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Dayle Orvis – Schools

Note: Dayle grew up as the middle son of Gordon and Muriel (Farr) Orvis in West Lincoln and started school in the one room schoolhouse there in 1951, and graduated 8th grade 1959. These are some of his memories of that time written by him in 2025.

Getting eight years of education at the West Lincoln one room school is a fond memory for many. The school was built in 1888, but it sort of stood out compared to the other schools in Lincoln as it seemed to have an extra amount of trim to it, including a bell tower, an actual entry space, and a slate roof. Perhaps it was due to the Burnhams and the other successful businesses in West Lincoln at the time of its building that helped the little community afford it.

I started school in the fall of 1951 and graduated in 1959. I was the only first grader at the start, but Danny Hutchins moved to town and joined me halfway through my first year. Lorraine Lee joined us in the fourth grade and the three of us graduated from the 8th grade together, along with six others from the Center school. Total number of students during my attendance at the West Lincoln school ranged from 20-25 students. During the period of February 1950 to June of 1954 there were about five students transferred to West Lincoln from the Center School. They were moved there because the Center School had burned and the new Lincoln Community School was in the process of being built.

I often reflect on the years when in the lower grades we would hear the upper grade discussing their lessons on such things as “long division,” geography, etc., so it would sort of prepare us for what we were to encounter the next year or so. Also, the teacher would often ask older students to help younger ones who were having problems in a certain subject with the workbooks etc.

I have to say the one room school may seem archaic to people today, but my observation was that every student was able to read, write and do math at a very satisfactory level by the time they graduated.

The West Lincoln School had no running water. It had outhouses around back for toilets. And for drinking water and such two of the older boys would take galvanized pails to Clark and Libby Atkins' home next door and fill the pails at their kitchen faucet. I think back to what an inconvenience it was to them to have two boys trucking snow and mud into their home each school day! After getting the water back to the school we would pour it into a 5-gallon crock that had a push button faucet where one could get a paper cup of water. After an incident of sickness going through the school, we were required to add several drops of Clorox to the water to help purify it.

The school also lacked a bit of playground space. Of course, one of the favorite breaktime sports was softball, but the large windows on the west side of the school were a problem as the panes of glass were continually being broken by fly balls. A decision was made by the school board to allow only Kick ball if we wanted to run the bases.

The lack of space meant that we only had room for the infield bases. The left field area was the outhouses and the woodshed. Center field was Clark Atkins' young cattle pasture area, which at times contained a bull, so the center fielder would have to keep one eye on the ball and one on the bull and be ready to quickly scale the fence. Right field was Freda Davis's chicken pen. If the ball landed in the chicken pen someone would climb a snow fence, go into the chicken coup door and into the pen to retrieve the "goosey" ball. We had a great time in spite of the obstacles.

Other games we played were "Fox and Geese" when there was a good snow, and tag could be played year-round. "Pick up Sticks" and "Kitty Ki Over" which was a game where two teams were chosen, then the ball was tossed in the air to see which team got the ball first. The teams went to opposite sides of the school, the ball was then thrown over the roof of the school; if the other team could catch the ball before it hit the ground, they would race around the end of the school and invade the other team. The person with the ball (hidden) would tag members of the other team, those tagged became part of the other team. Those escaping the

tagging would run to the other side of the school and thus the game would continue with throwing the ball over the roof again. The trick was to keep it a secret as to who actually had the ball and was able to do the tagging. The carrier would try to keep the ball hidden as much as possible, while other team members pretended to have the ball and would drive the other team's members toward the person who actually had the ball. It was an exciting game!

At West Lincoln we had good playground equipment, I believe on behalf of the hard work of the "Mother's Club." There was a great teeter- totter set, a very nice slide, and a fabulous swing set. All of these had galvanized frames that withstood years of heavy use.

The Mother's Club was also very much responsible for administering the Hot Lunch program, which according to my memory was available from December through March of each school year. The Mother's club would hire one of the women living fairly close to the school to prepare a main dish such as goulash, baked beans, stew, or macaroni and cheese, a vegetable, and of course a desert like brownies, cookies or cake.

About 20 minutes before lunch, three or four of the older students would walk to the home where the meals were prepared. One of the homes I remember was located about nine houses to the West of the school (Mrs. Stanley Byington), and the other I remember was across the York Hill Bridge (Mrs. Lee). The students would carry the pans of food back to the school.

At the school there was a cupboard with china dishes and the necessary utensils. My recollection is that the teacher would basically manage the serving of the food with the help of a few students. Of course, after the meal there were lots of dirty dishes to take care of. There were alternating assignments each week as to who was to wash dishes, wipe up and put them back in the cupboard. That brings up the question of hot water for washing dishes. We had a kerosene burner that would heat the water and pour into the dish pan and rinse pan. Food scraps were collected and thrown into Clark Atkins' pig pen or dumped over the guard rail across the road and into the river where high water eventually washed it away. Any scrap paper was burned in Clark Atkins' incinerator barrel.

Since we have touched on the subject of student assignments – each week the teacher would assign chores to be done especially for Friday afternoon before

dismissal. There was sweeping of the floor with a sweeping compound, cleaning the blackboards and erasers, dusting desks and woodwork, and washing windows as needed.

The majority of the students walked to school, sometimes up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. The only one I remember getting a ride consistently was Linda Parker, at least for the first grade. She lived at 567 York Hill, so it was a long walk for sure. Later when she was joined by her younger brother and sisters, they all walked to school.

The practice, at least in West Lincoln, was to let grades one through three out of school for lunch at about 10:45 in the morning and 2:00 in the afternoon. To protect these young ones, we had a Safety Patrol made up of students from grades six through eight. The Safety Patrol would walk with the little one to the York Hill Bridge to the east and just past the store to the beginning of the sidewalk to the west. One patrol person would lead the single file parade, the other would be the rear guard. The student would be taught how to cross the road safely and which side of the road to walk on.

The West Lincoln school was heated by a wood/coal stove. The stove was a rather tall pot belly with a steel jacket surrounding it, which kept students from getting too close and burned. It was located in the North Center side and it is surprising how well it heated the school. The steel jacket prevented much heat from the sides, but somehow the airflow worked, even though the heat went out the top into the high ceiling, (the second floor was not added until later), but we were generally comfortable except on really cold days when seated next to the big windows on the west side of the school.

The stove was generally tended by a janitor. I was able to get the job when I started 6th grade. Allen Steadman a former student, had graduated High School and I heard of the opening. I called Harold Purinton, a member of the school board, Harold was a little hesitant due to my young age, but apparently after checking around found that I could be trusted with the responsibility. The pay was \$2.50 a week!

Wood fire was used in the fall and spring; coal was used in the winter months. In the spring and fall I would go to the school about 6:45 each morning, Monday through Friday and build a wood fire to get the school warm for the day. Then let the fire go out at the end of the day. In winter I would go to the school on Sunday

afternoon and shake out most of the ashes from the week before. Then I would build a wood fire and gradually change it over to a coal fire. I would then pile on about five pails of coal to hold the fire through the night. It took about four hours on Sunday afternoon to do this. In the morning, I would again get to the school around 6:45, shake the fire down a bit and get the coal fire going for the school day. At the end of the school day, I would add another five pails of coal to keep the fire going overnight. I had to, of course, bring the coal or wood from the woodshed into the school stove. The woodshed was located about 25 feet behind the north end of the school. For my first couple of years there was no back door out of the school, so I had to go from the stove to the front door, around to the back of the school and on to the woodshed, then back through the front door to haul the fuel. All of this through the accumulation of snow. Apparently due to fire regulations a back door was added, which eased the access to fuel and it made for easier access to the outhouses for the students.

Winter snow was another responsibility for the janitor as I had to shovel paths to the outhouses and two paths from the school to the road – one for East bound students and one for Westbound. Many times, after a big storm other boys would help me get the paths shoveled. I was fortunate as I didn't have to shovel a space for the teacher to park. The teacher at that time, Hattie Brown, parked her car at Clark Atkins garage each day. Probably a wise move on her part to cut down on the possibility of dents, dings and broken windows with all the activity at recess time!