

# The Country School

## A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

The one-room schoolhouse is iconic of early prairie days, when children could walk to school with their siblings, or if they were lucky, they could ride the family horse. It's important to note that in those early settlement years, attending school was more of a fair-weather activity as it made no sense to put children through cold and treacherous winter conditions to travel to school.

But one aspect of the country school that was very important was that it was the hub of the community, where Sunday morning services were held before the building of that community's church. It was where baby showers were held, Christmas concerts and spring concerts were performed, and community reunions, school picnics, and anniversaries were celebrated.

Don't forget Field Day, when area schools came together to compete in a variety of sports events and drills. The day started with a parade, each school holding their banner high, and it ended with the presentation of the trophy to the school with the most points!



*Copley School - RM of Two Borders*

But the Prairie schoolhouse was also where the community dances were held – this being enjoyed in every season throughout the year!

It was a hilarious time as folks were picked up from farm to farm in wagons, or sleighs depending on the season, and squeezed in as many as they could as they made their way to the schoolhouse. Upon arrival, the horses were unhitched and put away in the nearby barn.

Inside the school, desks were piled in one corner and gas lamps were pumped up while the violinist tuned his violin. On those cold winter nights, the potbellied stove that stood in the middle of the room was lit to warm the building, before most folks arrived.

By the time most everyone arrived the piano player and the fiddler were well warmed up and ready to get people to their feet.

Then the floor manager called, 'Get your partners for the first waltz!' and everyone swung into action! The music was often volunteer and anyone who could play was persuaded to take a turn.

It's important to note that by about the middle of the evening, the pot-belly stove and pipes would be removed, carefully no doubt, making more room on the dance floor - and the dance continued on!

Each dance was announced as it came up. This was serious business and if you weren't doing the dance as called, you could be asked to sit down. How embarrassing for your partner!

A season's dance ticket could usually be had for a dollar, and this included at least eight or nine dances.

One can imagine the energy and excitement in the room, of the fiddler feverishly working his bow across the strings, the piano bouncing to the player's syncopated rhythm, and onlookers clapping and tapping their feet to the beat, hollering to couples as they whirled and twirled on the wooden plank floor, and if you were lucky someone brought their banjo to add their picking and strumming to the lively tune until wee hours of the morning.

It wasn't unusual for folks to return home as the nighttime hours awakened to the light of dawn.

*The Prairie Schoolhouse was adapted from the first volume of the Killarney-Turtle Mountain Reflections history book.*

*Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.*