

A most interesting celebration was held in the Loreburn District on July 14th. and 15th. to reunite those who had been pupils, or teachers, at Willdon School.

The Willdon School District #1063 was formed by farm families in 1912 to serve an area northwest of Loreburn. It was an active centre until 1957 when amalgamation took the children to larger centres. The one room school and adjacent barn were later sold and removed. The old schoolyard was prepared by the reunion committee as a rallying point for a homecoming for the many who had been involved there over 45 years of schooling.

However, rain changed these plans and forced a move to the Strongfield Hall. Here a fine potluck supper started the evening while reminiscing with friends we hadn't seen for so many years. Musical entertainment and a sing song added to the fun. Several families had prepared albums and displays of photos of the early days and of their families as they grew down through the years. A model of Willdon Schoolhouse, which served as the centre piece for the registration area, had been built and decorated by Johnny Haugen.

Sunday morning started with a pancake breakfast at Strongfield Hall followed by a memorable church service at 11 a.m. A banquet at 2:30 p.m. was followed by a program of entertainment focused on "SCHOOLDAYS" and amusing events, as well as musical numbers contributed by very fine local talent. These events are detailed elsewhere so I have only outlined them as a background to the whole reunion.

I was asked to write a commentary on the reunion, being now a Senior Citizen and one of the early pupils. My father, Will Martin, came to the district in 1910 and called his home Willdon Farm. When the school site was selected on that farm, the school was called Willdon School. My schooldays there covered from 1916 to the Spring of 1923, therefore I write only of the people and the memories of those years. Fifty-six years is a long time to be absent so I apologize now for missing pupils and events that could be mentioned. Space limits so much that could be written, but much will be recorded by others.

I think Willdon must have been a happy school because such a large percentage of pupils returned for this first reunion. For example, take the class of 1922. Of that group of 27 pupils, from grades 1 to 8, two thirds turned up, which I am sure must be a record of some kind for reunions. I believe it showed the affection those pupils felt for the friends of those times, and pleasant memories they wished to renew. No doubt it also indicates the good healthy families raised in those days. Certainly we all got plenty of exercise, not only at school but with all the chores at home, for everyone shared in the work on the farms or in the house according to their ability.

In early years the school closed during January and February because of severe weather, then remained open through the Summer, except for one week in July to change teachers. As my parents usually returned to the family home in Ontario for much of the Winter I had to attend school there and must have been about 9 years old before I knew there were holidays.

The Norwegian children did not escape completely either, for their parents established schooling, whenever the winter weather permitted, at one of the homes. There they received voluntary tutoring in their language and in the history of their ancestors. A wonderful idea, not only in maintaining knowledge and respect for their ethnic origins but no doubt also in giving mothers a break on long winter days.

The original school was a minimum by today's standards but about 1920 a half basement and a porch were added. This permitted a small kitchen with a coal oil stove. Two of the older girls would be delegated, on cold days, to prepare hot cocoa in a large granite pot. This was a welcome noontime addition to sandwiches still cold from the chilling drive to school. Also, the basement gave more room for play on stormy days, but on good days everyone was eager to be outside. In Winter there were games of "Fox and Geese" in the snow and in early Spring the icy ponds provided sliding and skating.

The Summer play periods were filled in with a variety of games which usually included everyone, girls and boys, from the oldest to the youngest, whether baseball or a favourite we no longer see --- "Stealing Sticks"---. There were three especially speedy runners, Jenny Tastad, Ethel and Gladys Butler, and as they seldom could be caught they were always in demand when choosing up sides for games.

One of the major events each year was the School Fair for the Loreburn District. Everyone worked during spare time preparing exhibits. Do you remember all the freehand penmanship exercises? The careful seatwork for the prescribed competitions for each grade and the variety of art work? Aksel Chrestensen had very gifted hands and I recall a plasticine model of a beaver which he made that was outstanding. It captured first prize for our school and his sister, Dagmar, took the second prize. Peder Tastad made an excellent model of a grain elevator. I remember it must have been 18" high made of red cardboard and it, too, was most realistic and captured a first. Another noted exhibit was an insect collection neatly prepared by Myrtle Aadland. But there must have been many more winners for Willdon scored the most points that year for prizes and for that honour won a football, which received good usage. The monetary prizes, too, though small were very welcome in days when our spending money was mighty scarce.

Do you recall the designs that were used to decorate the top of the blackboards? A seasonal design, say pumpkins for Hallowe'en, Santa and holly sprigs for Christmas, etc., was perforated on tissue paper. The appropriate stencil was held on the board and patted with a brush loaded with chalk dust so the design was transferred to the blackboard. The older girls were then the envy of others as they were permitted to fill the designs with coloured chalk.

I have great regard for the teaching done in the one room country school. No doubt we missed out on some advantages of the big specialized schools, but everyone learned important things, such as self reliance and helping others. We must have had good teachers for I cannot recall any behaviour problems in the school or that we missed any of our required knowledge. Any teacher who could handle the daily lessons for eight grades had to be capable and work very hard, as some of us learned later. I do not recall when I did my required work for I only remember listening with fascination to the lessons being taught to the older grades and to most of the younger ones, too, especially their history and literature. Perhaps this was why my marks were never a matter of family pride. I recall that in our grade 6 class, Leonard Aadland and I used to vie for the lowest standing while Lillian Aadland, Gudrun Tastad and Laura Tjosvold competed for top marks,

The parents and teachers of the pupils of the early years are almost all gone. It was especially good then to see Mrs. Gus Tastad at the reunion and recall the happy visits to their home. The parents set a pattern of service in the community and kindly concern and help for others that has been well followed by the younger Tastads over the years. Mrs. Tastad must have been very proud to see them all gathered at the reunion and perhaps sometimes thinks that the sparsely pioneer days were well worthwhile when she considers her real contribution to Canada.

Similarly the Aadland family have been prominent in the community through three generations and again the parents set a standard for hospitality, kindness and hard work that is well remembered. I recall Hattie Aadland as being one of the chief organizers of games and entertainment at school, so it was no surprise to hear of the prominent part she had played in the organization and preparations for the Reunion and as one of the gracious hostesses. My special chum at school was Leonard Aadland so he was especially missed. He was gifted with good common sense and I learned some examples of sound practical thinking from him. Ruby in the grade below us was always good fun and I was glad to find she had retained her great sense of humour and happy disposition.

From those years to 1923 it was wonderful to again see so many friends. Myrtle (Aadland) Hetland, Hattie (Aadland) Vollmer, Ruby (Aadland) Chrestensen, and Marie (Aadland) Joel. Thelma (Berg) Amirault was there and Robert Butler arrived to represent his family. Lillian (Aadland) Pies had come a long way to attend. Harold Reed was there and I almost looked for the fine pinto pony that he used to ride to school. Johnny Haugen was an active member contributing to the Reunion and his sister, Laura, particularly so.

The Tastad family was particularly well represented and from my early group Evelyn (Tastad) Hundebly was honoured with the presentation of a Willdon Cup. Evelyn was the only pupil who afterwards taught at Willdon and then later her children attended the school also. Jennie (Tastad) Ferkingstad and Gudrun (Tastad) Jackson were also present. Gudrun had also taught at Willdon. Peder and Edward Tastad were both present and active, as were their younger brothers of following years.

The Tjosvold family always added to the fun and it was particularly good to see Laura (Tjosvold) Olson again, still enthusiastic, capably contributing at the piano and keeping things moving. Sisters Olida and Ella were also on hand and well remembered from those years.

That completes the list of those fortunate ones, up to 1923 Class, who were able to attend the Reunion. I am sure each and everyone enjoyed it thoroughly. Personally, I was surprised to find so much good musical talent available in one community. It was indeed delightful. The whole Reunion went over so smoothly and interestingly that those involved in the planning and preparations deserve sincere congratulations and many thanks for a job well done.

Corley Martin.

WILLDON REUNION 1979

You asked for comments on my family as the Martins seemed to vanish after the sale in the Spring of 1923. First we moved to a farm near Moose Jaw, then in 1925 to Indian Head where Dad owned a section next to the Dominion Experimental Farm. He and mother lived there until retiring to town in 1947. My sister, Jean, became an R.N. and nursed for many years at Indian Head, Regina and finally at Fort Qu'Appelle. I decided in the "dirty thirties" that farming was too risky a future and one could never control the wind and weather. After High School and Normal I went East to Toronto University for a degree in Mining Engineering. This led to an interesting and adventurous life across Canada. Then several war years were spent in the Royal Canadian Engineers, It is of interest to add here that I was stationed for a number of months at the Engineers Training Camp at Chilliwack, B.C. I later found that Aksel Chrestensen had been there at the same time. I passed the house where he and Ruby lived many times, but each did not know the other was there so missed some good times we could have had together in those difficult years. I have often wondered how many good friends we miss that way in our travels,--- like the ships that pass in the night.

After the war, lumbering in Northern Ontario became my main venture with a White Pine sawmill at Elk Lake. This expanded to other species. But we were concerned with the amount of wood wasted, so after a study of this, decided in 1960 to build a particleboard plant. Such a plant takes wood that is otherwise not used, makes flakes of it and bonds these into a fine board without defects. With help from many friends and family this venture has been successful and now supplies most of the Canadian furniture and kitchen manufacturers. As it has no knots or warping, particleboard has many uses, from fine furniture to ping-pong tables. Happily my son, Douglas, and several family members have handled much of recent management and let me ease towards retirement.

Fortunately my work has involved travel to many countries and given me a busy and varied life. As well, my wife, Lyle, and I have enjoyed many holiday trips to far away places. However, we have always been happy to return to Canada and have never found any better place to live. It may be of interest that my favourite country visited was Norway. There I seemed most at home and found the same kindly and hospitable people I had grown up with at Willdon. My regret was that the only Norwegian word I could remember was "Springe", which was of no help, and I wished I had been smart enough to learn more as a child.

Returning to Loreburn was a delightful experience in 1978. I found there good friends and progress far beyond anything I dared to hope for. Lyle and I were eager to return for the Reunion and it turned out to be a successful and happy event. It was unfortunate that a family tragedy caught up with us on Sunday afternoon and we had to leave suddenly for home without a chance to say good-byes.

It was kind of the committee to honour me with a gift of one of the Willdon Cups. This is a nice reminder of happy years and many good friendships.

Corley Martin.