff neck, threshing, work, needed—sale at home, mother sick (E. C. Quakenbush, Gammon School, Northeast Township, 1921–1922).⁵ An interesting note, dated October 10, 1924, and written on an index card found in the Oak Grove School (Orangeville Township) record book for 1923–1924 explained, “Mr. Speer: Dorothy & Clois were absent on September 19 because of they could not cross the branch with dry feet and also the mud was over their slipper tops.”

“How was it possible . . .,” historian Wayne E. Fuller asked, “to educate so many children in such rude circumstances? What kind of education did Midwestern farm children receive in such buildings?”⁶ Prior to the Indiana School Consolidation Act of 1959,⁷ many rural Hoosiers received a significant part of their education in these small rural schools. For example, during the years 1926–1975, 30 percent of the graduates of Orleans High School, a small-town high school in southern Indiana, attended one of the one- or two-room schools in neighboring townships before transferring to Orleans to complete their high school education. During this fifty-year period the list of valedictorians of OHS included the names of twenty-one rural transfer students. Thus, 30 percent of the population boasted 40 percent of the valedictorians (in 1956 there were

⁵ Cooperative Duplicate Grade Records, including attendance records, visitors registers, inventory records, and other materials relevant to the rural elementary schools in Northwest, Orangeville, and Northeast townships, are archived at Orleans High School, Orleans, Indiana. References to specific items are identified in the text by teacher’s name, school, township, and date. Indiana’s compulsory attendance law of 1897 was subsequently amended to expand its scope, but during the first decades of the twentieth century the law was often evaded or ignored, particularly in rural districts. See Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880–1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 389–90; James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and its People, 1920–1945* (Indianapolis, 1982), 276.

⁶ Fuller, *Old Country School*, vii.

⁷ Indiana, *Laws* (1959), 451–74. For discussion of the Indiana School Consolidation Act and school consolidation generally in Indiana see James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington, 1986), 248–53.

two rural co-valedictorians).⁸ [See Tables 1 and 2.] In his study of rural education in the Midwest, Fuller noted similar achievements among many graduates of one-room country schools and posed the question, "Was there any connection between their success and their training in the one-room school?"⁹

Through their responses to a written survey, the rural valedictorians of Orleans High School provide, while not a definitive answer to Fuller's query, at least a glimpse of the one- and two-room schools that were a part of their educational heritage. Seventeen rural valedictorians participated in the original study, completed in December, 1985. Three of the twenty-one were deceased; thus, eighteen were contacted with seventeen responding. Five of them returned comments so extensive that additional postage was required on the prestamped envelopes which were included with the survey questionnaire. The respondents focused on their schools' structure, curriculum, and activities; their adjustments upon leaving the rural school; and, ultimately, their reactions to the small high school from which they graduated. Throughout their comments they emphasized the experiences they perceived to be important to their academic success. Indeed, these students who went on to become valedictorians of Orleans High School concurred that there was value in their learning experiences in the small rural schools. They fondly recalled the "readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic" and recognized the strengths of this seemingly archaic system.¹⁰

No attempt was made to determine validity of the survey instrument sent to these valedictorians, to correlate results, or to establish statistical significance. There is no basis for assuming that the experiences of these students were either typical or atypical of their peers; and, finally, the reader cannot conclude that the observations, experiences, and success stories here recorded can be applied to other populations. The information should merely be appreciated for what it is—a description of the one-room school experience as remembered by the living OHS valedictorians who received a part of their early education in the rural schools of Northeast, Orangeville, and Northwest townships, Orange County, Indiana. The fifty-year period 1926–1975 was selected because the 1975 graduates were the last to have attended the one-room schools for at least a part of their educational experience.

Orange County, located in the hills of southern Indiana almost equidistant from Indianapolis and Louisville, Kentucky, is, in the

⁸ Figures were compiled from lists of graduates and attendance records housed at Orleans High School. Also consulted were Orleans High School yearbooks and issues of the Orleans *Progress Examiner*. Further verification was secured from personal interviews with graduates and/or their families and other community residents.

⁹ Fuller, *Old Country School*, 4.

¹⁰ Valedictorians' responses to the questionnaire and other materials relevant to the survey are in the possession of Judith E. Toppe.

TABLE 1
ORLEANS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
1926–1975

Year	Total	Rural Graduates	Year	Total	Rural Graduates
1926	31	8	1951	27	9
1927	31	8	1952	38	9
1928	27	8	1953	39	8
1929	37	9	1954	41	10
1930	60	24	1955	45	24
1931	32	11	1956	38	11
1932	46	16	1957	46	22
1933	39	6	1958	36	13
1934	49	14	1959	52	13
1935	34	14	1960	47	20
1936	41	13	1961	51	15
1937	41	11	1962	36	15
1938	46	14	1963	41	17
1939	48	20	1964	55	15
1940	41	10	1965	53	15
1941	34	5	1966	47	18
1942	35	10	1967	44	12
1943	40	11	1968	53	20
1944	39	12	1969	60	15
1945	29	8	1970	53	12
1946	35	13	1971	52	12
1947	34	13	1972	45	10
1948	41	9	1973	51	11
1949	27	7	1974	49	10
1950	47	17	1975	50	14
			Totals	2113	641

TABLE 2
O.H.S. VALEDICTORIANS FROM COUNTRY SCHOOLS
1926 – 1975

1926	Agnes McIntyre Hopping	Northeast
1929	Doris Allegre Ellis*	Orangeville
1930	Alice Cottengaim Moffatt**	Northwest
1934	Bernice Ewbank	Northeast
1937	Flora Johnson Lashley**	Orangeville
1939	Franklin Johnson*	Orangeville
1942	Grace Johnson Farrar	Orangeville
1943	Eleanor Walker Caplinger	Northeast
1944	Emery Johnson	Orangeville
1946	Betty Radcliff Parish	Orangeville
1948	Joe Hopping*	Northeast
1950	Mary Rose Clipp Rosenbaum	Northeast
1951	Esther Johnson Hawkins	Northeast
1956	Phyllis Wilson Minnott	Northeast
	Morris Lee Sorrells	Orangeville
1957	Wanda Johnson Carroll	Northeast
1958	Carolyn Foutch Gund	Northeast
1962	Peggy Sokeland Stephens	Orangeville
1971	Susan Tolbert Burton	Orangeville
1974	Mary Lea Gray Brown	Northeast
1975	Melva Gray	Northeast

*Deceased before 1985

**Deceased since original study

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO VALEDICTORIANS

THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOL: INFERIOR EDUCATION?

PLEASE USE A SEPARATE SHEET FOR RESPONSES AND BE AS THOROUGH AND DESCRIPTIVE AS YOUR SCHEDULE PERMITS. I JUST APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN SHARE!

I. The School: Structure, Curriculum and Activities

Where did you attend elementary school (Grades 1-8)?
Please describe the physical characteristics of your school and the school grounds.
How many students were usually in your class? Your room? Please describe the curriculum, noting changes as you progressed through the grades.
Was there any classroom music? Science? Physical education?
Were there ciphering matches or spelldowns (a) within your school or (b) with other schools?
Describe any intramural or intermural athletic competition.
Describe any "moral" education which may have occurred.
How did you get to school? Did you carry a lunch? Describe.

II. Relationships with Other Students

Do you recall listening to other students recite?
Did you ever help other students?
Did you feel a strong competitive spirit?
Were you aware of "rich" kids and "poor" kids and how did you react?
Did you find it difficult to concentrate while other classes were reciting?
Did you feel a sense of responsibility for school property?
Did you have any assigned classroom or schoolyard chores?
How did any of the above contribute to your academic success?

III. Role of Parents and Family

How long had your parents lived in the community in which the school was located?
Did you also have grandparents living in the community?
Did your parents visit school?
Did they know the teacher?
How did they feel about punishment at school?
Did your parents participate in school fund raising, maintenance, or social activities (i.e., pie suppers)? Please describe.
How many siblings also attended the same school?
Did the fact that "big brother" was watching encourage you to behave and excel? Did you consider the fact that you were an example for younger siblings?
Describe any farm chores you had to do when you got home or before going to school. How long did these usually take?
Did you often have homework?

IV. The Teacher

Did you have a favorite, memorable teacher?
Please identify and describe this person.
What made him or her outstanding?
What teaching methods stand out in your mind? How many years did you have this teacher?

V. Beyond the Rural School

Were you "accepted" when you went to high school? Did you note any difference in study patterns or discipline between rural children and those who had attended town school?
Did any teachers treat you differently? Did you note any "knowledge gaps"?
Have you ever felt embarrassed or hindered because of your rural beginnings? What professional degrees or certifications do you hold? What is your present occupation? (If retired, what vocation did you pursue?)
Some parents are resurrecting the "old" one-room school as an attractive alternative to a public school system which some see as floundering. Would you want your children or grandchildren to attend a one-room school? Why or why not?

PLEASE ADD ANY OTHER THOUGHTS WHICH MIGHT PROVIDE INSIGHT AS TO WHY COUNTRY CHILDREN WERE ABLE TO "HOLD THEIR OWN" AND EVEN OFTEN EXCEED THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THEIR "CITY" COUSINS. I REALIZE I HAVE MUCH TO LEARN AND AM JUST SCRATCHING THE SURFACE OF AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON. THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP!!!!

final decade of the twentieth century, one of the poorest counties in the state; yet its predominantly white population of 18,409 residents boasts a rich educational heritage.¹¹ In 1811 a group of Quakers from North Carolina under the leadership of Jonathan Lindley established a settlement at Half Moon Spring, more generally known as Lick Creek, approximately forty miles north of the Ohio River crossing near Louisville. These Friends, typical of their faith, considered "education and the right training of youth" primary objectives of their society; consequently, the minutes of the Lick Creek Meeting contain many references to education, and the Lick Creek school was among the earliest in what was to become Orange County.¹²

In 1816, the same year that Indiana was admitted to statehood, Orange County assumed its official identity following a division of Washington, Gibson, and Knox counties.¹³ Early records indicate that schools were established in Northeast, Orangeville, and Northwest townships in the new county in 1817, 1816, and 1823 respectively.¹⁴ Schools of this era were generally subscription schools, organized and paid for by parents in a district. Not until the decade of the 1850s, when the legislature began to implement the provisions of Indiana's new Constitution of 1851, did free, tax-supported schools very gradually begin to replace the private schools in Orange County and, indeed, throughout the state.¹⁵ According to one early Orange County history, the first free schools were taught in Northeast Township in the winter of 1857–1858 and in Orangeville and Northwest townships in 1855–1856. By 1884, reports the same county history, Northeast Township had six free schools "furnished with improved furniture and school apparatus [*sic*], so that now the educational facilities . . . are second to none in the county." Orangeville and Northwest townships each had seven schools. All met approximately five months each year at a cost of \$1,100–\$1,200 per annum.¹⁶ These early schools had few

¹¹ U. S., *Twenty-first Census, 1990: General Population Characteristics, Indiana*, 2. According to the 1990 decennial census, Orange County's per capita income in 1989 was \$9,222 compared to \$13,149 for the state as a whole. U. S., *Twenty-first Census, 1990: Population and Housing, Summary Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics*, 159.

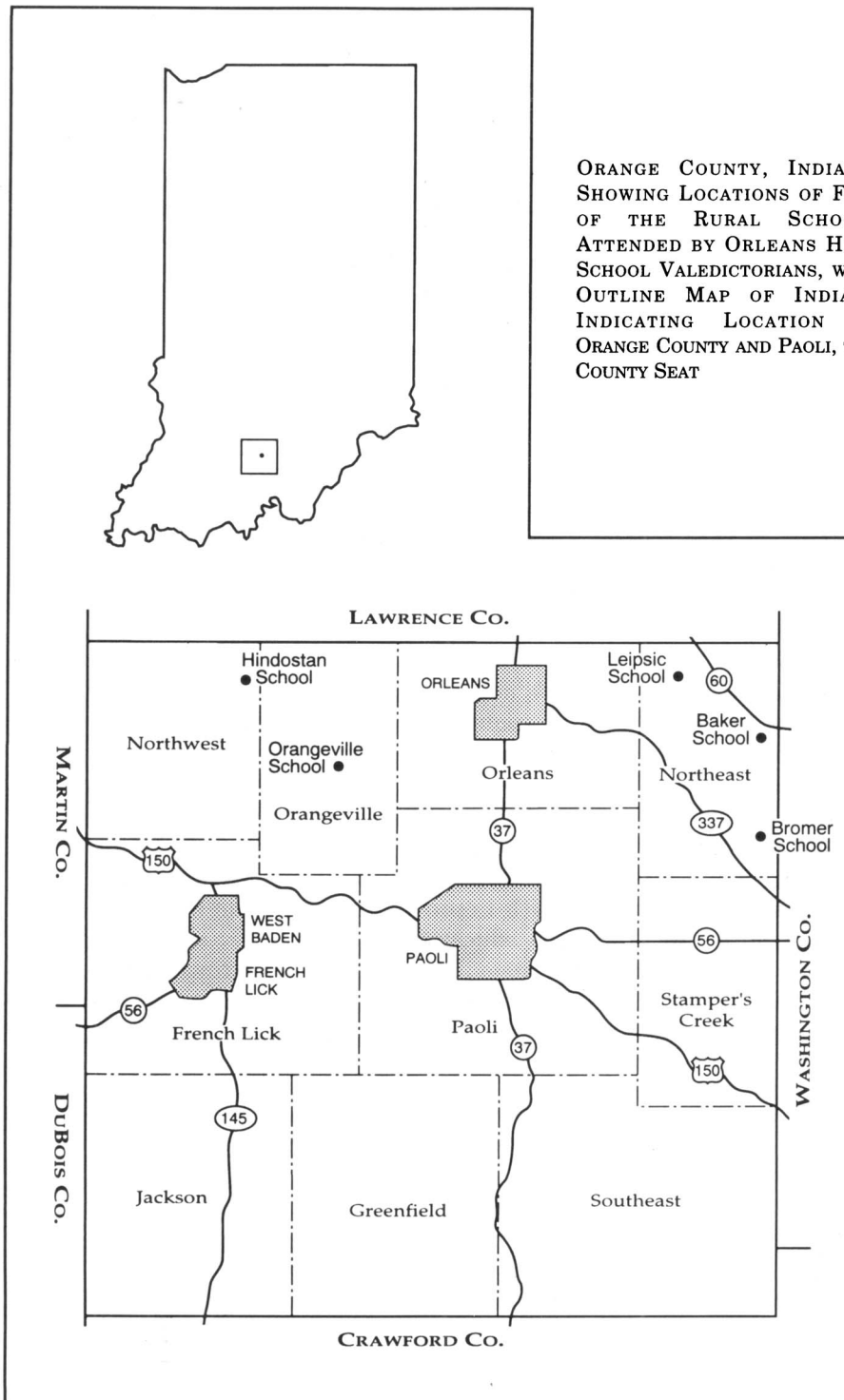
¹² Myrtle Maris Mavity, "Quakers from North Carolina Were Orange County Pioneers," in *Orange County Heritage*, comp. Arthur L. Dillard (Paoli, Ind., 1971), 23-24, 30.

¹³ George Pence and Nellie C. Armstrong, *Indiana Boundaries: Territory, State, and County (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XIX; Indianapolis, 1933)*, 636-37.

¹⁴ Goodspeed Publishing Co., pub., *History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties* (Chicago, 1884), 553, 558, 560.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the development of early education in Indiana, particularly the establishment of free, tax-supported public schools, see John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth* (4 vols., New York, 1954), I, 255-75, II, 105-28, 327-50.

¹⁶ *History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties*, 555, 559, 561.



ORANGE COUNTY, INDIANA,
SHOWING LOCATIONS OF FIVE
OF THE RURAL SCHOOLS
ATTENDED BY ORLEANS HIGH
SCHOOL VALEDICTORIANS, WITH
OUTLINE MAP OF INDIANA
INDICATING LOCATION OF
ORANGE COUNTY AND PAOLI, THE
COUNTY SEAT

Map by Chris Lindley; reproduced by Graphic Arts
Department, Audio-Visual Center, Indiana University,
Bloomington.

students. One of the Northeast Township schools listed sixteen male pupils and twelve female pupils in grades 1 through 5 for the school year October 4, 1886–March 11, 1887.¹⁷ Until the advent of buses around September, 1927, students furnished their own transportation, sometimes riding to school on the back of the family horse or mule. Schools were located within the district so that no child would have to walk over two miles.

At the end of the nineteenth century the county school superintendent and the township trustee administered the small rural elementary schools. Teachers were responsible to these individuals for completing required curriculum, verifying attendance, certifying completion of requirements, reporting disciplinary actions, and even for maintaining building and grounds.¹⁸ A school record book for 1887 testifies to this responsibility:

(1) *Make a brief statement of the condition of the building and grounds, furniture and apparatus.* The school building is in an average state of preservation. There is one shutter off and one with the bottom hinge broken. The grounds are in good condition and have been lately cleaned, the surrounding fence is all up. The out-buildings are in good condition.

(2) *If the school building, furniture, or apparatus have been injured, during the term of school, state the cause and estimate of injury.* The only injury has been done by the action of winds in the shutters.

(3) *State the number of all desks, chairs, maps, globes, dictionaries and all other furniture and apparatus which you leave in the building at the close of the school.* There are 20 desks and teacher's desk, 2 maps of U.S., 2 maps of Indiana, and an old series of maps also. 1 globe and box. 2 academic dictionaries, 1 pointer, 1 thermometer, and 2 moderately good brooms. 1 bucket and dipper, 5 erasers, and a good Polaris stove.¹⁹

The report was signed by the teacher, W. L. Tegarden, and verified by the township trustee, Samuel R. Tegarden, on March 24, 1887. In 1931 Stella Freed's inventory for Gammon School (Northeast Township) included one thousand thumb tacks, two oil cans, two coal buckets, two dust pans, and a lunch cabinet.²⁰

By the second decade of the twentieth century students who continued their education beyond the rural township elementary schools usually chose to attend the high school nearest their home. The townships in which they resided paid their tuition. From 1926 to 1958 there were high schools in the four major towns in Orange County: French Lick, West Baden Springs, Paoli, and Orleans. In 1958 French Lick and West Baden Springs, because of significant population losses and the growing consolidation movement,

¹⁷ Cooperative Duplicate Grade Records.

¹⁸ Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, II, 126, 337, 510-11, *passim*.

¹⁹ Cooperative Duplicate Grade Records.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

ISLAND SCHOOL
NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP
CLOSED IN 1923





ASHERY SCHOOL, ORANGEVILLE TOWNSHIP

THE TEACHER, MYRTLE ALLEGRE QUAKENBUSH, TAUGHT AT ASHERY FROM 1902 TO 1904.

combined their two schools into Springs Valley High School.²¹ During the period 1930–1970 students who graduated from the one-room schools in Northeast and Orangeville townships, as well as a number of pupils from Northwest Township, attended high school at Orleans.

Platted as early as March, 1815, and accepted as the oldest “laid-out town” in the county, Orleans itself has a long educational

²¹ Decennial census statistics indicate that Orange County experienced a meager 8 percent population growth during the seventy-year period 1920–1990. From 1930, the first year that statistics were reported for small towns with less than 2,500 population, to 1970, the end of the last full decade for the rural one-room schools in Orange County, the county had a 3 percent decrease in population while changes in the population of the towns were

French Lick	– 16 percent
West Baden Springs	– 21 percent
Paoli	+ 63 percent
Orleans	+ 29 percent

During this same period Orleans Township, whose school-age children attended the Orleans Community Schools, enjoyed a population gain of 17 percent while the neighboring townships of Orangeville and Northeast reported population decreases of 26 and 11 percent respectively. U. S., *Fourteenth Census, 1920*: Vol. I, *Population*, 108; U. S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. III, *Population, Part I, Alabama-Missouri*, 738, 743; U. S., *Nineteenth Census, 1970*: Vol. I, *Population, Part XVI, Indiana*, 16-27.



BUS DRIVER RALPH BAKER
1927-1928



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EN ROUTE TO ORLEANS
1928-1929

history. In 1823 a small house was equipped with school "apparatus" and served community scholars until 1831 when the first actual school building was erected near the center of the town. Until it was replaced in 1963 with the present elementary school building, it remained the only site of elementary school education for Orleans students. A separate high school building was erected in 1910.²² From 1926 to 1975, the period of this study, there was no emergent trend of change in the number of Orleans High School graduates. The mean number of graduates was 42.26; the median 41. Size of graduating class ranged from a low of 27 (1928, 1949, 1951) to a high of 60 (1930, 1969). [See Table 1.]

The Orleans High School valedictorians who were products of the rural one- and two-room schools in Orangeville, Northeast, and Northwest townships recalled many aspects of their early education.²³ Grace Johnson Farrar, valedictorian in 1942, wrote of the subjects that she studied, "The curriculum and my enthusiasm varied with the teacher assigned to the school."²⁴ Indeed, except for required core classes, teachers were given much latitude in designing the course of study, and their abilities and interests often determined the subjects offered. Over the fifty-year period, however, there was surprisingly little variation in the curriculum. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling were the basic subjects in the early grades. Gradually geography, elementary science, history, grammar, health, and sometimes even home economics and agriculture were added to the daily routine.

There was little emphasis on teaching music and physical education, but both were integrated into daily activities for enjoyment. Music, the recitation of memory verses from the Bible, the pledge of allegiance, and sometimes a brief moral or patriotic story were often included in daily "opening exercises" for the entire room. One school was fortunate enough to have an organ to accom-

²² *History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties*, 491, 492, 556-57. Prior to 1911 elementary school students who lived in Orleans Township but outside the Orleans city limits attended one-room schools. These included Mt. Horeb, Brookstown, Black, Webb, Gullett, Magner, Irvine, Turley, and Wright. Information supplied by Clarice Frost Newlin. See Ruth Quakenbush Fields to Lorna Lutes Sylvester, June 28, 1993 (*Indiana Magazine of History*, Bloomington).

²³ In 1925, one year prior to the beginning date of this study, the following one- and two-room schools existed in Orangeville, Northwest, and Northeast townships: Orangeville—Wesley Chapel, Mathers, Ashery, Black, Orangeville; Northwest—Miller, Dougherty, Webb, Hindostan, Camel; Northeast—Leipsic, Gammon, Baker, Roach, Bromer. By the time of mandatory school consolidation in 1959 several of these schools had already closed because of declining enrollments, fires, or other reasons. The rest soon followed. Information supplied by Lela Mae Purlee Bass, Ruby Toliver Pruett, and Ruth Quakenbush Fields, all former students in the one-room Orange County schools. See Ruth Quakenbush Fields to Lorna Lutes Sylvester, April 26, 1993 (*Indiana Magazine of History*, Bloomington).

²⁴ Hereafter parenthetical insertions following quotations or specific information indicate the individual contributor's name and date of graduation. A complete list of valedictorians can be found in Table 2.

pany the morning songfest (Agnes McIntyre Hopping, 1926). Students from another school gained an appreciation for classical music when the teacher played records and had contests to see which student could identify the most compositions (Flora Johnson Lashley, 1937). Physical education evolved from student-organized activities at recess or noonhour. Every inch of the school grounds was utilized for favorite games—drop the handkerchief, chicken, fox and geese, “unstructured” softball, Andy over, tag, Red Rover. Many students recalled that teachers sometimes went outside to play with them and seemed to have as much fun as the pupils did.

Moral education was a part of the curriculum, but it generally appeared in subtle ways. Teachers were expected to provide a good example for students, and those who did not were, without the protection of a union, dismissed from their duties. Children carried from home a sense of right and wrong and respect for the rights and property of others and for school property. They seemed to have a clear idea that they were expected to behave and to do their best; further, if they got in trouble at school, they would most assuredly be corrected at home. All of the parents knew the teachers and respected them and their right to teach the children to “mind” at school and to reinforce the moral foundation that had been laid at home. “Cheating, lying, and stealing were not done; we considered them sins. Christian ethics were respected even by those who were not Christian” (Eleanor Walker Caplinger, 1943).²⁵

Trustees and parents often preferred a strong-willed male teacher for students in the “Big Room.” Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, however, teachers apparently could not administer corporal punishment injudiciously. In fact, some of the early school record books provided a line for reporting the number of cases of corporal punishment; none were reported.

Teachers in these early one- and two-room rural schools often assigned their pupils a variety of chores: cleaning chalkboards and erasers, carrying drinking water from the well, bringing in wood or coal for the stove, helping younger students. Whether or not these jobs were intended to teach responsibility and cooperation, such was one end result. During the early years of this study, teachers generally assigned chores according to students’ capabilities and grade levels. “I usually viewed any such assignment as a privilege. Most were usually eager to help” (Eleanor Walker Caplinger, 1943). Teachers sometimes secured student cooperation by providing group incentives. When pupils in grades 7 and 8 at

²⁵ If, on rare occasion, a child needed moral instruction, a fit admonition might occur in an unusual form. One student recalls an impressive lesson that her mother provided for a student who was stealing her lunch apples. The next day’s apple featured red pepper that had been inserted in discreetly positioned holes crafted with a hatpin (Alice Cottengaim Moffatt, 1930).



BAKER SCHOOL
NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP
BASKETBALL TEAM
CA. 1928



BAKER SCHOOL
NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP
THE HIGH JUMP
CA. 1928

one school opted to do the janitorial work, the teacher applied the pay that he would have received to enrichment activities for the classes. One year he purchased a radio for the classroom; another year he took the students on a weekend trip to Renfro Valley and Cumberland Gap.

As long as teachers completed the required number of days of instruction, they could modify the school calendar as well as the curriculum. As Stella Freed noted in her record book for 1931: "I did not teach on Friday after Christmas. This day was made up in March." Also to be made up in March was "One extra day taken off during teacher's association"

Individualized instruction was the norm in the one-room schools—particularly for the superior scholars. In this early "open concept" atmosphere, the teacher generally would spend a few minutes giving each class an assignment in a particular subject. Then while these students worked at their desks, other classes would in turn come to the recitation bench to present the assignments that they had prepared. While this recitation was in progress, pupils working at their seats were obviously aware of what was being said at the recitation site. Some completely tuned out this classroom "noise"; others listened yet still found time to complete their own assignments. Those who finished their own work could participate silently in the recitations of others. If they did not entirely comprehend what they were doing at the time, the concept was easier to master when it was their turn to learn it because they had already been introduced to it via eavesdropping. Further, they had participated passively in the achievements of those who had gone before, and they, too, aspired to success. Most of the valedictorians indicated that this experience had a positive effect on learning.

You always hear the others recite in a one-room school. That's what kept me from being bored. My own level of textbooks always seemed too simple. I tried to learn everything the others did. I didn't try to concentrate while classes recited. I already knew what was in my own books (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942).

Surely I remember listening to other students recite! What they were saying and doing was ever so much more interesting than what I was supposed to be doing. That was one of the great strengths of the system (Eleanor Walker Caplinger, 1943).

I listened to other classes recite and do feel this was an advantage to me. However, I do believe it depended on the person since many others had this same exposure and were near failing (Peggy Sokeland Stephens, 1962).

I think hearing the older grades recite definitely kept us a step ahead. It also made us think and concentrate harder to try to comprehend the material that was grades above us (Susie Tolbert Burton, 1971).

I think listening to the older kids and concentrating while the other classes recited were *very* important. I always felt as if I were at least a grade ahead because of

listening to the other kids and I feel I can concentrate better now because of the need to “tune out” when I was younger (Mary Lea Gray Brown, 1974).

Official student academic records also attest to the fact that one-room schools provided the ultimate in individualized instruction. In addition to midterm and final scores for examinations that were required before students could complete the eighth grade, these records include comments on individual pupils' progress and achievements. John T. Radcliff of Green Brier School in Orangeville Township noted at the end of the school year on April 26, 1924, “All required work completed except the last 6 pages of 7th grade arithmetic.” Separate notations indicated that a particular student should “start on page 70 of the arithmetic book” and that “additional help is needed with reading.”

If a student was academically strong and perhaps the only one in a specific grade, he or she was sometimes allowed to skip a grade. One valedictorian recalled that she was the only first grader the year that she started school. Because of parental encouragement, however, she had already learned most things expected from a beginner. “Therefore, I recited with the second grade almost all year. Naturally I was promoted to the third grade at the end of the term. Then we were a large class of five members” (Eleanor Walker Caplinger, 1943)! Another valedictorian recalled that, as the only student in the first grade, she was permitted to recite with the one student in grade two and progressed at her own speed.

Most of the time I spent listening to what all the others were reciting. . . . I never enjoyed any year so much at school or learned so much. By the time the year ended, I could read my older brother's 4th grade books, do my older sister's 6th grade spelling, and hold my own at the ciphering board with any one up to my older brother in grade 4, including long columns of addition, long multiplication, and division (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942).

Teachers also encouraged students to participate in “enrichment” activities when their lessons were completed. Those who had already mastered a concept might be assigned to help one of their peers who was having difficulty. Allowed to whisper quietly to one another, both students—as well as the burdened teacher—usually found this informal tutorial system beneficial. Other pupils found pleasure in reaching for *Compton's Encyclopedia* or working on the school newspaper. And, of course, one could always just sit and listen to other classes recite.

The rural students who eventually became valedictorians at Orleans High School brought with them to the one-room schools an enduring love for competition. “Something or someone inspired the ‘hustle’ in me. I was very desirous of making 100 percent everyday” (Alice Cottengaim Moffatt, 1930). “I'm afraid I've always had a strong competitive spirit. When someone told me I couldn't do something, I had a tendency to say, ‘I'll show them’ ” (Flora John-

son Lashley, 1937). Students seemed to know what their families and their community expected of them, and this knowledge contributed to their motivation toward academic excellence.

Home chores and summer work often heightened this spirit of competition. One student recalled trying to pick as many blackberries as her mom and also trying to chop two rows of weeds while her dad chopped four, at the same time always competing with her own record in her attempt to improve her "race" with her father (Alice Cottengaim Moffatt, 1930). Teachers were able to harness this competitiveness—not in the athletic arena but in the academic sphere. Apparently the brighter students profited.

Friday afternoon spelldowns and ciphering matches were common. Students who emerged victorious from their grade's contest advanced to compete with students of the next grade until, finally, the winner of the "Room" was declared. Spelling and ciphering matches were also common entertainment at the school's pie suppers. Parents often joined the competition only to be bested by a bright seventh or eighth grader. Obviously such events were more enjoyable for the students who excelled than for those less adept. Some students expressed enthusiasm: "I loved the ciphering. I think that's where I learned to love math" (Mary Rose Clipp Rosenbaum, 1950). Others felt chagrin: "I hated them. I didn't like to let someone do better than I did. I was embarrassed to lose" (Wanda Johnson Carroll, 1957).

Wise teachers encouraged students to better their own performances and sometimes provided small prizes for those who achieved 100 percent in all their work on a given day. Pencils purchased from the teacher's meager pay or "headmarks" cut from paper or small "pocket" books are still among the treasured memorabilia of some rural school graduates.

The township trustees had sole responsibility for the hiring and firing of teachers in the rural elementary schools. Such a system had both strengths and weaknesses. If there was an effective teacher in a one-room school, that teacher would likely remain for several years; hence, students had the advantage of continuing under the same person's tutelage. An ineffective teacher could easily be, and often was, removed from the classroom. Unfortunately, teachers were sometimes also fired because of a whim on the part of the township trustee or because of a personality conflict with influential members of the community or the trustee. Further, nepotism in the school system was not uncommon, and applicants were not discouraged from attempting to influence hiring decisions by providing gratuities to township trustees.

Most of the valedictorians spoke highly of their teachers and readily identified a "favorite." A 1926 graduate recalled a superior teacher who was impressive with his presentation of "the analytical method" of solving arithmetic problems (Agnes McIntyre Hop-

ping, 1926). Another memorable teacher was described as adhering to the philosophy that

... when we study we work hard and when we have recess we play hard. He expected us to do our assignments and never left a bit of doubt that he was in charge of the classroom. He spelled out expectations of behavior clearly and fairly together with proper punishments that we could depend on him to carry out should we disobey. He held no grudges. As soon as the discipline was completed we knew beyond a doubt that he was our friend. ... In the old vernacular, *he was strict*. We respected and loved him for it (Mary Rose Clipp Rosenbaum, 1950).

Yet another special teacher “touched our lives with art, music, dance, and poetry. She loved to do plays and readings. She took a few of us to IU to watch a modern dance class” (Wanda Johnson Carroll, 1957). Other teachers were motherly types who took the time to sit down and talk with students who seemed to have problems outside the academic domain. These caring teachers sometimes even brought lunch for students who could not afford their own and managed a treat for every child at Christmastime when they themselves might be wearing shoes with thin soles.

Five of the valedictorians (1937–1971) cited the same teacher, Miller Scarlett, as their favorite. One wrote, “. . . in this day and age he would have been ‘Teacher of the Year’ ” (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942). Students’ comments were replete with memories of the innovative things that this Orangeville teacher introduced into the classroom.

In very cold weather only the space around the woodstove was warm, so we all left our desks and gathered close to the stove while he and others read books to us. Even then our faces might be rosy hot and our backsides cold, but we were lost in adventure. One book he read was *Alice of Old Vincennes*. . . . Then we planned a trip to Vincennes in the spring and saw the places we’d read about. In those days when scarcely any one had a car it was as exciting as a trip overseas now (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942).

He did unusual things no other teacher did then. In studying Indians and pioneers we tried the methods of survival. I’ll never forget bringing a potato and egg to school, covering them with mud, and baking them in coals for lunch (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942).

[He made] a miniature golf course at Black School and brought us golf clubs (Flora Johnson Lashley, 1937).

He liked to take a student that wasn’t doing well and get his interest and started [*sic*] learning (Emery Johnson, 1944).

He started the first hot lunches by having the 7th and 8th grade girls cook soup or beans for their home economics instruction. He had a monthly newspaper. . . . We even sold advertising. . . . We held mock elections, went through the whole election process. We would stage plays, make our own stage curtain from a sheet, exit lights from tin cans, print our own programs, and make our own costumes (Betty Radcliff Parish, 1946).

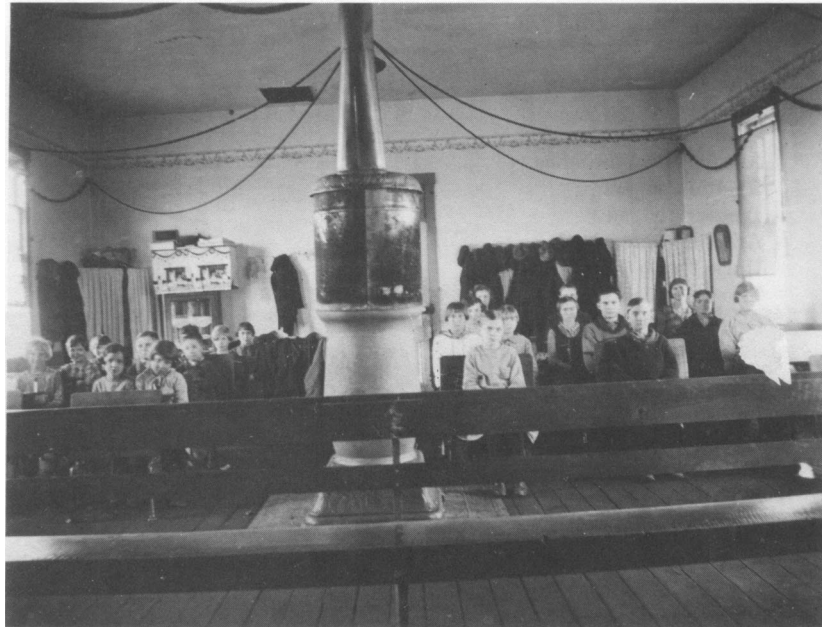
Most of the students were lifetime residents of the small communities in which they attended school. Many of their parents and even grandparents had lived there throughout their lifetimes as well. Generally there was more than one sibling in school at one time, and the children felt a special responsibility to one another. They also knew, however, that if they misbehaved the story of their antics would probably arrive home before they did. There was a great deal of encouragement from home. Students were not specifically admonished to do well; they just sensed the need to do their best—both academically and behaviorally.

The feeling that the school was an extension of the community is apparent in the visitors registers that were kept. In 1924 C. H. Radcliff recorded a visit to Green Brier School in Orangeville Township of “about 50 students for debate” as well as visits from the county nurse, attendance officer, county superintendent, and trustee. E. C. Quakenbush’s record book included the following entries:

Sept 25 1921	Rev. John Marshall	Fine talk
Oct 25 1921	Miss Jessie Freed	
Nov 24 1921	W. E. Hunt	
	Township Trustee	
Dec 8 1921	Mrs. Steilberg	Examined children
Dec 12 1921	Harry Kirk	Excellent address
	County Superintendent	

Quakenbush also noted: “This school is easy to manage and like to work about as good as any school I ever saw. The patrons are not much for visiting the school though.” Parents knew the teachers but, indeed, rarely visited school except for special occasions such as Christmas programs, pie suppers, and end-of-school programs. Dessie Moon, teacher at Bromer School in Northeast Township, recorded in 1928: “The last day of school was April 6. The school gave a program and patrons and friends came with well-filled baskets.” And one young man proudly recalled that his dad played the fiddle at the last day of school celebration (Emery Johnson, 1944).

The annual pie supper, a major fund-raising event, fostered community goodwill as well as garnered money for library books, playground equipment, games, and other special things that were not a part of the township’s meager budget. Bertha Felknor notes in her report for Orangeville School, Orangeville Township, on May 3, 1929:



BAKER SCHOOL, NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP
CHRISTMAS, 1924

NOTE STOVE, RECITATION BENCH IN FRONT, CURTAINED CUPBOARDS IN BACK THAT
CONTAIN LUNCHES.



BAKER SCHOOL, NORTHEAST TOWNSHIP
LAST DAY OF SCHOOL, 1925-1926

TEACHER IS CHARLES S. FINLEY, WHO TAUGHT FORTY YEARS IN ONE-ROOM
SCHOOLS.

Receipts from pie supper	\$20.67
Bought these books:	
Covered Wagon	.65
Alice of Old Vincennes	.65
5 Little Peppers	.45
Treasure Island	.45
Alice in Wonderland	.45
Uncle Tom's Cabin	.58
Two Little Indians	.60
School in Animal Land	.68

Some of the students found it necessary to carry work home, but those who did not often read books after they completed their chores for the day. Only the last four valedictorians had access to television. Four of the twenty-one valedictorians came from one family, and one of these children recalled: "family evenings during winters were spent around the one stove in the living room with each member taking turns reading from a classic while others shelled corn, quilted, etc. And so we went through *Silas Marner*, *David Copperfield*, and many others" (Grace Johnson Farrar, 1942). No doubt this reading reinforced both learning and the attitude toward learning.

Most of the valedictorians had some chores to do upon arriving home. One 1956 graduate remarked: "I had chores such as feeding the animals and milking the cows morning and night as well as helping out in any other way whenever needed. I was taught responsibility at a very early age (4) and I was always responsible for my actions" (Phyllis Wilson Minnott, 1956). She believed that her family's expectations in regard to responsibility and work carried over to her academic success. Rural children knew that if they did not do the job correctly there would be no second chance that day and that their parents were not going to check their performance and redo the task. "My success in school and later in life stems, I believe, from the emphasis my parents placed on education and in doing any job correctly. Farm families were generally closer due to the nature of the work environment" (Phyllis Wilson Minnott, 1956).

Although overwhelmed at first, students from Northeast, Northwest, and Orangeville townships quickly adapted to Orleans High School. New friendships were soon formed, often among both "good" pupils and academically "poorer" ones. Close friendships frequently developed between town students and country students, and such associations provided the best of both worlds. The small size of the high school probably eased the transition for the rural students. The average graduating class during the fifty-year span from 1926 to 1975 was only forty-two although each class was considerably larger when it entered the ninth grade.

Most rural students felt adequately prepared for high school although an occasional "knowledge" gap appeared in college pre-

ORLEANS HIGH SCHOOL
ORLEANS, INDIANA
1910-PRESENT



Courtesy Eleanor S. Himebaugh, Bedford *Times-Mail*.

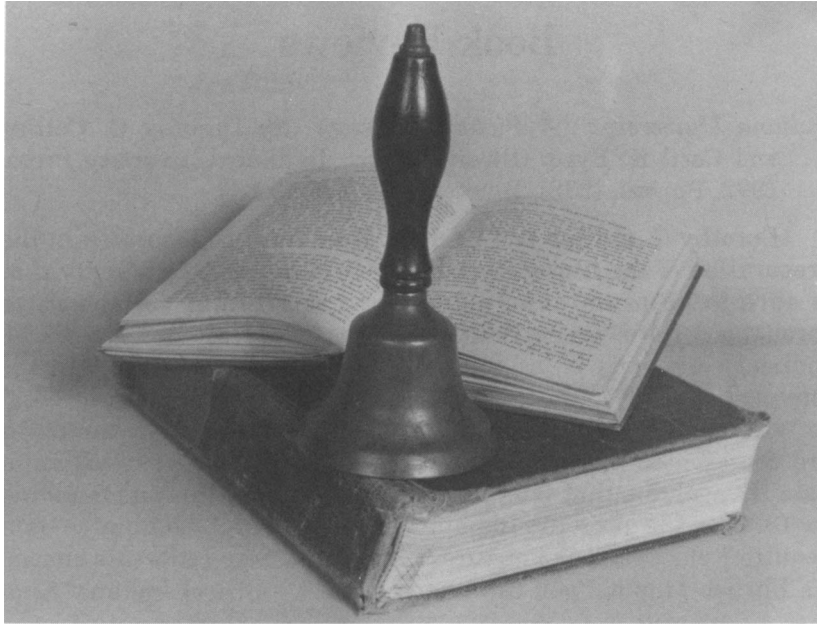
paratory mathematics, science, or grammar. Most also felt a bit inept when it came to music; and, of course, very few played in the high school band as most town pupils had begun the program when they were still in elementary school. In fact, few rural children participated in any extracurricular activities because of the inconvenience of staying after school. Most needed to ride the buses home because there was no alternative transportation and because there were farm chores to do.

Rural students found that the quality of instruction in high school varied from class to class whereas in their one-room elementary schools the entire school year had reflected the abilities of just one teacher. Further, academically superior students were often bored because teachers in the larger high school classes usually felt that they should teach to the median, and repetition of concepts grew dull. Most of the Orleans High School teachers had great respect for the rural students, especially if an older sibling had done well. Although the valedictorians remarked that they were accepted as individuals and treated as such, they all sensed that their families expected high achievement and that the faculty, because of past family performances, did too. Here, again, these rural students emphasized family values and expectations as inspirational goals.

After graduation from high school all except five of the eighteen students who participated in this study continued their education. Those who did not cited financial circumstances as the deterrent. Five went on to earn teaching certificates; two completed two-year degrees; two earned Ph.D.s; three became certified public accountants; one became a registered pharmacist, one a nurse, and one a medical doctor. It seems likely that these rural valedictorians of Orleans High School would have experienced success in almost any school setting. Their families' expectations and encouragement early fostered their sense of uniqueness and their desire to excel. Assigned chores cultivated feelings of responsibility and self-worth. Such chores also kept them busy, and the lack of ready transportation to town compelled them to occupy themselves in their pastoral environment where few commercial diversions were available. And while about half of these rural students would not want their children to attend a one-room school, all concur that when you had a good teacher, you had an excellent experience.

Addendum

Soon after completion of this study in 1985, based on the responses of seventeen of the eighteen living rural valedictorians of Orleans High School, I received notification of a special delivery letter and was thrilled to receive the final questionnaire—making



SCHOOL BELL USED BY E. C. QUAKENBUSH, THE AUTHOR'S GRANDFATHER, TO CALL STUDENTS TO CLASSES

Photograph by Professor Ken Hopper, Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana.

a return rate of 100 percent, a rare phenomenon! The information provided by Dr. Morris Sorrells (1956) echoed the sentiments of his peers. In particular, he confirmed the importance of family and community influence: "Looking back I think the simple virtues of my parents, the lack of opportunity to 'get into trouble,' the close-knit community background were instrumental to my success."