

Following are memories of life at Covesville Elementary School in the late 40's. The author is a current member of the Louisa County School Board.

Even before I walked through the doors of Covesville Elementary School for the first time, I knew what the expectations were. During the 1940's, teachers and administrators from neighborhood schools visited the homes to provide individual orientation for in-coming first graders. Today, parents and students attend the schools where entire classes receive orientation. The two teachers from Covesville Elementary School met with my parents and me. I don't remember much discussion about the ABC's ----- most of the conversation dealt with behavior. I recall my mother saying , "Y'all take care of him at school, and I will take care of him at home". Dad looked at me and chimed in, "If you end up in the principal's office, remember one thing ----- YOU put yourself there. Don't call me". Uh-Oh !!! Going in, I knew I didn't have much wiggle room.

In the Covesville School, the first thing we did EVERY morning was the Lord's Prayer; we also recited the 23rd Psalm, pledge of allegiance to the flag and sang "Good Morning Merry Sunshine" (even when it was raining). Don't remember all the words to the song, but remember the first verse:

"Good morning Merry Sunshine,
How did you wake so soon,
You scared away the little stars,
And chased away the moon".

TEACHERS:

Mrs. Olive Giannini was Principal/Teacher and she taught grades four through six. She lived in the community of Covesville, where her husband operated an appliance store. She handled most of the discipline. Took no prisoners.

Miss Emmarene Davidson taught grades one through three. She braided her hair and wrapped the braids around her head. Wore granny glasses. She lived just across the line in Nelson County, near the community of Faber (pronounced "Fauber"). Our bus turned around near the county line and sometimes Miss Davidson would ride the school bus. The Nelson County school bus turned around at the same spot.

THE SCHOOL:

Covesville Elementary School (former high school) was a two-room structure located in southwestern Albemarle (VA) County, on Rt. 29, approximately 18 miles south of Charlottesville. One room was a little larger than the other, with a small stage, a small office and a concession stand. Enrollment was probably between 50-60 students.

Near the front door was what we called a "cloak room", where we stored our coats, lunches and sometimes our overshoes (artics). Heat was provided by a big pot-bellied stove and the room was toasty when we entered each morning during the winter. We had outdoor johns. There was one water fountain, outside, with a foot pedal. We had the old desks (double wide) with the ink wells. There was a picture of George Washington on the wall. Every classroom in VA had a picture of George in those days.

Several weeks after school started in the fourth grade (1951), school officials closed Covesville School, and we were all transferred to Red Hill Elementary School, several miles north on Rt. 29. Covesville School is still standing. Think it has been converted into a home now.

SCHOOL BUS:

Going back 61 years I can still remember the school bus ----- it was a new '48 Chevrolet vehicle, # 11, driven by Jessie Rittenhouse, a high school student. In those days the bus stops were spaced at least a

mile apart. Approximately 18-20 students met at my bus stop. There were six from my family, plus four cousins, so 10 Shifflett kids boarded the bus there. We had to arrive early because the bus had an irregular schedule. During the winter, we built fires to keep warm while waiting. We'd stomp the fire out when the bus arrived. One day we were several miles down the road when one of my cousins, James, noticed that his jeans were on fire (from stomping the fire); after that, we built fires in a metal barrel. High school and elementary students rode the same bus. Teachers often rode the school buses. Students who lived within a one-mile radius of school had to walk or ride their bikes. Bus did not pick them up.

Snow never stopped us from attending school. The drivers would attach chains and we kept on booking. Sometimes it would be 9:30 AM before we arrived at school, can't recall a single day when we closed during those first three years. Buses were extremely cold, the only students who kept warm were the ones sitting on the front seat behind the driver. I wanted to be a member of the safety patrol, to wear the white belt and sash (with badge), and hold the red flag for students crossing the road, but I was too young.

Having an old substitute bus was fun; the old bus had long bench-like seats, with the back of the seats against the windows, and two long seats (back-to-back) down the middle of the bus. When the bus stopped suddenly, many students would slide off. We usually laughed, and I think the driver often did that deliberately.

INSTRUCTION:

There was a heavy emphasis on reading, and rightly so. I did not learn to read phonetically, and to this day, I have difficulty pronouncing new words. Other than that, I read well. Like most folks my age, we had a heavy dose of Dick and Jane. We spent a lot of time on math and hand-writing (although you wouldn't know it after seeing my penmanship). Yet, it's much better than what I see among many youngsters today.

Miss Davidson taught all three grades in the same classroom. She gave us assignments while she taught the other grades. She was my teacher for the first three grades, all in the same classroom; three years. I had perfect attendance during those first three years. Mother saved the little "perfect attendance" buttons the county gave us, and a few years ago I donated those to Albemarle County Public Schools; they are on display at Red Hill Elementary School.

The grading system was Outstanding, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory (O,S,U). Miss Davidson wrote on my report card one time that I was "stubborn".

STUDENTS:

Many of the students lived in the nearby community of Covesville, but others came from as far away as Heards Mountain. This was a mountainous area, and most parents worked in the apple orchards, and/or the packing sheds, as did most parents in Covesville. I cannot remember all the students who started school with me, but remember Glassell Mawyer, Betty Harris, Billy Brush and Margaret Mehring. Some common surnames in the school: Toms, Tomlin, Pugh, Napier, Maupin, Critzer, Johnson, DeMasters, Boaz (he pronounced it "Bows"), Harris, Hite, Fox, Martin, Hunt, Clements, Norvelle, Newton, Barnett, Powell, Carver, Morris ----- Shifflett was the most common.

LUNCH:

Most students packed a lunch. A few who lived adjacent to the school grounds went home for lunch. A few really poor students had hot lunches provided ----- usually vegetable soup and grilled cheese. Some brown-bagged it and some had lunch boxes. I had what dad called a "sawmill lunch box", ---- tall lunch box with thermos in the top portion. I still have it. Generally, we had peanut/jelly sandwiches, Spam, but on special occasions we had ham and or tenderloin (pork chop) sandwiches. One time I traded a country ham sandwich for a bologna sandwich and thought I had made one heck of a good deal. Another day, mom ran out of sliced bread (we called it "light bread"), so she packed a couple of home-made biscuits filled with fried apples. Didn't know it until I opened my lunch, and I was kind of embarrassed and tried to grovel over the meal, and hide it, but to be honest, it was damned good. For drinks, we had

hot cocoa in thermos, water, or we could buy Cokes, Pepsi, RC, Tru-Ade, Ginger Ale, Brownie, Tiny, etc. ----- 5c each. Generally, we had a "fruit break" at mid-morning, usually an apple.

One day I left my lunch box at school. The next morning mom said she was out of lunch bags, so she packed my lunch in a lard pail. I was embarrassed, but the kids on the bus and the kids at school thought it was neat. That incident eventually led to a hobby (another story) (I have been collecting lard tins for 40 years and have 400+ in my collection, including one from Charlottesville)

RECESS:

Students had two recesses ----- Little Recess and Big Recess. Little recess was in the morning, and Big recess was mid-afternoon. Sometimes we were allowed outside to do a little romping after lunch. We had play time before and after school also. For the little kids, we had the usual playground equipment ----- swing set, slide, merry-go-round, monkey bars, etc. Also, kickball, dodge ball, tag, etc. Girls played hop-scotch, jump rope, jacks. There was another game they played called "jack straws", with lots of little sticks, etc. Older students played mostly softball, but before and after school, some played baseball. The school was located between Rt. 29 and the Southern RR tracks. Still had steam engines at that time. A ballfield was located near the RR tracks, on the terrace. A tall fence kept the students off the tracks. One day we received a new softball, with instructions not to lose it. The first batter popped it up and over the fence; it landed on a coal car, bounced a few times, and continued on to Norfolk. Marbles was a favorite game, and we played for "keeps". On rainy days we stayed inside and played checkers, etc.

Sometimes for amusement, some students would throw gravel at hobos riding the train. I can still see the hobos ducking and dodging the stones thrown at them.

After a snowstorm a large sheet of ice was located near one side of the school yard. We were warned NOT to slide on it, but we did. While waiting for the bus one afternoon, a girl thought she would take one final slide; she fell and broke an arm. Still remember her name ----- Agnes Fox; Saw her not long ago.

Surprisingly, we were allowed to throw snowballs, but it was organized, at least during recess. We were divided into teams, 25-30' apart, each student made five snowballs, then given to "GO" sign. We pounded the heck out of each other. Before and after school, we free-lanced.

Mrs. Giannini would ring a big brass bell to end recess.

DISCIPLINE:

There were very few discipline problems. No "Cool-Off Periods", no "Time Out", no parental conferences, no suspensions. If a student screwed up, there was an immediate consequence. Miss Davidson would paddle our hands with a 6" ruler, but if a real paddling was required, Mrs. Giannini, Principal/Teacher handled that. She had a thick wooden paddle, with holes in it. Painted on the paddle was "Board of Education". She didn't paddle students in her office; students were paddled right on the spot where the offence occurred. Many students received another paddling when they arrived home. One of my brothers misbehaved one day, near the end of school; Mrs. Giannini had a visitor right after the incident and couldn't get to him immediately. When she was free, she ran outside and pulled my brother right out of line while he was waiting to board the bus; bent him over and wore his behind out.

One day two of us left the school grounds without permission and were caught. Surprisingly, Mrs Giannini gave us the option of receiving a paddling or staying inside during Big Recess. Easy choice ---- both of us took the paddling. I've heard of students being punished in other schools by standing in a corner, wearing a dunce cap, or drawing a small circle on the blackboard and holding one's nose in it. Covesville had none of that. Inappropriate behavior = paddling.

HALLOWEEN:

Halloween was a big event at Covesville School. Games, fund-raisers (cake walks), food, etc. One particular Halloween we were at school (we lived about two miles away, we walked). There was a chubby kid in school we called "Billy Boy" (he was anything but "Charming"), and he was present that particular night. He rode his bike to school that night; in fact, rode his bike to school every day, and would not allow

others to ride it. Everything he had was bigger, better than what others had. Had a basket in front of the handle bars where he stored his books and lunch box; tied it down with a belt.

During the program a few of us walked outside. Billy Boy's bike was parked near the flag pole. While Billy Boy was inside playing musical chairs, bobbing for apples and pin the tail on the donkey, we rode the heck out of his bike. After we were worn out, we returned the bike where we found it, near the flagpole. Someone suggested that we put Billy Boy's bike up the pole. It was all we could do to get it up there, but the tugging paid off. After the program, Billy Boy was terribly upset and had to walk home. While walking home with him, we assured him his bike would be found; we continued walking another mile past his house. The custodian lowered the bike the following morning when he raised the flag.

Although we did not have many resources at Covesville School, we received a good basic education, whether we wanted it or not. Mrs. Giannini and Miss Davidson did not play. They meant business. The person who said, "Fear doesn't motivate", didn't attend Covesville Elementary School.

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