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ON THE COVER: The Old Federal Courts Building, viewed from across Rice Park about 1905. With the park itself, and the Minneapolis Public Library directly across from it, the Old Federal Courts Building lends a sense of community to the area.

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And How a Frog in a Desk Drawer Became a Lesson in Biology

The following article, second of a two-part series, has been condensed from an unpublished manuscript by Alice Olson, 2045 East Seventeenth Avenue, North St. Paul. The manuscript describes her experience throughout her 50 years as a teacher and administrator in Ramsey County schools during an era when much of the county outside of St. Paul was rural.

In the first article, published in the Fall, 1971, issue of Ramsey County History, Mrs. Olson wrote of her early years of teaching, beginning in the fall of 1914, in a little school out on the Hudson Road. Born in St. Paul in 1894 to Swedish parents, she graduated from North St. Paul High School and began teaching after a year at the Teachers' Training School in White Bear Lake. Marriage followed, and three children, but her World War I marriage did not last and in 1929 Mrs. Olson went back to school. She attended the St. Cloud State Teachers College to train herself to teach once again.

In the following article, excerpted from her manuscript, she describes her teaching experience in a school system that was, as she was, 10 years older than when she had entered the field. Hired as teaching principal, she was assigned to School District 8 in Maplewood, the school her father had built and where she had received most of her elementary education. A two-classroom brick structure had replaced the earlier one-room school near White Bear Avenue, several miles north of Lake Phalen. Here Mrs. Olson began her new career.

BY ALICE OLSON

My school was about a block from my home and my children, all of school age, could live with me. My salary was \$100 a month for nine months. I was to teach the upper four grades and perform the duties of principal, and instead of Miss Lindstrom my name was Mrs. Olson.

With the permission of the school board members, my father made bookcases and sanded tables for the classrooms. They paid for the materials and he donated his services. The school board consisted of two women, Mrs. Martha Gustafson and Mrs. May Sturzenegger, and one man, D. A. Walker. Mrs. Gustafson and Mrs. Sturzenegger served on the board the entire 10 years I taught there, both of them willing community workers.

I often have wondered why more women are not interested in serving on school boards. It is women who know and understand children, who know the value of money and its best uses, who realize the importance of health, nutrition, exercise, mental growth, and the dozens of other aspects in the training of young people.

BEFORE EACH FALL term opened, my women school board members always made

sure the school was immaculately clean, with crisp, clean curtains at the windows.

I had been teaching for just a short time when the Depression began. Banks closed and President Roosevelt declared a bank holiday. School board members had no money to meet expenses. I was given a slip of paper which entitled me to draw part of my salary at the First State Bank in North St. Paul so I could buy food for my family. Even so I was fortunate, for I remember how men with master's degrees worked at hard labor on the highways.

Families were hard up. Food was scarce. A boy in my classroom came to school one bitterly cold January day wearing shoes with ragged soles and worn-out socks. His feet were cracked and bleeding from frostbite. To help out, I took some of my own pennies to pay for milk so the children could have hot cocoa with their noon lunch. Sometimes the school board women made spaghetti for the pupils and that was a treat.

The school board had asked me to suggest a teacher for the lower grades, and so Marion Anderson became my first teaching partner. The years we spent together were happy



and busy. Enrollment increased steadily until our classrooms bulged at the corners, reflecting the growth of what was becoming a settled suburban area. One year I had 55 pupils in grades four through eight, and the lower grades also were filled to capacity.

THAT WAS A hard year; as principal, many other duties fell to me. Because I believed in good parent-teacher relationships I encouraged the Parent-Teachers Association which had started as a Mothers' Club. I found that a school paper also helped keep up contacts between parents and teachers, and it gave older students a chance to write about school problems and activities. Except for my own brief editorial, the paper was written entirely by the pupils; and parents enjoyed it, even the little first-grade writeups.

Marion taught until she married Fred Radatz, a neighbor. Other teachers took over the lower grades — Marian Swift, Lucile Walser. Finally, as the school enrollment continued to grow, expansion was desperately needed. A third teacher, Bernadette Johnson, was hired, and we had to change our little library room into another classroom.

I attended the Parent-Teacher Council meetings held in schools throughout the county. I shall never forget one ride home from a meeting. Lucille Walser and I drove together in her little one-seated car. It was about midnight, with fog so thick we had no

Mrs. Olson, at right in background, with Grades 5,6,7, and 8, at Maplewood School, during school year of 1932-33. Picture from author's collection.

idea where we were. Finally we came to the streetcar tracks on Rice Street. There we ran out of gas. A man helped push us to a gas station. We started again; Lucille drove while I directed her with my head out the window on the other side. By following the car tracks we finally got home about three o'clock in the morning.

I was much interested in 4-H work as I had three children of my own. Mrs. Paul Kraemer, the 4-H leader while I was at District 8, formed the Maplewood Juniors 4-H Club. For several years I helped the 4-H girls and boys in their dramatics contests and I'm sure I had as much fun as they did. There is something contagious about working with youth. Some of their exuberance is bound to rub off on you.

THROUGH THE Works Progress Administration program, we were able to get Mrs. Robert Johnson to teach dramatics to adults. She reminded me of her mother who had been the first woman to dare to run for the office of Ramsey County superintendent of schools. Just as women have had to struggle for their legal rights, so have teachers had to surmount many obstacles. When a friend of mine, Fern Freeman, ran for the office of county superintendent, a newspaper refused

to print her endorsements. This was not the fault of either candidate, in my opinion, but rather the unwillingness to recognize a woman's equality. Any teacher involved in politics runs a risk which should not exist.

One of my school board members, D. A. Walker, moved away and Norman Mogren took his place. At one of our meetings, he told us that School District 8 also was named "Maplewood," and suggested that we plant maple trees on the grounds. We agreed and, although we eventually planted elms instead, the Maplewood School often was referred to as "the school with the lawn." This was an era when few schools had well-cut and cared for lawns. Our custodian, Al Haberman, was proud of our grounds with its sidewalk, concrete steps, flagpole and shrubbery, as well as our well-kept classrooms.

My classroom faced White Bear Avenue and my pupils enjoyed putting art work in the windows each month. Since we were state-accredited, we were inspected every year by a member of the state department of education. During one spring check-up, the state inspector suggested that I not put art work in the windows.

"Windows are made to look out of," she said.

SOMETIME LATER, as I was coming home on the bus from St. Paul, a White Bear resident said to me, "Whatever happened to your window displays? Every time I rode by I did so enjoy them. They were so beautiful."

There were many agencies outside the school which enriched the children's training. There was the Red Cross who gave us orders for favors which the children enjoyed designing and making, learning much about art in so doing. These went to hospitals, and to children's and old folks' homes. All grades participated in Junior Red Cross work. In the late 1950's my older pupils at Hillside School put on an original program, inviting parents and friends, and turning over the freewill offerings to the Red Cross. Such projects increase youngsters' knowledge of human needs.

The teacher who ignores the enrichment of memorization has deprived her pupil of

Junior Red Cross — first aid practice is going on here — was an organization in which all grades at Maplewood School took part. Picture from Minnesota Historical Society.





Maplewood School youngsters also took part in 4-H. They planted and cared for garden plots . . .

a vital part of education, I believe. As a rule, a teenager memorizes easily and memorizing the Preamble to the Constitution may mean as much or more to him in later life than some of our great poetry.

Every teacher has countless opportunities to help round out a child's life, and to help stabilize the emotional side of his life as well. Many a child comes from a home so filled with stress and friction that the only peace and security he may know is during the few hours he spends in school. How important it is for the classroom teacher to know a child's circumstances.

I REMEMBER two little girls at Maplewood Elementary School. Their parents were in the midst of divorce proceedings. The mother had custody, but the father was contesting it. One day he came to school and asked that the girls come outside to talk to him. Knowing what I did, I refused his request, telling him he must see them in my presence. He left in anger, but I feel that I probably avoided much trouble for the girls.

Later, when I was teaching at Hillside School, a father brought a sweet young girl to school who was mentally disturbed. She had seen her mother killed by a rejected suitor. The child badly needed security. I tried to give it to her in my own way. She was there only one year. Her father remar-

ried, they moved to California and she wrote to me. She was very happy. She told me she had a new little brother, whom she loved very much and that her stepmother was a dear mother to her.

In most cases, discipline at Maplewood School was good. To me, discipline has meant training in self-control, not punishment only.

ONE WAY to achieve this self-control is through group activity. In my first school, the pupils had a little club; they chose their own officers, and they even had a pin with "W. W. C." on it. They were the "Willing Workers Club." And my last classroom groups had officers, with such duties as room hostesses, news and weather reporters, hall patrols and countless other duties. Children will take responsibility and grow in the process.

Of course, at times I had to punish. I remember how three small boys once disobeyed instructions. It was a wet, muddy spring and the youngsters had been warned to keep off the grass and stay on the playground area. After school, one of my Junior Sheriffs called, "Mrs. Olson, look out the window. See what those boys are doing."

I looked. There were Julius, Louis, and Austen jumping up and down in the mud around the flag pole. They looked up to see if anyone was watching and grinned happily. To them it was a big joke. I sent the Junior Sheriff down to bring them in. The result? Each in turn got a little paddling on his behind, one at a time in the storeroom, and each had to promise not to do it again. Then they were sent home.

. . . and proudly displayed the results of their efforts. Both pictures are from the Minnesota Historical Society.



EACH CHILD reacts differently to punishment. Austen took his school supplies out of his desk and trotted off to his sister's home. His pride had been hurt, but he was back the next day. Years later, I met two of the boys, now grown men, and we recalled our experiences. They did not think less of me because I had upheld the rules.

However, today corporal punishment is rarely needed, and we must never forget it carries the great responsibility of how, when, where, why; but with no authority at all, it is like trying to stand up with nothing to stand on. The older the child, the less the need for corporal punishment, or for any punishment. This is where an administrator's responsibility increases immensely. Of course, children make mistakes. They will try anything, dare anything. They love and are loved. Teaching is a unique profession because we are dealing with the human mind.

A SUCCESSFUL teacher must have a sense of humor. One morning I opened my desk drawer and out jumped a large live frog. Some of the boys had put it there, expecting to scare me out of my wits. They were taken aback because I enjoyed it immensely.

"What a beauty," I exclaimed, "Let's catch him!"

After jumping around the classroom for some time, he finally was caught and put into a glass jar.

"Aren't you pretty," I said. "Look at his colors. Watch his breathing! Do you think he has a tongue?"

What had been a practical joke turned into a lesson in biology; even at recess time the children crowded around the jar to watch the frog.

In those days a great many children did not continue their education beyond the eighth grade. Superintendent Belland often said, "It is important that those students who never go to high school have as good a training as can possibly be given and that a desire for more learning be created in those short years." Consequently, eighth grade graduation meant more to these youngsters, and during the 10 years I was principal at Maplewood, I tried to make it a happy, memorable occasion.

I especially remember John Robbins' graduating class. John's mother had sent him to live with his grandmother, Mrs. William



In the years when fewer students went on into high school, graduation from eighth grade was a big event. Here are some smiling members of the class of 1937. Photo from the author's collection.

Bruentrup, so he could acquire a better early schooling than that offered by the small Montana town where his parents lived.

As John went up to get his diploma, Mr. Belland told the audience that he was our "Montana boy." When John turned to go back to his seat, there was his white shirt tail hanging out — an incident which drew laughs from the audience. Mrs. Bruentrup was chagrined, to say nothing of his teacher's consternation. How times change! Today that would mean nothing.

AFTER 10 YEARS at Maplewood I decided to make a change. Mr. Belland suggested that I apply for a position in the District 14A School called the Beaver Lake School. I was hired to teach a combination fifth and sixth grade class. Since I wanted to take extension work at the University of Minnesota and go to summer school, too, I thought that teaching, without the additional work of principal, would give me more time. And so I left the Maplewood school to teach first at Beaver Lake and later at the Hillside School.

Mrs. Olson held a two-year teaching certificate from St. Cloud State Teachers College. In 1951, she received her bachelor of science degree from the University of Minnesota, earned by attending summer school and taking evening extension courses. When she retired in 1966, she was principal of Hillside School.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958, the Society erected a barn behind the farm house which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.