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EARLY SCHOOLS ARE RECALLED

MISS OSBORN WRITES REMINISCENCES OF PORTAGE.

Taught in Empty Store Building of N. H. Wood at Pacific and Manufactured her Own Blackboard—Salaries Are Better Now.

"It was a simple life we led, with no hair-breadth escapes or imminent dangers, though the Indians were not far away and sometimes looked into the the windows as they passed on their way to Portage for tobacco and fire water," writes Miss Elizabeth C. Osborn, from Denver, recalling the days when she taught school at "Wood's Folly." Her letter of reminiscences, penned at the request of Mrs. J. H. Rogers of the landmarks committee, will interest her many former pupils in Portage. She says:

The greatest annoyance I think I endured in those early days were the fleas and sandburrs, particularly the latter. Portage was rightly named the Sandburr City. What a contrast she presents today! Her handsome residences, fine public buildings, well kept lawns and beautifully shaded streets, speak volumes for the progress and advancement she has made since those days. I do not believe the sun shines over a fairer little city than the Portage of today. I went there from New York City where I had been teaching for two years, in the fall of 1861. As I needed rest and quiet after ten years of public school work, I decided to spend the coming winter at Pacific (that portion of which N. H. Wood was sole proprietor) with sister Hemenway's family who were living there. At that time the little settlement consisted of an empty store building, which in later years was removed to Portage and was known as Liederkrantz Hall, a hotel or boarding house also vacant and four or five cottages all occupied. There was no school building, but a dozen or more children to be educated and Mr. Wood seizing the opportunity of a teacher in their midst set about opening a winter school. He therefore offered those interested the use of the large hall over the vacant store which contained a

stove, a few chairs and some settees and a bountiful supply of God's fresh air and sunlight.

A few days before the school was to open the "committee man" called to examine me for the position of teacher. The only question he asked me was: "How long have you taught and where?" After my answer he replied: "I think you know more than I do and will question you no further." His name I have forgotten, neither do I hold any certificate from the district but accomplished the work assigned me and drew my salary. In those days the country schools in the west had very few conveniences for teaching. There was in the hall absolutely nothing, not even a blackboard. I called on Mr. Swift, familiarly known as Bina Swift, a school officer I think, for a blackboard and he promised me one. As it did not materialize, I suppose for want of time, and was a great necessity, I had two of the largest boys assist me in making one. We appropriated some of Mr. Wood's lumber and nails lying around, and with the aid of hammer and saw put one together. Two other lads were sent to Portage for oil, turpentine and lamp-black for painting it, and in a few days we had a blackboard for general use. It was not a thing of beauty, I assure you, but a joy and help those two winters I taught there.

I do not recollect having but two visitors during that winter. One was D. W. Rosenkrantz, the first county superintendent, the other Yellow Thunder's quaw who, with others of the tribe, the Winnebagoes, was living near Duck Creek. She called one cold day evidently with the intention of warming herself. It was recess time and the children followed her into the room curious to see what sort of a reception she would get. I shall never forget the expression on their faces as I extended to her my hand for a shake and offered her a chair by the stove. I treated her with as much deference and respect as I would the president had he called, thereby giving the pupils an object lesson in courtesy and politeness even to an Indian.

Before the term closed I had registered twenty-five pupils. Two of them today are residents of Portage—Miss Emma Marsh and her sister, Mrs. Kenyon. The following winter I taught in the bar room of the hotel with no better school appliances or comforts, except that the room was smaller and more readily heated.

Today there is not one stone left upon another to mark the spot where N. H. Wood located, on the banks of the beautiful Wisconsin river some fifty years ago his place of business, which he laughingly said was to be a second Chicago.

Last summer I had the pleasure through the kindness of Mrs. E. A.

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Gowran to take an automobile ride with other friends down through Pacific. It was with much difficulty that I could locate the exact place, so completely had the undergrowth of grass and bushes obliterated the old landmarks.

It was with some reluctance that Mr. Wood abandoned his project. He remarked to a friend that it was no use to butt against Portage any longer, consequently removed his merchandise to that city and for many years carried on a large and successful business. With all his peculiarities and visionary projects he was a man of generous impulses and rendered assistance to many that the world knew not of. I do not doubt that he bore nearly all the expense of those two terms of winter schools. On May 1, 1866, Judge Guppy, superintendent of schools in Portage, opened a room in the basement of the old high school building to relieve the congested condition of the ward school. I was installed principal and Mary Ten Eyck, now Mrs. Neef, assistant. This was the beginning of my work in Portage. Previous to this the board of education had withdrawn the use of the Bible in the schools. As I wanted some form of opening the morning session, I placed on the blackboard one of Solomon's proverbs namely: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold" and had the pupils repeat it for several mornings. One day Mrs. Cornwell came into the room and noticing the verse asked: "Do you teach that to the pupils?" "Yes," I replied. "Well you'll have the board of education after you," she said.

"Let them come and if they can find anything improper or any sectarianism in that verse I will erase it," was my reply. When the week had passed I placed another on the board and went through in alphabetical order continuing the practice for nearly eighteen years. During that time no one, to my knowledge, condemned the exercise but several commended it. Today many of my old pupils scattered here and there are making similar use of the same. When Mrs. Cornwell resigned from the principalship of the grammar school Miss Austin was appointed principal and myself assistant. After one month we exchanged places and worked very harmoniously together up to the time of my resignation in 1884.

The methods of school work changed very little during those years. Judge Guppy liked the good old ways of teaching, yet wanted his teachers up-to-date and fully abreast with the times. There were not many fads and frills in those days in the school room. More attention was paid to reading, spelling, writing, branches that today are crowded out, that Johnny may know how to sing and paint, cook and sew, according to the latest theory.

These things are a burden and not a benefit if they prevent the acquisition of ability to read and write well. His strict economy in the city's finances kept down expenses, especially in teachers' salaries. The first year as principal of the grammar school, which was composed of 7th and 8th grades, I registered over 120 pupils and had one assistant. My salary was the paltry sum of \$37.50 per month. It was afterwards raised to \$40 and then \$45. Through Dr. Kellogg's influence when superintendent it was raised to \$50, a less sum than teachers receive today for those grades with less than half the number of pupils. Truly the world doth move; times have changed. To Mrs. Cornwell belongs the credit of introducing the decoration of soldiers' graves in Silver Lake cemetery by the school children. I always assisted her in gathering and arranging flowers and prepared recitations for different pupils to recite at each grave as the wreaths and flowers were strewn upon them. After the day became national the G. A. R.'s and the W. R. C.'s relieved us of that work.

If you were to consult the old files of The Register you would find this item: "July 4, 1868, Dick Veeder's celebration near the jail, Miss Osborn read the declaration, John Briekwell made an impromptu oration."

Let me explain how this came about or rather my part in it. I was spending an evening in company with Mr. Dibble, county officer, and in conversation inquired how the 4th was to be celebrated. He said that Dick Veeder was planning an observance of the day, since the city had decided not to. That he did not like to let the day pass without some manifestation of patriotism. He was struggling hard to find persons willing to take part in the exercises, which were to be held in the grove back of the jail. One great difficulty the old gentleman had, was to secure some one to read the Declaration of Independence and he feared he would have to abandon his plans on that account. I jokingly remarked that I might fill that vacancy on his program in order to have his project materialize, never thinking it would go further. That was Mr. Dibble's opportunity to play a joke on me, and forthwith sent word to Mr. Veeder that he knew a lady who would read and referred him to me. I think also he had some intention of giving Mr. Veeder another lively chase without satisfactory results. I therefore surprised Mr. Dibble by helping out the old gentleman in his patriotic efforts by reading the declaration.

This occurred nearly forty years ago when women were not as prominent in public gatherings as at the present time and may have seemed to some a bold, daring step to take. However, it afforded him much gratification and

did me no harm.

I enjoyed my residence in Portage exceedingly. The church, dear to me as the apple of mine eye, school employment laborious as it was, and society among a class of people whose memory I shall ever cherish, all combine to make life sweeter as the years roll on. In my occasional visits there I miss the faces of the dear old friends who sleep in beautiful Silver Lake Cemetery, "beneath the low green tents whose curtains never outward swing." And last, but not least, is the pleasure and delight, meeting the old pupils wherever located. To know of their success in life is most gratifying, a joy, a reward.

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