

1-room schoolhouses being documented

By Diane Graff
of the Daily Times staff

Back in the day, they dotted the landscape. They were built in all shapes and sizes. Some were brick, others were wooden structures. Many had towers for bells.

But the one characteristic they all had in common was one big room filled with desks for students.

At one time there were as many as 440 one-room schoolhouses throughout Dodge County.

Today, a Lowell woman has documented more than one-third of those public school buildings.

Lorraine Beal will discuss her findings with the Dodge/Jefferson Counties Genealogical Society when it meets at 7:15 p.m. Monday, July 9, at the Watertown Senior and Community Center, 514 S. First St.

Beal has documented about 186 one-room schoolhouses she has located in Dodge County. That information has been made into an online e-book on the genealogical society website.

For some of the structures, she obtained pictures of the buildings, some of the classes and even a few of the teachers. For other schools, she obtained a list of the teachers and even some report cards. All that information is available, through the assistance of Ken Riedl, online e-book editor and annotator, at the website, www.dodgejeffgen.com.

Her interest in the unique project began about five years ago when she and her husband, Gerald, built a home on Chapel Road, about seven miles south of Beaver Dam in the town of Lowell. A former one-room schoolhouse, Park Lawn School, stood on the property, which has since been moved down the road and converted into a garage.

A picture of that school was the start of her massive collection and research.

"I needed a project," Beal said following her retirement from a retail business in Beaver Dam. Prior to that, she worked at the Beaver Dam Middle School library for 10 years. Her interest in research stretches back to when she was a student

librarian and head of the library club in high school.

"I always liked working with children and finding things," Beal said.

Her interest in one-room school buildings peaked when she learned Gerald's mother attended the one-room school and his aunt later taught in the building relocated on Chapel Road. The historic structure contained so much history for the Beals that Lorraine began her research project through records and files.

Prior to doing her own research, Beal visited the historical society of Lost Lake, located near Randolph at St. Mary's Church on state Highway 73. Beal said she volunteered her time and services but got the feeling the members wanted to work on their own.

She then contacted the Beaver Dam Historical Society and learned of their one-room schoolhouse display. But when she volunteered, she was assigned other tasks and duties.

"So then I went out on my own," she said.

One of her stops was at the Dodge County Administration Building where she was directed to an upstairs room that contained four filing cabinets of school history, including school census reports.

She started small, with the town of Lowell. She discovered at least 14 one-room schoolhouses in the township, including the Valley-Lowell and Calamus school, the Maiden Lane School, Pleasant Hill and the one most dear to her, Park Lawn.

Once she documented the information from Lowell, she moved up the road to the town of Beaver Dam. There she discovered about 10 schools, including Clason Prairie, Crystal Creek and Prairie Hill.

She researched schools in a couple more towns and soon decided to document all the one-room schools in the county's 24 townships. Beal said she has been working full-time on the project now for the past three years.

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DIANE GRAFF/Daily Times

Lorraine Beal flips through the hundreds of pages of one-room school houses in Dodge County that she has compiled into two binders. The information is available as an e-book on the Dodge/Jefferson Counties Genealogical Society website.

Lowell woman documents Dodge County schoolhouses —

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 She claims she has been through the filing cabinets three times since she started her project. She calls it “the schoolhouse room.”
 Once people learned of her quest to find information about the old buildings, the knowledge began to flow. “I got pictures from people at my church or whoever I ran into,” she said.
 Beal said she even met a few of the older teachers who provided firsthand knowledge of some of the schools. Her husband’s fifth- or sixth-grade teacher, Joyce Hendricks, 85, is one that provided background and helped with the project.

Riedl noted there is an older book available of one-room schoolhouses in adjacent Jefferson County, but the hard-cover book does not contain any color pictures.
 Riedl encouraged Beal to put the book online which really spurred an interest in the collection.
 The schools are listed on the site according to township and alphabetically. All the information Beal has obtained has been included on the site.
 The first one-room schoolhouse in Dodge County was built in 1791 near Fox Lake. Most of the schools were closed

by the early 1960s, she said. Between five and 80 students’ names were included on class lists.
 “There are a lot of stories on how these schools came to be,” Beal said. Some of the schools were named after the farmers who resided in the area. When the schools closed, they reverted back to the farm owners.
 Information about the schools was obtained in a variety of ways. Information about a school in Leipsig was found at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Beal said. Some pictures were obtained through cemetery records, she added.

“I even drove around looking for schools,” Beal said. Many of the schools of the bygone era have been remodeled and don’t resemble a school, she added.
 Beal said she was surprised at the number of one-room schoolhouses she was able to document in the county. She was also excited about what she discovered, including report cards, some teacher contracts and sample lesson plans.

She also credits George Fredrick of Mayville for his assistance with the project.
 Riedl said Beal was very methodical in her research.
 “It is a neat history because some day it will be gone,” Beal said. “That is why I wanted to do it.”
 “It has brought back a lot of memories for older people,” Beal noted.
 It is an ongoing piece of work

and has been picked up by the Internet on Google. As people email from around the country seeking and providing information, there is no end in sight, Riedl said.
 Riedl said he hoped the interest would spark a good turnout at the genealogical society meeting.

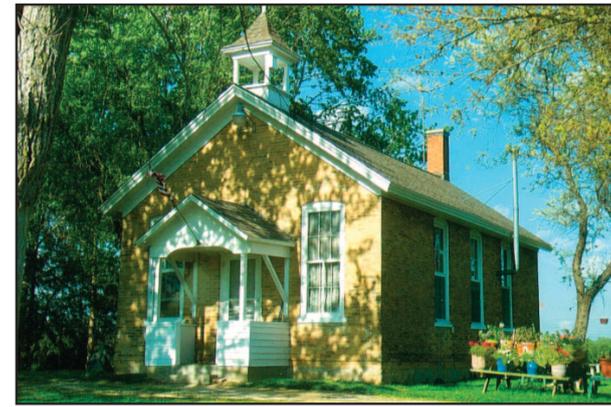
**Photos provided by
 Loraine Beal**



This Rolling Prairie Grade School picture is one of many photographs available for the school. The students are identified on the website. The school was located on County Highway I near Juneau, but has since been razed for a home. At one time, the school was awarded “The Most Beautiful School in Dodge County.”



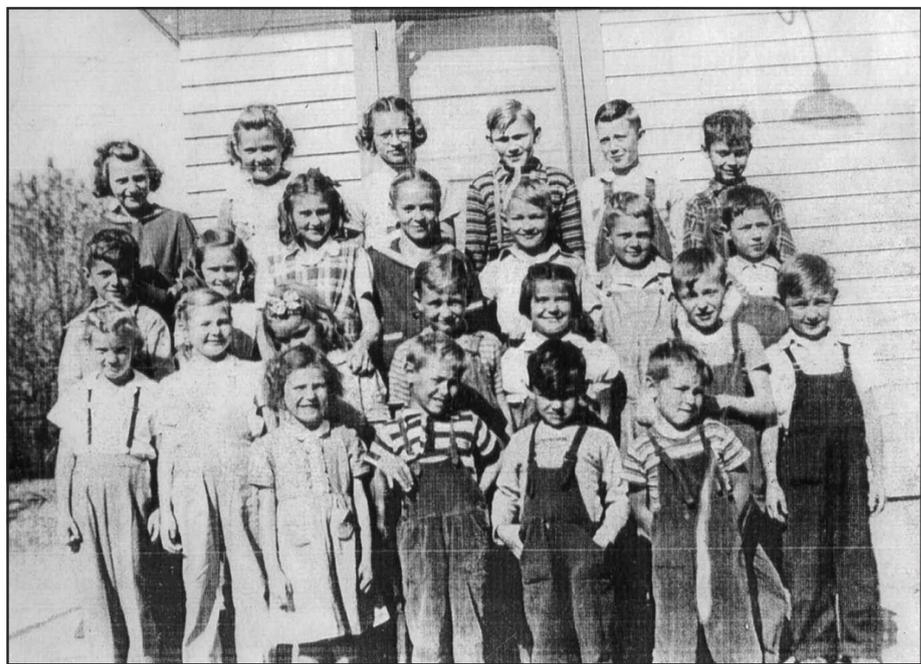
Top left: Liberty Bell #2 Joint with Oak Grove and Burnett townships is still standing today. There was another Liberty Bell School in the town of Theresa.



Middle left: This is the River View Lawn School located on St. Helena Road in the town of Oak Grove. A photograph of the school in 1905 is published on the online version of the book, “One-Room School Houses of Dodge County.” A list of teachers from 1901 through 1961 is also available on the site.



Bottom: The Rhodes School District #2 in the town of Emmet was recently demolished for the state Highway 26 bypass project. The school was located at the intersection of state Highway 26 and County Highway JM. The school closed in 1932 and was converted to a home.



Above: The class of 1946-1947 is pictured in front of the Gahlman School in the town of Clyman. The students are identified in the picture on the e-book edition. The original school was purchased by Chester Caine Sr. in 1962 and moved to Lowell where it was converted into a home.

Above middle: Students attending the White Lime School, District #3 in the town of Hubbard are pictured in front of the school building. According to records, the school near Mayville, was used from 1857 to 1981, with a total of 121 years of public education.