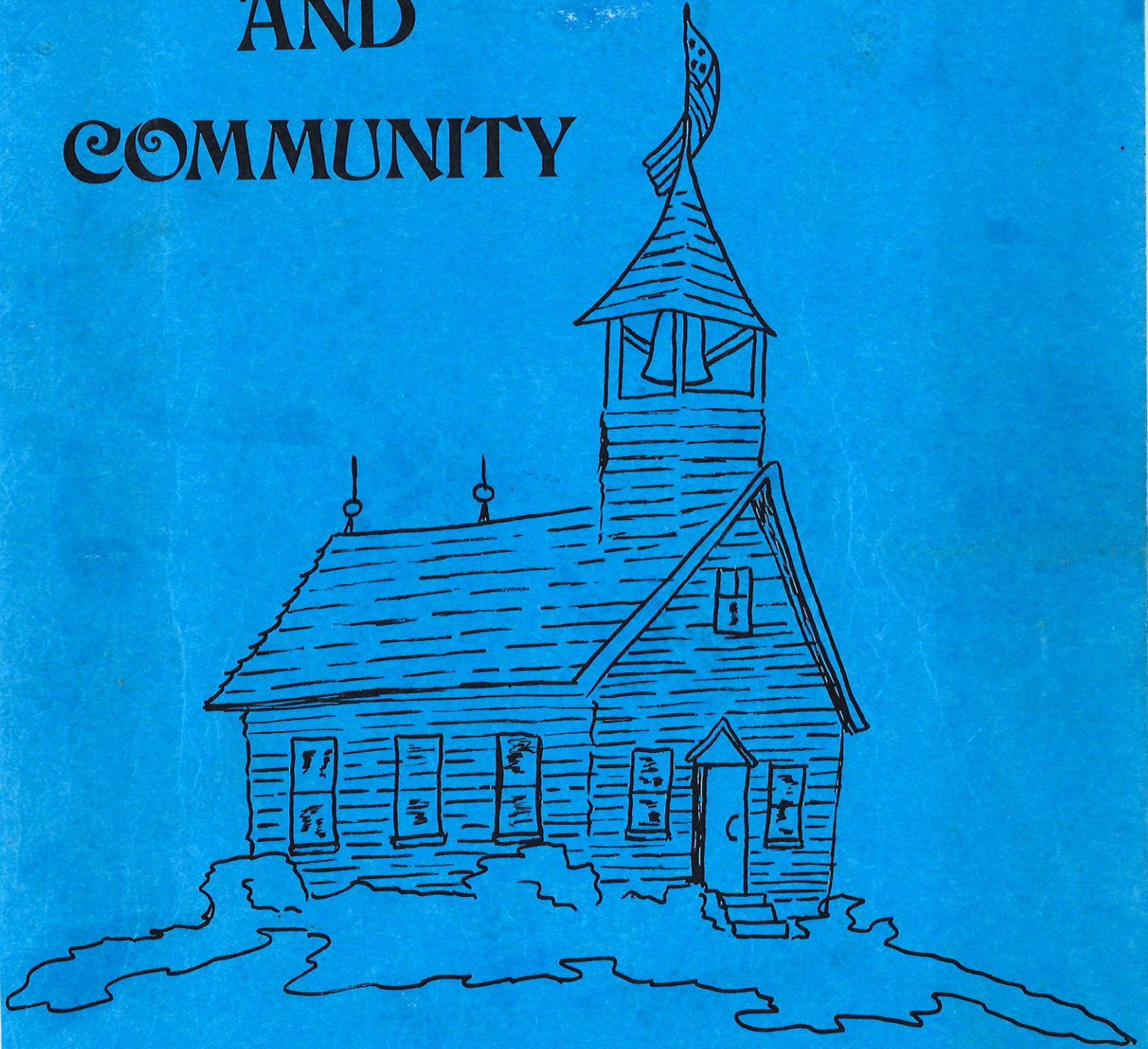


Trempealeau Co Historical  
Society

# THE HAMLIN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY



1859

1960

h-180-1

HISTORY OF HAMLIN SCHOOL

DISTRICT NO. 3

Written and Compiled By

Florence Teeple Beals

1973 - 1974

DEDICATION

This history is dedicated to all the people, who, through the years 1859-1960, attended Hamlin District School in Trempealeau County.

I hope that these pages will bring pleasant memories to the readers who lived in these times. To the younger readers, I hope it may bring about a better understanding of an era before their time.

I have used all available material in compiling these facts, and have included personal memories that may be of interest.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have given the writer material in the creation of this history. Old school records dating back to 1878 have been a source of information. Past teachers have donated many needed pictures. Visitations with senior citizens have brought forth many humorous incidents. The writer of this history went through all the eight grades of this little rural school and has first-hand information for the years 1910 through 1918.

Visiting with old neighbors and friends has been a great delight and satisfaction.

The rustic schoolhouse was sketched for the cover by Marjorie Beals Jacobson, and was taken from a slide, courtesy of WKBT TV, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Stenographic layout was done by Jean Amundson.

## HAMLIN CORNERS

Historians, sociologists, and just plain people have much interest, especially of late, in the beginnings and early days of their communities. Why did some grow, others fade from first activity? Who first settled? Why? From where did they come and how did they live? And last, why did they choose a particular area?

The movement of man and explanation of his actions can often be very interesting, and a discourse on the subject would consume much time and many pages, and truthfully, tell little new. Main subjects of this story are the Hamlin School, the oldest in this immediate area, and a settlement at one time alive with activity, now a peaceful farm community. Yours will be the only answer to the whys, the whos, and hows of those pioneers and their trek. The story will relate, in a somewhat chronological order, the early days in their new homes and following years, interspersed with happenings of importance in the community.

Hamlin is located in the Beef River Valley of northern Trempealeau County, halfway between Eleva and Strum, and a short mile of town road south of U.S. Highway 10 and the river.

The settlement at one time boasted the only Post Office within 12 miles in either direction of the valley. A daily stage coach traveled north and south, an Inn provided travelers with bed or board, a blacksmith plied his trade, and there was a drying house in operation to prepare fruits and meats for preservation. The school building served several purposes and eventually a cemetery was set aside on a very picturesque prominence.

Nearest settlements of any size were at the present locations of Osseo and Mondovi when Russell Bowers and his family moved onto the SE Quarter of Section 15 in June of 1857. He had traded property in Dane County with a Mr. Moon who had lived here and decided he could not stand another cold, lonely winter. Bowers became the first permanent settler in a wide area, his closest neighbors being A. V. Gibson and another family at the west county line.

There is no information as to what material was used in construction of that first small home but it definitely stood on the western part of the Bowers property. Common impression among those first comers was this valley was woefully short of good timber, the only usable material was tamarack growing in swamps where fires had not reached. Homes were constructed of either tamarack logs, chinked with moss, or rough pine sheeting boards obtained at Eau Claire or Fairchild saw mills. A wagon load of wild hay was acceptable pay for a wagon load of such lumber at either place.

Land speculators were many those days and traveled through the country constantly. There were many requests for purchase of food and travelers would also leave letters to be forwarded when an opportunity arose. Bowers handled mail in this manner long before appointment as Postmaster, and the continual press for other staples caused him to stock a small store.

Isaac Webster, located a half mile east in the NW Quarter of Section 24 in 1859 seems to have been the second permanent settler in the area. He paid \$200 in gold for the 160 acres, of that a half acre was set aside as school land. Men were coming in and moving out after a few months stay those early years, a common happening at the time. The year 1863 saw the arrival of James Rice and Jack Carter, the former settling south of Bowers'. The latter traveled a bit and finally took land north of the present location of Strum. About the same time Henry Teeple arrived from Dane County and took possession of the land east of Bowers by purchase from James Chase who had lived there less than a year. A son, David Chase, had enlisted with the Union Army a short time earlier, his life was lost in the first round of rifle fire at the battle of Shiloh. The townships of Unity and Sumner were formed as one about that time and was named town of Chase in honor of the young man.

The Civil War was not going well as expected so the President called for additional volunteers in late 1863 and Russell Bowers was among those who left. He served with Co. K of the 36th Wisconsin Regiment and saw some hard, bloody fighting. Members of the company saw the surrender of General Lee's army. During this time the store supplies and postal duties were moved across the road and handled by Henry Teeple during Bowers' absence.

A stream of settlers came through the valley after the Civil War, hardly a day but that one or several covered wagons could be seen heading west. Henry Teeple enlarged his stopping place the first of several times. A stage operated regularly on the north-south trail turning toward Eau Claire at the corner and crossing the river at a ford slightly below stream from the present bridge. A blacksmith, an important and indispensable man in those days, worked long hours.

The settlement had been known as "12-Mile Station" up to this time, possibly because it was that distance from the well-known Beef River station serving the Tomah-Hudson stage line where it crossed the northeast corner of the county. Russell Bowers received official appointment as postmaster in 1863 and named his office "Hamlin." It was the only such service between the Sumner office, at the present location of Osseo, and Mondovi. Hamlin had often been referred to as "the corners" and through years following was often called "Hamlin Corners." The post stamp, however, was Hamlin.

Within three years after the war all good land had been settled. The people surrounding Hamlin were of New England or Ohio River Valley origin, with stops for a year or so in the southern part of our state before coming here. Beside the Bowers, Teeple, and Rice families at the Corners and Isaac Webster further east, Jack Carter and A. J. Lyons were at the present Strum site, John and David Wingad, Al Lampman, Wm Boyd, Morris Clement east to south and further west St. Clair Jones and John Springer were prominent. Undoubtedly several families are missed in the above enumeration.

Immigrants from northern European Countries usually arrived at frontiers in near-destitute condition. Members of the first settlement here were fairly well equipped for such life. Nearly every family had a team of horses, some of the basic farm implements and necessary home utensils. Homes were small at first and furniture was usually hand made in many instances.

They were genial people, all English speaking and with education common for that day. It is said that "good people make little history;" aside from the Civil War volunteers and their experiences, there is little to note except that those remaining did their best to make this a better place to live, with no fuss and little fanfare.

They were of Methodist faith and served by the Rev. Anderson of Mondovi. He held services in both the first and second school buildings years before arrival of the Norwegians who built a church at the river crossing 2 miles east of the "Corners." Site for a cemetery was probably determined when Thankfull, wife of Wm Jones, died in February of 1866, she being the first interred. Little is known of medical aid for the community, but Mary C. Teeple, "Aunt Kit," served for years as midwife throughout the settlement.

Independence Day was always observed with the many veterans of the area probably providing a bit of reminiscing. Tom Dean, now 84, remembers the Bowers grove, lemonade and dinners being served, contests of strength, foot races, and a tug-of-war.

It was a good community in which to live, fine citizens, helpful neighbors all interested in the happenings and activities of Hamlin. A change came, not quickly but in a manner similar to many other such communities across the land.

Back a century ago, more or less, the matter of securing ground wheat flour for baking bread was of prime concern to any family. This was no problem in this area as every stream of any size had some enterprising settler operating a pair of millstones on which the home-grown wheat could be turned into fine baking flour. The little stream at Hamlin was hardly large enough for such operation and this fact may have been the first trickle of local trade away from the little settlement.

The best stream for power in the whole area was two miles northwest, near where Big Creek emptied into the Beef River. There is no doubt milling had been done at that place before E. J. Carpenter built a grist and flour mill in 1877. About the same time, R. P. Goddard erected a store building nearby and included farm implements in his trade. The settlement was given the ambitious name of "New Chicago" (see map) and was so known until the two men platted the "Eleva addition to Albion" in December of that year. Goddard's operation was large for that time and had considerable effect on business at Hamlin. Mail was collected at his store and brought to the latter place for forwarding.

The late seventies also saw two stores and a church go up near the river crossing two miles east of Hamlin and when a post office was created there in 1885, business decreased at the older settlement.

Thus, in a span of a half dozen years, the 20-year-old community lost much of its outside activity. The stage however made its stops for passengers and mail until the late eighties. Coming of a railroad down the valley was more than a rumor during those years, a strip of right-of-way had been purchased through the Teeple farm in 1883, although construction of the bed and track did not occur until late 1889. Valley residents were elated because city markets were now local and land values increased greatly. The railroad

missed Hamlin by a half mile, with stations established at Strum to the east and Eleva west.

So Hamlin slipped away from the main stream of activity as have many other similar places. Life moved on as always, old faces faded away, new moved in, school programs went on, veterans meeting and reminiscing, 4th of July observances, Thanksgiving and Christmas festivities, and whatever usually goes on in a friendly community.

Hamlin has changed little in the past 85 years. The Inn is yet there, the old abandoned school, a cluster of newer farm buildings, and the picturesque country cemetery that had many burials at the turn of the century and following years, including those of 12 Civil War veterans who lived and worked in the neighborhood.

The future brings changes that come to any rural area, but this place will still be Hamlin. RHM

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HULBERG'S RED OWL

We have followed the tradition of the pioneer merchants  
who operated at this site; Solberg, Oluf Dahl,  
Joe Mathison, and Ted Hulberg  
in furnishing you the best at the right price.

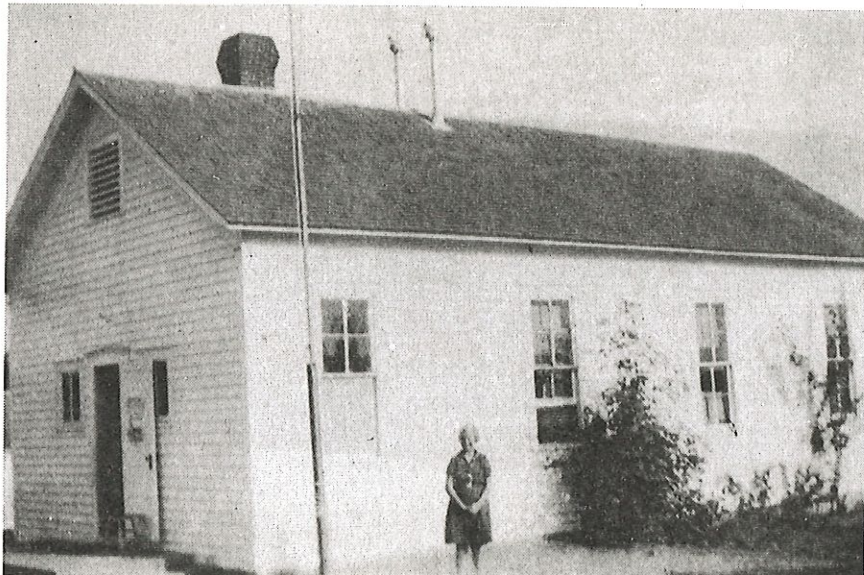
David and Dorothy Hulberg

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# School Days



THE VERY FIRST HAMLIN SCHOOL, used as a granary on the Webster (Gene Hardy) farm for a hundred years.



3rd Hamlin School. In late years, the belfry had been removed.

## Three Oldest Living Pupils



Nettie Lampman, Mrs. Ben Babcock, Mondovi, attended Hamlin school 90 years ago. She began 1st grade in 1883.



Grace Lampman, Mrs. Grace Hayes, Eau Claire, began school in 1892.



Merle Crocker, Mrs. O.K. Lee, Gilmanton, attended Hamlin School in 1896.



## THE FIRST HAMLIN SCHOOL

The first Hamlin school was also the first in a wide surrounding area, there being nobody living closer than what is now Osseo to the east and beyond the west county line in that direction. First settlers were yet to come at either Eleva or Strum, when Isaac Webster paid a land agent \$200 in gold for the northwest quarter of section 24 of range 9. He received less than 159½ acres as a trail along the north line was reserved for road (C.T. "V" today) and a half acre of land on the "north side near the creek" was set aside for a school. The date of the transaction was May 11, 1859; it is recorded in Volume 6 of Deeds, Page 730 of our county records. Only creek along the north line today is where a culvert is located just beyond the northeast corner of the property, the bed of the stream may have changed somewhat in the past 114 years.

A building was erected, but its use as a school was of short duration. We find the same land agent deeded the half acre to Mr. Webster in 1865 which indicates its use for instructional purposes was ended, but it served as a granary on the old Webster farm for the next 103 years. Gene Hardy, present owner, demolished the structure in 1968. He has a photo of the farm place taken some years ago which shows the old building (see photo page) which he describes as more than adequate for the purpose used. Two-foot-wide pine boards served as sheeting with plastered inside walls. Interior paint was a faint green.

The writer recalls playing around the building as a child, remembering the green interior walls and being told it had once been a school. A diligent search turned up no earlier information about this very first school except word comes down through the years that water was obtained from the Tappen place across the river. Methodist services were held in this building while it was a school, the date being 1860-65.

## THE SECOND HAMLIN SCHOOL BUILDING

Hardly more is known of the second school building except that the location had been changed. It now stood just southwest of the "corners" on land set aside from the Rice farm. A greater number of settlers lived in that vicinity, all had large families those days, and the first school had been small. The move may have come in 1865 as Isaac Webster received a deed to the first half-acre of school land from Whitmore that year.

In early pioneer schools, desks were usually homemade and unpainted. There comes information through the years that planks were used in making desks for this school. Mrs. Ben Babcock of Mondovi is the oldest living pupil, who attended in 1883, and remembers the floor had many knots which were pushed out by pupils. Grass would grow up through the holes during the summer months, presenting an eerie appearance. Wilbur Klick of Osseo remembers being in this school as a small boy, and recalls the plank desks and painted blackboards.

The building as evidently used about 23-25 years when again a decision was made. This time we have original records supporting our story. The following minutes speak for itself, well written, no further explanation needed.

### THE THIRD HAMLIN SCHOOL

#### Minutes of a Special School Meeting Held December 24, 1887

Minutes of a special school meeting held in School District No. 3, Town of Albion, Trempealeau County, Wisconsin. Meeting to authorize the school board to make a loan from state trust funds in amount of \$300 to build a schoolhouse in said district. Legally called according to law, meeting was called to order, Henry Teeple chosen chairman of meeting, notice of meeting was read, vote taken by ballot for and against the loan. The whole number of votes cast for the loan fourteen (14), against the loan none (0). Voted to raise the amount of loan in three annual instalments, the first \$100 and interest to be raised in the tax roll of 1889, the second \$100 and interest in the tax roll of 1890, the third \$100 and interest in the tax roll of 1891. Also voted to raise \$150 in the tax roll of 1888 to aid in building said schoolhouse. Motion to adjourn, carried.

David Wingad, District Clerk

Above is the authorization for building and raising money for the third school.

The school was erected a couple hundred yards farther west on top of a hill. It had just the one room, with three large windows on each side, with outside siding painted white. Later an entry was added and hardwood floors were put in. The name "Hamlin" was printed in large letters on a small board over the door. This board is still there, but very weather beaten.

In front of the schoolhouse, as you came in from a long open, wooded porch, was a cloak room. The girls could hang their coats and scarves on large pegs, and boots were kept on the floor to one side. The boys things were kept on the other side. A door in the middle was open most of the time, except in cold weather. A large woodbox occupied one corner on the girls side. The older boys had to keep this filled with sawed wood and some kindling to make fires.

An uncovered wooden porch or walk went the width of the building. Three steps led to the ground on one end. The other end had only one step. Parents bringing children to school in buggies on bad days could drive to the high end and they could step out of the buggy onto the wooden walk. The sandstone foundation was higher on one side of the building than the other. Sometime after the year 1920, this wooden walk was dismantled and a cement approach made.

**Pupils**

Dorotha Stoughton  
 Merle Crocker  
 Clarence Lampman  
 Ida Smith  
 Antone Battlfson  
 Emma Smith  
 Margrete Skogstad  
 Tillie Anderson  
 Tillie Olson  
 Grace Lampman  
 Gracie Crocker  
 Mayfred Stoughton  
 Gertie Lampman  
 Harry Smith  
 Clarence Battlfson  
 Anna Smith  
 Thomas Rice

INSTRUCTOR CO., DANVILLE, N. Y.



**HAMLIN SCHOOL**

✻ TREMPEALEAU COUNTY, WIS. ✻

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER ✻ 1900

Presented By

**Leona R. Webster, Teacher**

L. S. KEITH, CO. SUPT

**SCHOOL BOARD**

S. R. Stoughton, Clerk  
 F. Bowers, Director  
 G. N. Webster, Treasurer

Leona R. Webster Souvenir



1918 - Enrollment was down.



We were a happy school - 1938 - Esther Hoff, Teacher.

Hamlin had a very nice clean school at all times. It was a good size one-room building with a smaller entry room. The class room had three large windows on each side. The entry room had two large windows on each side. Outside was the woodshed and two outdoor toilets. The dimensions of the school was about 24 by 60 feet.

The very good hardwood floor had been scrubbed and oiled at the beginning of each year. This was a task for the most rugged. Windows were washed and clean curtains put up. This was all done after the stove had been gone over and was ready for cold weather. From time to time, painting had to be done on the inside walls, too. I am writing this as I remember it - 1912-22.

In another section of this book there are records of meetings held to discuss the improvements needed as the years went by.

How did the rest of the inside of the school house appear? I remember the desks of 1910 were made with stationary tops, with iron grillwork on each end of the desk. Books could be put under this top. A bench-like seat was connected to this top. New desks were installed a number of times during the 85 years the school operated. Old records show this. There were 35 desks in the year 1915. There were times a few pupils had to double two in a seat.

A new set of desks were purchased in 1915. These had inkwells on the right side and a lift up top for books. Sometimes a boy would have a live toad or a small field mouse and things to scare the girls, stored in these desks, which did not go over very well with the teacher, if she found out. Sometimes spit balls and notes would find their way inside. The inkwells provided a very convenient place to stick a girl's pigtail into, if a girl happened to be in a front seat.

The usual furniture consisted of desks for pupils, a desk and chair for the teacher, and about a couple dozen chairs for visitors; these were stored in the cloakroom. A large wall clock hung on the east wall. There was the stove, with the large black jacket around it for safety reasons. Then a bookcase that held about 100-200 books.

There were reference books, story books, and readers for the different grades. A set of glass jars in a glass holder that held different forms of cocoa, - the cocoanut, cocoa butter, white cocoa, and brown cocoa. This always intrigued me. I liked the smell of this, and more than once some of us had a little taste of each when the teacher wasn't looking.

The teacher's desk was up front on a stage, about a foot higher than the main floor. This stage ran the width of the room and was the most memorable part of the school room. It provided a place for recitations, writing on the blackboards, reading the rolldown map, ringing the school bell, and Christmas programs.

The last time I visited after leaving the school, a nice piano had been added, and other things too numerous to mention. A telephone was installed on September 25, 1940. Inside toilets were also installed. Some coal was

being used instead of all wood. When in school I can remember the saw rig, and every spring sawing the long trees up for fuel out by the woodshed. Farmers took their turn to bring a load of long trees. I can still hear the buzzing of the saw.

Kerosene lamps were used to light the rooms when a program or meeting was held at night. The lamps, with a wick and chimney, were held in black iron brackets on each side of the room about halfway up on the side of each window, three lamps on each side. These lamps had reflectors which, when one looked into them, faces became distorted. A large hanging chimney lamp with a shade was suspended from the ceiling in the center. Someone had to stand on a chair to light all lamps. As I recall, the hanging lamp was not in use too many years. This was before the school had electric lights.

All one-room schools had sort of the same conformation, or standard way of holding school classes. Classes were held at the front of the room for each grade, while the rest worked their lessons at their desks. We had some homework and book reports. This is a sample of a typical day's schedule.

Year 1904 and 1905 - Teacher, Nora Nelton - Fifteen (15) Pupils.

9:00 Opening with roll call  
General exercises  
Reading - Primer  
Reading - One  
Reading - Two  
Reading - Three  
Arithmetic  
Some study periods with no classes at all  
Geography  
Language  
Writing  
History  
Spelling

1:00 Opening exercises  
1:10 Writing  
1:25 Primary Reading  
1:35 Primary Reading  
1:45 Upper Grammar  
1:50 Middle Grammar  
1:55 Middle Language  
2:10 Middle Grammar  
2:20 Primary Language  
2:30 Recess  
2:54 Upper Agriculture  
3:05 Primary Agriculture  
3:25 Middle Geography  
3:45 Primary Geography  
3:50 Primary Spelling  
Middle Spelling  
4:00 Dismissal

## THE WATER SYSTEM

The water system was a pump outside, near the school. In the fall, after not having been in use all summer, it was checked for frogs and snakes. Someone had to do rather a lot of pumping to get all the rusty water out for the start of a new year. It usually became cool and clear. But it was always advisable to throw the first pail away, to get fresh water. On cold winter mornings this pump was frozen, and many things had to be tried by the older boys to get water. Many times they heated pails of snow to get hot water to prime the pump, which sometimes was not very successful. With all the extra work for the children to do, especially the boys, it is surprising they got the education they did.

Water was carried into the school in a pail. At first a community dipper was used. Holding up one finger was request sign to get a drink of fresh water. With a nod from the teacher, she went around the room releasing a child, as the last one came back into the room. If we did not get a drink right after inspection and in school hours, no telling what would be found in the pail - maybe a dirty mitten or spit ball would be in the bottom.

Health and sanitation was talked over at a special school meeting. It was decided to replace the water pail and dipper with a stone jar with a spigot and cover on the top. Ours was a dull gray with a blue line for decoration around the top and bottom. Each child was then required to get an individual cup if they could, or use some cup from their dinner bucket. Folding tin cups with lids on were very compact and could be carried in ones pocket. They are still on the market in some stores.

## SCHOOL LUNCHES

Most of the children carried their lunches in the empty buckets left from the syrup bought at a local store. These were shiny tin with wire handles. The tin lids were loose and easily lost. Losing a lunch pail lid was a disaster. The pails came in two sizes, 4-quart size which was just right for the older pupils, and a 2-quart size for the small fry.

Each family lunch was made up of whatever was on hand. Sandwiches were made with thick slabs of home-baked bread, and peanut butter or jelly, occasionally cheese. In the winter they might contain fried side pork or eggs.

Hard-boiled eggs were a standby. A lunch might contain big squares of molasses cake or homemade, rolled-out cookies, made with real butter and sour cream.

The only fruit that appeared in the lunches were apples. These were far inferior to the fine ones we buy today. No one sprayed the trees and most of the fruit was wormy. We often bit into an apple and found a worm. But worse yet, sometimes found half a worm.

## LUNCH TIME

Lunch time was a pleasant time, especially in the spring and fall. Groups of children would sit in a circle on the lawn, the boys seemed to be separated from the girls. It was always interesting to know what each one had for his lunch. Sometimes we exchanged parts of our lunch with another. The ones with lefse in their pails were the most respected.

After lunch was over we hurried to play games. The ones that lived near by and had to go home for dinner would sometimes miss the most fun.

## PLAYTIME

In the early days there was no playground equipment. We relied on each other to know a game or invent one. Of course, ball games were always popular, plus one old cat, drop the handkerchief, pom-pom pullaway, marbles (in the early spring), jack knives, red light green light, and many more. Anti-I-Over was real fun. Then there was always a fight or two. The girls were always afraid someone would be hurt.

## GOPHERS

When the boys could get away with it, they pumped pails of water out of the old pump to drown out gophers, by filling holes the gophers made, until a little head would pop out and then run for dear life. Being all wet and slippery, the boys and some brave girl would try to catch one. The poor gophers would not know which way to run, with so many feet running this way and that. I don't think any rural school could have had so many gophers as Hamlin.

## MUSIC

Some early schools had a little music, some had no music at all. Some songs were taught at home and carried into the school room. No one could read music, even after a few song books came out. The Golden Song Book was one of the early books, mostly patriotic; America, Battle Hymn of the Republic, Yankee Doodle Dandy, and others. About one teacher out of four could play by note or by ear. Very simple tunes would be played, which sounded very well. Some games were played to song; Farmer in the Dell, This is the way we shine our shoes, etc. Jews Harps and harmonicas kids could carry in their pockets were something special.

Hamlin school was given a phonograph. We did listen to a very few songs and marched around our desks. It seemed we did a lot of marching for one reason or another back in 1915. A piano was bought for the school much later.

The school day usually started out with a song, if there was any music at all. Schools with organs, usually had outsiders that came in to play for singing for special occasions. It has been said back in the middle 1800's, in the first schools, pictures would be drawn, and the pupils made up their own songs about this particular subject.

Again we go back to Mrs. Ben Babcock of Mondovi, the oldest living pupil, and her recollection of music in the second school in the early 1880's. There were no song books except one held by the teacher, who copied the lyrics on the blackboard. There was a reed organ and the pupils learned to sing a few patriotic songs in this manner.

There was little time allotted for this art in country schools.

### DISCIPLINE

Discipline was not of consequence in the old country school. True, there were grown boys who could cause much disruption for the teachers. I remember shortly after 1910 a boy enrolled at Hamlin who was not only larger but older than our instructor. His actions caused the board to expel him and school resumed its normal course. Another overgrown boy merely dived through an open window one warm spring day, no laws forced him back to class.

Parents were possibly more cooperative than today. Punishment at school meant additional corrective methods and penalty at home. I can recall no time when parents questioned the teacher's actions to maintain order. Occasionally boys would receive a sharp slap with a ruler across the fingers, it being the only punishment I can remember.

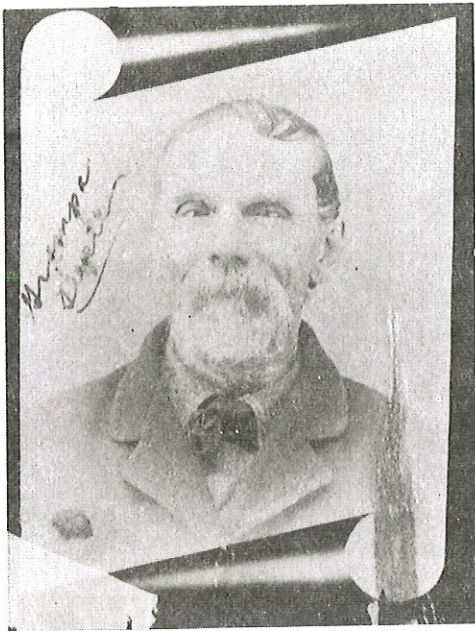
### THE SCHOOL BELL

From the center of the ceiling at the back of the class room hung a large rope with a knot on the end, within reach of anyone. This rope was attached to a big bell. The belfry was outside on top of the building to the north.

The bell was music to our ears. I can still hear its toll. The longest ringing was at 8:30 A.M., lasting about 5 minutes. That was one-half hour before school began. Children hearing this knew just how fast they had to walk or run to get there in time. At 8:55 A.M. the bell rang again, about one toll. Sometimes in their haste to get to school, so as not to be tardy, dinner buckets would be dropped and contents would spill out, with a mad scramble to get it all back in the bucket.

Children living along the same road met one another at the proper time so they could walk together. Coming to school was rather peaceful, but going home the boys liked to chase the girls and pull their pigtails. Snowball throwing was something else again. It seemed the parents with the largest families lived the farthest away.





Henry & Mary  
Teeple - pioneers;  
they operated the  
Inn.



Fred Bowers and wife ready for church - 1914.



The big snow - 1924, Kenneth Teeple & Carol Bowers.



Early and familiar names in Hamlin: Men are l to r: Fred Bowers, James Grant, Dub Webster, Ch. Webster, Werner Boyd, L. Crocker, John Grant, John Teeple, Jack Carter, Charles Adams, George Bowers. Boys, l to r, Leigh Grant, Rex Adams, Bowers boys, Ken Teeple.



The ladies, Mrs. C.N. Webster, J. Teeple, J. Carter, C.D. Adams, O.K. Lee, John Grant, W. Boyd, R. Adams, Grace Crocker, F. Bowers, Aunt Kit Teeple. Girls - A. Grant, F. Teeple, R. Teeple, M. Adams, Esther Adams. Photos at the Webster farm about 1913.

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The bell rang at 8:30, 8:55, 10:45 A.M. and at 1:00 and 2:45 P.M. on a regular school day.

The bell was used for special meetings, church gatherings in the late 1800's, and early 1900's, and for emergencies. Everyone got to know the meaning of the different tolls. The bell could be heard through most of the district. Even farmers in the fields could tell what time of day it was without looking at the sun to tell time.

Special privilege was given to different pupils big enough to pull the rope on the big bell, being careful not to turn the bell over. If that was done, someone would have to go up a ladder through a trap door in the front of the building to the dark attic, find the bell, and ring it.

The day in 1924 when the Teeple house caught fire, during summer vacation, someone went to the school house and rang the bell to summon help. This was unusual, and help came. A general ring on the telephone line helped, too. Kenneth Teeple, working his land near the John Wold farm, heard the bell one mile away and came home with his team of horses as fast as he could walk, to find friends and neighbors had put out the fire. During the course of putting out the fire, everything was removed from this large house, even the telephone, and about the first thing he saw was our mother lying on a mattress in the yard, but the house had been saved.

#### WE WELCOMED THE BLIZZARDS

In a child's eyes a big blizzard was very exciting. To the ones that had to shovel long paths shoulder high it was hard work, but at the same time with all the pure white fluffy snow came a change and sort of a peace settled over the land. Everything was quiet and silent, even the farm animals and fowl seemed to have a quietness about them. It was fun running through all the tunnels, and making angels in the snow. If it was cold, we did not mind it; it was accepted.

To the Wisconsin farm child of 1912, before days of surfaced and plowed roads, being snowed in was an annual adventure equalled only by Christmas and threshing. The phrase "snowed in" for only a short time, brings back nostalgic memories of freedom from routine, chilling outside adventures, and warm indoor protection from the raging elements. In the early 1900's, there were no cars in the winter time, and always some brave farmer going through to break a road for others. It was sort of a challenge to see if he could do it. If not, there were others to come and shovel the big drifts.

There usually was one good snowed-in stretch a year. January and February were those months. They helped to break up that long stretch between Christmas and spring. Along toward spring, with the freezing and thawing, good skating could be counted on near the creeks and lowlands. Usually some good ice storms helped, but this was not what the good farmer looked forward to.

"Now, at school, in case there is a blizzard", and maybe one had already started before we left school, and maybe early at that, our teacher would say hopefully, "you'd better take some reading books home." If we were to return to school the next day, it was with mixed feelings. Some mothers, whose sanity had been endangered by even thinking of a large family at home all day, was almost more than she could cope with. One could stay in a house just so long, then out came the heavy winter clothing. This was fine, but coming back in with this clothing all wet and stockings drying by the fire gave off a pungent smell which nothing else could equal.

#### AFTER THE SNOWS CAME

The most fun we all had would be the time we could go sliding with all kinds of sleds and makeshift sleds. The main road climbed up rather a steep hill at one time, from Hamlin corners past the school house. This hill was just right for a nice long ride and it was not too far to walk back. The little hill became very popular all winter. Even fathers and mothers and young folks and families used the hill in their free times. Free time was mostly evenings on moonlit nights. The hill became so slippery that the farmers were unable to drive their teams up the grade. A new road had to be shoveled off to the side as far as possible. All had to be done by hand, as there were no snow plows. There seemed to be so much more snow back in 1915. There were no cars in the winter time, just tracks made by the bob sleds for horses to go through.

#### WINTER

On the coldest days of winter when roads were drifted, some came to school in a sleigh snuggled in a bed of straw and covered with heaps of blankets. Mufflers were wrapped around faces. The strong smell of steaming horseflesh and oiled leather combined with the jangling of harness rings and whipletrees. At times the struggling team plunged into shoulder-high drifts with the sleigh lurching this way and that, sometimes even tipping over. The father would stand with the reins, dressed in a long raccoon fur coat, frost on his eyebrows, mustache, if he had one. The mustache was as popular in the early 1900's as it is today in 1973.

In bitter cold weather, we could walk on top of the snow most any place where it had drifted over the fences. Sometimes we would break through and sink deep in the snow, having a hard time to get back on top. Mostly children up to 12 years of age could do this, depending on how heavy they were. This was all great fun, not to mention skating on the frozen creek that ran at the bottom of the hill. This creek would freeze and kept overflowing because it was spring fed. This made for good skating. On Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, young people came from several miles away. On some very cold days, our family kitchen became a good warming place. The creek ran very close by, at one spot within 100 yards. With the creek overflowing

and freezing so much we could skate right over the line fences and on to Beef River a mile away. In low areas we sometimes had a whole field on which to skate. We all had clamp-on skates. These were ordered from Sears and Roebuck, and could be adjusted to just about any size.

Neighbors a half mile away would appear, dressed in heavy boots, just to talk to someone who knew no more about the outside world than they did. It was some excitement, and they would usually stay through a meal, politely refusing the cream gravies and whipped-cream cakes, because they were escaping from the same at home.

When the youngsters had enough of being snowed in, they were given the job of sprouting seed potatoes. Father would bring up a bushel at a time into the kitchen from the cellar. That we did not care about, but it was something to do.

In a few years, snowplows became a good sight. But before the snowplow, it really was more fun and excitement walking on top of big drifts of crusted snow and sinking up to our shoulders when we did not have to. It was more fun trying to get out.

Anyway, mother had the curious custom of going to town soon after the snowplow came through, "just to see people on eye-level again, and talk to someone that understood her language."

#### THE CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

The biggest social event of the year as the Christmas Program. For one magic evening, our school room was turned into a theater.

Christmas was a time of year we did not think about until after Thanksgiving. Teachers, of course, started to make plans earlier. There were recitations, musical numbers, dialogues, and pantomimes. The musical numbers consisted mostly of the school singing the Christmas carols. Someone always memorized "The Night Before Christmas." There was always a short play or two to keep in the spirit of Christmas. The Three Wise Men would be played by three boys, or if they could be secured, three fathers, all dressed up in colorful costumes. Not one child could recognize his own father. The fathers dressed in their costumes in the ante room and at the appointed time would come in through the school room and up to the stage. The children were always wide-eyed with excitement.

Everyone took some part in the program. Excitement ran high the last week, as practice took a lot of time. Some classes and recesses had to be shortened. A school board member would come and string a tight wire from one side of the room to the other, so borrowed white sheets could be used for pull curtains.

At certain time, the children would slip under the curtains, and the teacher would get in the right place and guide the children. Then two older boys would pull open the curtains.

The performer's heart would skip a beat, just looking at the sea of faces in the back of the room. The program always played to a full house. Proud parents, grandparents, and even some from other districts, came to see the program. There was standing room only, for most, even after a couple dozen chairs had been set up. Children sat two and three in a seat to make room for a mother or father holding a small child.

Sometimes a curtain would fall and expose all that was on the stage. Smiles and laughter began, but there were always willing hands to put the curtain back up again. Many a dialogue needed prompting, but no one seemed to mind.

At the time the program was going on, there was the big Christmas tree with lighted candles and decorated by the children. This lighted-candle glow gave the room a mysterious look. The program did not last much over an hour. Outside at the appointed time could be heard a lot of jingle bells. In came Santa all dressed in his red Santa suit. He would march up to the tree with his Ho, Ho, Ho, and his sack full of gifts made or bought. No one was left out. Everyone got something. Everyone had a part in trimming the tree the day before, an older person clamping on the candle holders to hold the 5-inch lighted candle. Older persons were always glad when the program was over and the last candle would be put out, because of the danger of fire that existed while the tree was lighted. A man always stood by the tree with a pail of water and watched every minute to see that nothing caught fire. There were paper chains made by the children, and draped around the tree. Some would make chains of popcorn and cranberries. There would be store candy, apples, and popcorn balls.

Everyone went home with a little spirit of the meaning of Christmas. Many a small child had fallen asleep on his father's shoulders by the time everyone got into their warm clothes and ready to go home.

There were many sleighs and cutters with the horses tied to a fence all around the school building. The horses standing out in the cold, with large blankets over them. The families living close by walked hom in the crunchy snow, glad to be home by their own hearth. Best of all was the two weeks of vacation that had started.

#### LAST DAY OF SCHOOL TERM 1918-1920

The last day of a school term was celebrated with a school picnic. The children came at the regular hour to get their report cards. After cleaning out the desks and putting things in order, we sometimes sang songs we liked best and played games. This day also meant a better dress and clean overalls for the boys.

Around noontime, mothers and some fathers came with baskets of food. In nice weather a large table was arranged to place the food on. Some chairs would be used for the older folks. It was a real get-together and to say "goodby" to the teacher who had charge of their youngsters all winter.

The last days also meant cleanup days. A day was usually spent raking the yard, putting things in order. Hamlin had no trees so it meant only dead grass to be raked. This had to be done before the grass started to grow. It also meant a picnic lunch. It was all great fun to go to school and not have classes. We usually went home early that day.

From the year 1937, the rural one-room schools began to disappear one by one. As of this writing, 1973, some schools are for sale, some just boarded up, and some have long gone.

Though this school no longer exists, I feel it was a privilege to go to this historical school, being so closely related to the stage-coach days and pioneer days.

#### CLOSING OF HAMLIN SCHOOL 1960

The last of October, 1960, after 40 days of school, Hamlin School closed its doors for the last time. Fifteen pupils said goodby to the teacher, Mary Ann Mueller of Independence, Wisconsin.

The day started out like any other day. The last afternoon they had a picnic of hot dogs and potato chips. No visitors. They played games outside until it started to rain. They ate their picnic lunch inside. It was a very gray day.

These children were divided between Eleva and Strum, and were attending school in those schools during the first week in November. Some pupils were bussed.

#### THE SCHOOL EQUIPMENT

The equipment, especially the seats and desks, were real old. This was divided between the two schools. There really was not much left of value besides the library books and the text books. The dinner meal had been sent in from one of the other schools. It was usually warm. The tin syrup pail with the wire handles had long gone. As usual, all through the years, at noon, some children went home because they lived so close to the school. There were two reasons for this. First, to get a warm meal, and not have to pack lunches, and second, after the school lunch program it was probably cheaper.

The last teacher, Mary Ann Mueller, now Mrs. **Rodney Johnson of Harmony**, Minnesota, was added to the Eleva teaching staff as 5th and 6th grade teacher. While in Hamlin she drove a car from Independence every day to school. The names of all the children attending school at this time is on Page 24.

The shell of the old school house still stands in 1973. The name "Hamlin" is still there in faded letters. The big school bell has been reported to still be in the attic of this little white frame school building. After it was removed from the belfry for safety reasons, it was left inside, being very heavy, and not knowing what to do with it.

Mary Ann Mueller Johnson reports she has seen some of the children since the last school days. Some are even married, but it would sure be nice to see them all again. I suggest a school picnic, for all families that are still here, and have had a part in this school. A number of teachers might just show up.

This is the end of the Hamlin School History.

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