

One-room school was hub of rural, community life

More money and bigger schools do not necessarily improve the quality of education, said Mrs. Donalda Switzer, who is retiring after 31 years of teaching. The old one room schoolhouse fulfilled a function and need in society that cannot be replaced. "The school was the centre of community life in many ways", she said.

Mrs. Switzer, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George McPhail of Acton, started her career in a one-room schoolhouse in Nassagaweya, near Campbellville. And next Tuesday, June 28, after 18 years with Erin Public School, she'll dismiss her class for the last time.

Mrs. Switzer taught in Nassagaweya for two years, the Lorn School at Acton for two years, and spent six years at Acton Public School. After her sons, Craig and Keith were born, she served as supply teacher in various Erin Twp. schools including SS14. She was also principal's supply for Lorn Brown, and in 1962 went back to regular classroom teaching at Erin Public School. To upgrade herself for the special education class she now

teaches, Mrs. Switzer took summer university courses. She has taught every grade, including high school.

For her first assignment, she taught 23 students, from grades 1-8, in a building heated by a wood stove in winter. Two of the older students were the school's caretakers.

The students walked to school from neighboring farms, often after morning chores. Mrs. Switzer said her students then considered education to be very important. They were "reliable and responsible" and few would risk not doing their homework. "They didn't dare be kept in after school," she said. "In the fall, they'd be walking home in the dark."

Parental discipline too was stronger. Very often a student who was punished at school would receive further punishment for the same offence from the parents.

The exigencies of teaching students of different ages, grades and capabilities, demanded firm control of the class and plenty of common sense. But discipline has never been a great problem for Mrs. Switzer. "I just

didn't expect anything but the child's best work or behavior," she said.

She stressed the importance of communication in the classroom. Often a problem student would improve his behavior, after being spoken to. Sometimes firmer methods would be called for. "I never punished a student without their knowing the reason why," said Mrs. Switzer. And though she thought she was "a tough teacher", she said she has always believed in firmness and fairness.

There is a great difference in teaching today, Mrs. Switzer noted. "Kids nowadays will scrap for the sake of scrapping". Before, she said the older students would help to teach the younger ones, and were often more effective than the teacher in getting something through to them. She feels that today there is often "a lack of personal caring" by the older students towards the younger students.

In contrast, she's of the opinion that teachers are just about the same as they've always been. Earlier, some young women chose teaching as a career in hopes of marrying a rich farmer. Now, she thinks, poor teachers sometimes stay in it for the money. "They haven't got the gumption to find anything else to do" she said.

"However, most teachers teach for the love of teaching" she said.

While discussing the greater number of men now teaching, Mrs. Switzer said she thinks they are most effective in high school. Children up to grade 6 respond best to a "mother image", she said. Many of the younger children often call her 'mom'.

She hopes retirement will give her some time for her own interests. "I'm going to do a lot of things I've always wanted to do," she said. She plans to take organ lessons, travel, garden. She is involved in WI work, and she and her husband, Howard, belong to a dance club.

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MRS. DONALDA SWITZER, (sitting) her father George McPhail, brother Kerwin McPhail and sister Peggy Harmer gathered last Wednesday evening at Mrs. Switzer's retirement party held in Erin public school. She taught for 35 years.

Community honors Mrs. Switzer

At the Erin Public School last Wednesday evening, the staff, assisted by the Home and School Association, tendered a testimonial buffet dinner for Mrs. Donalda Switzer, who is retiring from teaching after 31 years. Her husband and family were included among the guests.

Principal Bruce Macpherson paid tribute to Mrs. Switzer and in his brief address passed on some of the highlights of her classroom adventures. There was the time, for example, when fire at the Robert Little school in Acton forced her to find another makeshift classroom at the "Y" building. Some time later, flood made it necessary to relocate in the Scout hall. Principal of Robert Little school in those days was Pat McKenzie-Smith school is named in part. He is well known in

Halton regional government. He was among the guests last Wednesday.

The community through the Home and School association presented Mrs. Switzer with a replica of an old school clock and - of all things - a guinea hen. It had leaked out that guinea fowl

were something she had always wanted on the farm. There were several other personal gifts.

Representing the Home and School Association were president Anita Cunningham and past president Erna Durksen.

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This is the last programming until the fall. Have a nice summer - See you in the fall.

Sideroad 5
 with JENNIFER BARR

Baby chicks are the funniest little people I know. If you're ever feeling at odds with the world take time to watch a batch of two week old chicks dart about their business. Suddenly the sun comes out again.

Presently we have several batches of banty and Silkie chicks in various stages of development. The banties look like regular everyday conventional farm chickens, very bright and pretty. The Silkies look like something you made in kindergarten.

Poodles that lay eggs
 Adult Silkies are weird enough. They have blue faces, assorted blue rosettes about the beak, fluffy white feathers featuring some odd topknot arrangements and silky trousers. The babies come out of their shell looking like the epitome of the Hallmark Easter card chick but when they start to grow their white feathers they do it in bits. First comes some wings, then comes a head pom-pom followed by an identical tail pom-pom, so you can't tell one end of the chick from 'tother. When they grow their long pants but still have their fluffy down bottoms they begin to look really hilarious. Dr. Sues couldn't have created anything better.

Some restaurant tble
 Little chicks seem to be born with all the right instincts. When you feed pieces of bread to adult hens they'll get terribly excited and run round in circles grabbing each others' crumbs. Nobody actually eats, they just run with it in their mouths.

Baby chicks are just the same. Give them some crumbs and off they race. They haven't got a clue what they're doing - just galloping around in a tizzy with a mouth full because some instinct dictates they should.

One hen produced only one chick and he did exactly the same thing. When given bread he ran off like a loon doing his forty laps round the pen even though there were no other chicks to chase him and swipe his bit. I don't think he ever got to eat it.

Feathered paratroopers
 Some of the older chicks play out in the barn during the day now. Their door is opened in the morning and they can flutter the two feet to the ground. Mama pops out first along with a couple of the braver chicks. The rest start cheeping and line up on the take-off ramp. Two or three will balance on the edge testing their wings like beginner swimmers getting up nerve for the plunge. The younger chicks in the next pen run about fluttering their tiny feathers for takeoff, too - only they haven't got the foggiest notion why they're doing it.

Finally someone gets impatient and pushes Charlie off the ramp and they all pile out pulling their rig cords and soaring gracefully down only to pile up beak first on landing.

Once on the barn floor they have a wonderful time seeking treasures, scratching little holes and scooping bits of grit. One little rooster has an obsession for a small packing label that's been floating around for a while. He picks it up and has a little run with it every morning. Mama and Papa call them to order and off they go to explore the other end - as happy as only a bunch of chicks can be.

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Have suspect in shooting

Halton Regional Police have a suspect in a June 16 shooting incident.

An Acton man reported to police that as he was leaving Acton Auto Body, he saw a woman pointing a rifle at him, from a car parked on Agnes St. One shot was fired in his direction.

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