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**McDonald School, Spruce, Michigan (Alcona County)**  
**and**  
**Norwegian School, Spruce, Michigan (Alcona County)**  
By Helen Olson

Since my mother and her sister and brothers went to the McDonald School, my father and his sister and brothers went to the Norwegian School, my older brother, sister and I went to McDonald, and my younger brother and I went to the consolidated Norwegian/McDonald School, I think it appropriate that I attempt to report what I know about both. This story is mostly about my own family and, even more so, about my own school experience. I hope it will inspire its readers to think back on their own school days and to leave their own memories for their children and succeeding generations.

The McDonald School was located on about a 4.4-acre plot on the McDonald School Road that is only one mile long between East Spruce Road and what is now known as the Swede Road (formerly Piper Road) about one and a half miles west of US 23 and an equal distance east of Spruce. It was built to serve the east end of Caledonia Township in Alcona County in what was primarily a Scottish-American community. So far, no one has been able to establish the exact date when it was built. We know that the district was first organized in 1878 for the purpose of building a school. We also know from an 1883 picture that the school was originally located on the corner of Hansen and Spruce roads. An interview with Eugene Oliver<sup>1</sup>, whose family was among the earliest settlers, tells us that the school was moved to the McDonald School Road location between December 17, 1908 and January 12, 1909. The basement and foundations for that site still exist.

Much of the Scottish-Presbyterian community settled in that area beginning in the 1880's. My grandparents, Sam and Mae Abbot Piper, settled on burned-over forestland on the corner of Swede (Piper) Road and M41 in 1910. Sam Piper's best friend George Snowden and his family settled on adjoining property on M41 at the same time. (Our generation knows that property as having been the home of Tommy and Elise Snowden Clark.) The Caledonia Presbyterian Church (now Spruce Presbyterian) was founded in 1888.

All six of Sam and Mae Piper's children attended the McDonald School through the eighth grade: Frank, John, Elmer, Arthur, Helen (Vicary) and Isabel (Olson), my mother. Most of the stories from that era were told by my Aunt, Helen Piper Vicary, who started school in 1918.

The school was a white clapboard frame building with a stone "Michigan" basement.<sup>2</sup> There was a woodshed attached to the back and small entryway on the front with a bell tower. It sat with its side facing the road so that the entry actually opened onto the large schoolyard, which was slightly hilly toward the back and had a scattering of trees and shrubs, especially around the back fences. Later, but while Helen was still in school, cloak rooms were added on each side with cistern toilets built into the corner of each, one for boys and one for girls. A large wood-burning stove took up a large area just inside the entranceway at the back of the schoolroom. Also near the back was a "bubbler," a drinking fountain that worked on gravity. Water was poured into the top of the fountain and then came out in the form of a small round "bubble" when the faucet was turned. A basin at the bottom caught the spillage and had to be emptied at the end of the day. At the front was a low platform/stage, a piano and recitation bench. Blackboards went across the front and down one side of the classroom with cards of the printed and cursive (*Palmer Method*) alphabet tacked along the top. The opposite side was all windows facing out on the schoolyard. There were double desks with bench seats bolted to the floor, the smallest in the front. Water was pumped at the well in the

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted by Eleanor Tacia Mosley

<sup>2</sup> Meaning it had concrete block walls and a dirt floor.

yard near the entry. The teacher, who was often not much older than the students, was expected to build the fires in the stove, bring in the water, and keep the school clean.

Usually the teachers would have studied a year or so after the eighth grade with the resident teacher and perhaps would have taken a brief County Normal course. Then they would take an exam to earn a temporary teaching certificate that had to be renewed, I believe, every year. These young teachers were certainly sincere and worked hard, but it must have been a challenge for them to manage eight grades of children when their own education was fairly limited. Both of my parents spoke of times when the teachers knew little more than their students. My mother told of a time when her teacher said that the word "phlegm" was pronounced "play-gum." Mother reported this to Grandma Piper who first snorted and then more kindly said that sometimes young teachers were mistaken about oddly spelled words.

The children all walked to school. Some of them had to walk quite a distance, so tended to take the most direct route, which was often through the woods. When I was a young child, an old stile<sup>3</sup> crossed the fence from the back of our Grandpa Piper's farm onto the Tacia farm next over. It had been built there for the children going from the Piper and Snowden farms and would have saved quite a bit of walking, especially for the Snowden children. I suspect it wasn't used in the winter.

Mother's cousin Floyd Rasmussen, now 90, recalls being in school with Isabel (our mother) and Helen. He also remembers walking home with his brother and sister, Roy and Irene, and Omar Tacia, Maynard Gunderson and Lillian Alstrom down Swede Road. Maynard's family was the Rasmussen neighbor. He says he remembers walking in the winter when the snow was as high as fence posts and carrying his lunch to school, but can't remember if it was in a Karo Syrup pail, which most children carried. He remembers the whistles he and the other boys made from tree limbs with jackknives.<sup>4</sup>

The school day started with the Pledge of Allegiance, singing from *Knapsacks*, a book of army songs, or *Pat's Pick*, and then a chapter from a book read aloud by the teacher. Elise Snowden (Clark) usually played the piano for the singing. Then classes began, with various grades called on to "stand," then "pass" (walk in an orderly fashion to the recitation bench) and then "sit." When the lesson was over, children were marched back to their seats in the same fashion. The children not reciting were expected to work quietly on their lessons. Aunt Helen remembers playing paper dolls with her desk partner by hiding the paper dolls in their geography book placed on the seat between them.

Children usually went out to play for a 15-minute recess morning and afternoon and an hour lunch. They were not very supervised and not necessarily confined to the schoolyard. Aunt Helen remembered playing with her girlfriends in the woods across the road from the school and picking wintergreen berries, which they then squashed into water and sneaked into the school to drink, pretending they had wintergreen wine. Off in the farthest corner of the schoolyard, she and her friends built a playhouse under some plum trees. There were also both boys' and a girls' baseball diamonds. On nice days, recess and noon breaks often got stretched as the young teacher got engrossed in whatever novel she was reading and lost track of time. This was also a time for shenanigans. Some of my uncles and their friends were known to pry stones out of the basement walls so that the basement would flood when it rained. They also were inclined to wash their feet under the pump with the water running back down into the well used for drinking water. Aunt Helen

<sup>3</sup> A set of steps going over a fence. Since cattle can't manage steps, they were kept on their own property while the children had an easier time going getting over the fence to the next farm.

<sup>4</sup> Floyd added this note: "I remember Arthur Piper in church. I think he was pumping pedals on the organ to help the organist. John Piper loved to ride my dad's black riding horse. Helen had pictures of him on that black horse with rubber boots on. He had been working with my dad dressing out hogs."

reports that she first saw that famous forbidden word written on the outdoor toilet wall and spelled it to her father that night to find out what it meant. (He just told her it wasn't nice and not to use it.)

All children at that time had to pass a county-wide exam in order to complete the eighth grade, so teachers had to be careful to prepare pupils properly for the exam. The top-scoring boy in the county was awarded a trip to the State Fair. (Of course girls were not considered for this honor.) My oldest uncle, Frank Piper, scored second the year he took the exam, losing out to Larry Gunderson who, Aunt Helen always pointed out, was two years older. Two years later, Uncle John Piper had the top score, but was only 13 and ineligible to go. Two years after that, Uncle Elmer Piper won and went to the fair. That put a bit of pressure on the fourth brother, Arthur Piper. He was the family dreamer and artist who handled the familial expectations by passing the exam but nowhere near the top! He was to become a skilled builder, cabinetmaker and stone mason whose beautiful craftsmanship graces many homes in the area.

Aunt Helen missed a lot of school because of poor health, especially in her eighth-grade year. There were also some problems between the teacher and the school board over the teacher's rigor in teaching. Partway through the year, the teacher learned that she would not be rehired. She believed that Grandpa Piper was behind this action and made it known that Aunt Helen and the other two eighth grade girls were no longer welcome. After that, Aunt Helen prepared for the exam at home and was tutored along with her two friends by her mother, who had been a teacher before she married. Grandma Piper felt that she was not adequately grounded to help them in advanced math, so when the teacher of the Norwegian School learned of the problem, he invited the girls to spend the last few weeks of the year studying with his students. The superintendent reported that they did well on the exam.

Our mother, Isabel, had passed the exam at age 13 and went on to board in Alpena where she went to high school. She was the only one of the family who had a formal high school education, though the others all continued study via other channels and Uncle John ultimately earned a B.S. and a Ph.D.

The school constituted much of the social life in the area. Children, or even the teacher, would often have a visitor spend the day at school. Every holiday was celebrated in some fashion. There was always a Halloween party and a Valentine's Day party, with homemade valentines. The biggest event was the Christmas Program. The children began getting ready for that right after Thanksgiving, and there were recitations, songs, "dialogs" which were small plays and, of course, drills in which all the girls got to dress in long white nightgowns and march around looking and feeling like angels. The schoolroom always had a standing-room-only crowd for this event. The Christmas tree had candles on it, but it was deemed too dangerous to ever light them.

The school year for rural schools in Michigan was only 160 days, because children were needed to help get the crops in. School was over about mid-May and celebrated with a Last Day of School Picnic with a potluck lunch, ice-cream, races and games and finally report cards. This final ritual of the year had its scary moments because social promotion had not become prevalent and children were often required to repeat a grade.

Vern Miller was the teacher at McDonald School when my uncles were there. He left for World War I and was replaced by Louise Olson. Later Marie Bergen (Olson) was the teacher.

The **Norwegian School** was located on five acres in the West end of Caledonia Township about three miles from Spruce on School Road which runs between Swede Road and Spruce Road. The original school was built on the lot facing south sometime in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A photo of it exists and we know it was the second school of Lily Larson, born in 1889. A photo taken in 1912

shows the school with a larger addition, facing west.<sup>5</sup> That addition became the main school room until 1947 when the McDonald School was joined to the building.

Our dad, John Olson, attended the Norwegian School, as did his older brothers and sisters, Harold, Hilda, Olaf, Myrto, Karl, Lena, and Elmer. The stories he told about school were similar to those told by our mother, except for the definite Norwegian influences.

Although he had been born in this country twenty years after his parents immigrated, Daddy didn't speak English until he started school. This was fairly common for most of the Norwegian children born into the community at that time. Daddy had been a premature baby and was frail as a small child. At that time his family lived on the Alpena/Alcona County line road, a long way from the school, so Daddy's mother didn't start him to school until he was nearly eight. He recalled sitting in a double desk with his sister Lena, who was five years older, and not understanding what the teacher was saying. He also remembered that one of Lena's friends braided his hair and he didn't know how to handle that teasing. Nonetheless, he learned both English and to read within a very short period of time.

Like the Scottish children, most of the Norwegian children came from hard-working but poor families. Daddy liked to describe some of the lunches that came to school in syrup pails with the children. One family always had cold pancakes for their lunch. Another family with several children was sent to school every day with a loaf of bread and a quart of canned fruit. The oldest sister would gather the children around her while she sliced the bread for them and distributed spoons for them to eat the fruit directly from the jar.

Unlike the Scottish children, the Norwegian children skied to school in the winter. Daddy said that each child, on reaching a certain age (I can't remember what that was) was sent to a ski-maker in the community who would have the child's hand-made skies ready. These wooden skies had just a leather toe strap into which they thrust the toes of their boots. They waxed them with paraffin<sup>6</sup>. On arriving at school, the children would knock the snow off their skies and lean them against the school wall until it was time to go home. Daddy was always (to his adoring daughter) an impressively strong and fast cross-country skier. I remember being towed by him on the toboggan along with a bunch of groceries as he skied up hill from M-41 on Swede Road to my Piper grandparents' home to take them supplies when they were snowed in. I don't ever remember seeing him use poles..

Like the McDonald School, the Norwegian School did not have a lot of fancy supplies and each new item was cause for delight. Daddy remembered the day the school got a pencil sharpener. Until then, pencils were sharpened with a jackknife, which nearly every boy carried. Daddy was so intrigued with this modern device that he snapped off the tip of his lead pencil multiple times that first day, so that he could use the sharpener one more time.

The teachers at the Norwegian School were also young, usually still in their teens. Our Uncle Karl loved telling about the time he threw a snowball at a friend, missing and hitting the teacher instead. Unfortunately for Karl, his older brother Harold was "sparking" the teacher and soon got a first-hand account of the incident. Poor Karl "got it" both at school and again from his brother.

The Norwegian School also celebrated all of the holidays. The Norwegians were not quite so cautious as the Scots, so the candles on their Christmas tree were lighted. One father would sit next to the tree with a bucket of water and a ladle to douse any small fires that might ignite from the dripping candles.

<sup>5</sup> This information comes from David Tacia, a great-grandnephew of Lily Larson.

<sup>6</sup> Paraffin is a bar wax which was melted and poured on jelly and jam jars to seal them.

Our Dad was the youngest and only child in his family to formally graduate from the eighth grade. That he had a diploma was a matter of great pride for his family. The older children dropped out of school in their early teens to take jobs to help support the family. I have the impression that this was typical for the period, but was probably exacerbated by the fact that our grandfather died when Daddy was eight months old. The older brothers all eventually got specialized training through the military or in other ways and held jobs that required some expertise. Aunt Lena studied for and took the eighth grade exam. Unfortunately, her exam paper and that of the girl who sat next to her contained exactly the same answers. The examiners believed that the other girl had done the copying, but to resolve the issue, offered both girls a re-take. Aunt Lena was incensed that anyone would question her honesty even a little bit, so she refused the re-take, as did the other girl. Uncle Elmer, who was only three years older than our Dad, had always marched to his own, pretty wild, drummer. He went to school only when he felt like it and dropped out early on. He was basically illiterate, though very smart and good at talking himself into fancy jobs that he ultimately couldn't hold.

My parents' diplomas are sitting in my closet while I try to think about how to preserve them and where to put them. The two eighth grade diplomas measure 17" x 14". Daddy's is made out to "Johnnie Olson." Mother's Alpena High School diploma is 22" x 18". By contrast, my high school and college diplomas fit neatly into a folder the size of a novel. I think that speaks to the regard folks had for their educational accomplishments in those days.

Our parents lived in a number of places in the first few years of their marriage, but by the time my older brother Francis (Frank, Sonny)<sup>7</sup> started school, they were back in the McDonald School district known as Caledonia Township #2, living in the John Beck house, just down the road from the small farm they were to buy the next year.

Francis started school at age 6 in 1937. His birthday was July 31 and he could have started the year before but our parents, who had both been a bit older starting school, decided that an extra year of maturity would be better for him. Mother and Aunt Helen dressed him up in a cute little sailor suit and leather oxford shoes for his first day of school. Until that day, he had lived a rather sheltered life and didn't know most of the children who would be his classmates. He got to school to discover that all of the other boys were dressed in bib overalls. He took a lot of teasing and of course was devastated. He threw a royal fit when he got home and a trip was made to Gillard's store to buy bib overalls and work shoes. Tennis shoes, which at that time were simple cloth shoes with a rubber sole, were not allowed at school, or at least they weren't worn. As he grew older, Francis would wear Jodhpur pants tucked into high-top lace boots. He is quick to say that he liked Jodhpurs but he hated knickers, the other common trousers for boys in his day. Once our Uncle Myrt bought him knickers for Christmas and Mother exchanged them through the Sears Catalog for snow pants.

Mother reported that getting Francis to come home was a problem. He was happy to have other children to play with and after school was known to go to Dean McKinnon's house across from the school or to Bobby Oliver's house at the top of the school road to play. Since there were no phones, there was no easy way to track him down. I suspect that this was a problem that many parents had. There is a story about my sister Kathryn deciding to go home with the Pierce children, and I still feel guilty for the spanking Shirley Tessmer got after I talked her into staying and playing at my house. After I was born in late September, Mother said that Francis came right home after school to check on me. (He still has a soft spot for babies.)

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<sup>7</sup> Both Francis and I were given nicknames by our Piper relatives. He was called "Sonny" until he started school and then called "Frank," though many of us still call him "Sonny." I was called "Honey." When we started school, we were called by our given names: Francis and Helen.

The McDonald School and school routine had not changed significantly since our parents' years. The double desks had been replaced by single desks, but they were still the variety that bolted to the floor, with the smallest near the east side and the largest near the windows. Children were not seated by grade but according to size. Children with vision or hearing problems were seated near the front. We remember the care with which Christina Landon fitted us to our desks so that our posture would not be affected by poor seating. She also tended to be very aware of hearing and vision problems.

During Francis' second year at the school, a furnace was installed in the basement with a large four-foot square grate in the middle of floor for the heat to rise. Francis remembers making pinwheels by fastening a square of folded paper with a straight pin onto his pencil eraser. Held over the rising heat, these would spin quite nicely.

The songbooks of my mother's day had been replaced by *The Golden Book of Favorite Songs*, but the day still began with the Pledge, followed by singing and then a chapter read aloud from a children's novel.

The school day went from 9:00 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. The teacher rang the bell at 8:45 to remind children to hurry and again at 9:00 to let us know that school was starting. Although only the McKinnon children lived closer to the school than we Olsons, we were frequently nearly late and remember the last frantic run to get to school on time. All tardiness was reported, along with absences, on our report cards. The children with the longest walk came from Spruce or from M171. In either case, those children walked about 2 1/2 miles one way. In the winter, the school road was not plowed. Lighter children could often walk on top of the snow crust, but the older children broke through, making the last half-mile to school pretty rigorous. Mrs. Landon would drive to the top of the McDonald School Road and then walk down to the school. Kathryn remembers that the Hansen boys usually skied across the fields to school. Evajeane Tacia, who had a long solitary walk from Roe Road, usually cut through the swamp on an old lumber trail, until a bear was reported to live in the swamp. Then she had to walk the extra mile. Kathryn and I both remember the Valentine's Day that Evajeane was found crawling toward the school, having gotten her hands and feet frostbitten. Kathryn says that Mrs. Landon had been looking out with a worried expression for some time watching for Evajeane who was almost never absent. Mrs. Landon ran out and hurried her in and rubbed snow on her hands and feet so that they would warm up slowly. It must have been difficult for both parents and the teacher to send children off without knowing whether or not they would reach their destination safely. There was also no way, short of sending an older child for help, to take a sick child home. I vaguely remember once when Mrs. Landon sent someone to the MacKinnon home for help, but don't know what the problem was.

Sometimes in the winter, the McDonald School Road hill leading from the top of Spruce Road would ice over. Then the children would bring their sleds and slide the last half-mile to school. If the road was really icy and the child got a good start, the child could slide past the school and nearly to Piper (Swede) Road. To keep this from happening, Francis' second teacher, Mr. Richard Bushy, used to pour stove ashes across the road at the schoolyard entry.

As I recall, Kindergarten children went home at noon and first- and second-grade children went home at 2:30 p.m. Kathryn remembers that the first day the Tessmer children came to school, Mrs. Landon started to send Shirley home early, but when Shirley cried, Mrs. Landon said she could wait to walk with her sister. In my Kindergarten year, we did not go to school at all in January and February. I don't know if this was standard practice for Kindergarten or if we were kept home because of an especially bad winter.

Recess and noon activities were much the same as they had been in our parents' days. Children could play in or out as they wished unless the weather was really bad. Then the teacher organized

inside games such as Musical Chairs or Duck, Duck, Goose. Kathryn remembers playing pretend games with her friends and building houses from leaves or tramping out snow "rooms." The children crossed the street and played in the woods and climbed trees. By my era, that was forbidden; we had to stay on the school property and out of trees. Children, girls especially, skipped rope and played Jacks. Kathryn loved to read and would often stay inside unless her friends dragged her out to fill out a team for girls' softball games. All of the boys carried a knife in their high-top boots and often played Mumblety Peg<sup>8</sup>. Francis often used his knife to carve us whistles from a poplar (aspen) twig. He can also roll hoops with a stick, a skill he learned as a child.

Mr. Bushy loved Soccer that he had learned in teachers' college. He felt it was a good sport because both girls and boys could play it. The first day he got the boys organized to play, "Lefty" Olson, who was a good athlete and a couple of years older than Francis, kicked the ball hard and hit Francis square in the face, giving him a nasty bloody nose. Francis never cared much for soccer after that.

Francis' first teacher was Velma Walker. She was convinced that Francis should be in the same grade as the other children his age so at the end of Kindergarten, moved him to second grade for the next year. This would prove to be a poor decision since it meant that Francis missed the introduction to reading and, especially, phonics. He says he is still a poor speller and blames that on his lack of phonics. However, the rest of us are also "spelling disabled" so it may just be a family trait. It may also be that we could just ask our mother who spelled very well. Even though she tried to send us to the dictionary, we could usually get her to help us

**Kathryn started school in 1938.** Velma Walker was still teaching when Kathryn started Kindergarten but left partway through the year and was replaced by Richard Bushy who stayed through 1942. Christina Landon taught at the McDonald School from 1942 until 1947 and then at the combined McDonald/Norwegian School that became known as Caledonia District #1.

Kathryn remembers her first day of Kindergarten. She thinks her class had Eleanor Tacia, Evajean Tacia, Edward Swartzinski, and Arnold McKinnon. The class was called to the recitation bench and the teacher asked them each to count as high as they could count. Some children counted to ten and others as high as twenty. She counted to 100, though she thinks she skipped the 50's and 60's. Then she thought she should stop. She also remembers feeling a little jealous that Evajean got to pass out the reading books.

Mr. Bushy loved airplanes, so when one flew over the school, he and all of the children ran out to watch it. Francis reports that Mr. Bushy could always identify the make of these planes that were usually Piper Cubs or Ironica Champ C-3's. He suspects that he got his life-long love of planes from Mr. Bushy. He also pointed out that these planes and their parts along with most farm equipment could be purchased through the Sears-Roebuck Catalog. A plane cost about \$900. (For comparison, our 80-acre farm with a small house and barn cost \$750.) Francis says that all boys read the Sears catalog starting at the back where the "good stuff," like tractors and planes, was.

Mr. Bushey's love of planes did not extend as far as allowing Francis to spend his time drawing wonderful planes and war tanks when he was supposed to be doing his reading or arithmetic. Francis remembers being pulled by his hair from his seat and shaken more than once when he was caught with a page full of drawings.

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<sup>8</sup> A game in which players flip a knife, trying to stick the blade into the ground, usually while standing in various prescribed positions. (World English Dictionary, Encarta)



Kathryn was mostly an obedient student, but she does remember being scolded by Mr. Bushy for reading comic books. She had to sit in his chair as punishment and remembers crying.

Francis says that Mr. Bushy rarely hit a student, but they all knew that there was a leather strap in the bottom drawer on the right-hand side of his desk. One day, Lefty and another older boy got in a knock-down, drag-out fist fight. Mr. Bushy ordered the other children into their desks as he pulled the two boys apart and marched them through the classroom to the woodshed, pausing to get the strap on his way. The children all sat frozen in their desks as they heard the "whacks" of the strap and the boys screaming.

One problem for our parents and his teachers, but apparently not for Francis, was that Francis was not learning to read. Kathryn, who was 17 months younger, had taught herself to read at age four, but Francis was not reading at the end of the third grade and was held back to repeat the grade. Mr. Bushy noted that he was a bright little boy and thought he might be dyslexic. My parents asked a friend who was a reading specialist to test him. She said that there was nothing wrong except that he was such a happy-go-lucky child that he wasn't going to learn to read himself as long as he could get others to read to him. She told my parents to fill the house with comic books and not to allow anyone to read to him. He remembers how wonderful it was to have such a supply of his favorite comic books: Superman, Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny. But there was no one to read them to him. Sure enough, he was reading within just a couple of weeks. He's a prolific reader to this day and ultimately went on to become an engineer. I asked him once if he had been traumatized in any way by the "reading issue." He said, "only the day that I got Joycie (our cousin) to read the funny papers to me and Mom caught us and made her stop." Meanwhile, his late development in reading skills has been a great help for the family because we seem to produce a lot of dreamy, happy children who adapt slowly to the rigors of school but who go on to become well-educated and creative adults. It is a comfort to be able to tell teachers and ourselves not to worry, that our child will read and do homework in its own good time.

When Francis was eight or nine, one of his classmates, Frank Swartzinski, spent a healthy day at school and then became ill that evening. He died within just a few hours of spinal meningitis. Because the disease was considered extremely infectious, Frank was buried before morning. Francis remembers how confusing and traumatizing this was for him and his classmates. One day Frank was there playing with them; the next he was already buried.

A happier memory comes from a last day of school picnic. This occurred at a time when school events were also social events for the entire community and people wore their dress clothes for these occasions. The village postmaster and her husband, a Mr. and Mrs. Shell<sup>9</sup>, arrived in their black Roadster. (Nearly all cars were black in that era.) The Shells had no children of their own but nonetheless came to the picnic. Mrs. Shell was a thin woman, taller than her husband. She was dressed in a nice black dress with a white collar, a hat and gloves and was sitting primly in her seat with her hands folded in her lap. Mr. Shell was somewhat rotund in his three-piece suit with a watch chain across his girth. When the picnic was over, he escorted Mrs. Shell back to the car where she settled herself again with her hands folded on her lap. Mr. Shell went around front to start the car with the crank. He had inadvertently left the car in gear and the car lurched forward. Mr. Shell jumped out of its way. The car took off across the playground with Mr. Shell huffing and puffing behind it and Mrs. Shell continuing to sit primly with her hands in her lap. Mr. Shell somehow managed to catch the car and jump in. Then he brought it under control and sedately drove the pair of them out of the schoolyard and home.

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<sup>9</sup> We know that her name was Edweena, but are not sure of his. Most adults were simply "Mr." and "Mrs." to children of that era.



Francis longed for a bike, so our parents said that if he could save half the money for the bike he wanted, they would pay the other half. He realized that he would also have to learn to ride a bike and didn't want to risk damaging his dreamed-of new bike. One of the Bushey boys had a bike with no chain or brakes that he rode kind of like a scooter, pushing himself along with his foot. Francis paid him a dime to use the bike for practice. He would push the bike to the top of a little hill behind the school, jump on and careen down, crashing at the bottom. Meanwhile he picked apples and did whatever he could to earn money. By the time he had saved \$12.50, half of \$25.95, for his new full-size green Hiawatha bike with lights, a horn and a luggage rack, he could ride. He was ten years old.

When Francis and Kathryn were in grade school, the district sent children to the Lincoln School in Alpena to complete the eighth grade. The McDonald School had become overcrowded and it was felt that doing the eighth grade in Alpena would better prepare students for Alpena High School where the district paid tuition for us to attend. Children were tested each year with standardized tests to assure that they were ready to move on. In a one-room school, children could always listen in on lessons and sometimes children would be placed in one grade for one subject and another for another subject if they happened to have special talents in one area. In any event, Kathryn and Eleanor Tacia were "double promoted" and sent on to Lincoln after their sixth grade because they had scored higher on the standardized tests than some of the seventh grade children. Francis points out that he was passed "on condition" because his spelling was still terrible. Francis and Kathryn would finish school in the same grade, which turned out to be a very happy situation for them. They were "almost" twins and enjoyed going to school together.

I started school in 1942. I can't remember when I didn't want to go to school. I'm five years younger than Kathryn, so had to spend winters alone with my Mother waiting for the day when I, too, could go to school. For some reason, I had the notion that if I could just get someone to give me a lunch bucket, I could go to school. My parents sensibly waited until the day before I started Kindergarten to buy the lunch bucket. Then my Dad took me to the hardware store for the big purchase. Kathryn and Francis had green lunch buckets with rounded corners and a printed design in the paint. By the time I got a lunch bucket in 1942, all manufacturing was dedicated to the war effort. My lunch bucket was plain blue with square, crudely made corners. I thought it was beautiful. I came proudly home with the lunch bucket and, for reasons I can't explain, was sitting balanced on the end of my parents' bed, holding the lunch bucket and feeling happy. I've always been a klutz, so I fell off and landed with my mouth on the corner of the lunch bucket. I went off to my first day of school with a swollen and split lip. I split it again a few days later when I dreamily wandered in front of the swing set and got hit by my best friend Harold Clark.

A major area of contention between my mother and me concerned what I should/would wear to school. The school building was drafty and cold. Girls in that era wore dresses or skirts and in the winter wore long underwear under long brown stockings held up by a sort of harness that went over their shoulders with straps that hung down to pin up the stockings. Like most of the girls, Kathryn had always worn these along with sensible brown lace-up shoes. Moreover, she wore black four-buckle boots in the winter! I thought this was the ugliest and most uncomfortable arrangement in the world and absolutely rebelled. I wanted to wear my rayon panties, a nice dress, ankle socks with ruffles and Mary Janes<sup>10</sup>. Mother sought a compromise when it became clear that I was simply not going to cooperate. We finally agreed on wool skirts held up by a flannel waist<sup>11</sup>, wool sweaters and wool knee socks. She tried pushing flannel bloomers or "snuggies", but I ultimately won the panty war. I wore loafers or saddle shoes most of my school life, all the way through high

<sup>10</sup> Black-patent leather shoes with straps

<sup>11</sup> A kind of slip top that had buttons on to which the skirt was fastened. All of my skirts had button holes that matched the waist or my blouses which were also made with buttons to hold up the skirt. I was skinny and Mother could not stand to see little girls with their skirts drooping down.

school. My boots were usually pull-ons of some kind. After a year or so, mother bought some army-surplus uniform-fabric remnants. This was during WWII when fabric was extremely scarce. She made me two pants suits: one fashioned after jungle attire with a short-sleeved, belted, jacket-shirt and the other with an Eisenhower Jacket. I felt terribly patriotic wearing them and didn't realize until I was an adult that 1) mother had made them so that I would be warm at school; and 2) it was pretty daring and liberated to send a little girl to school in pants. Kathryn and I also had pants and shorts for play because mother thought that little girls should be able to tear through the woods and climb trees.

In nice weather, I rode to school on the back of my brother's bike with Kathryn riding ahead on her bike. We, Francis and I especially, were always running late, so the ride down the rutted, dirt hill toward the school was always precarious as we tried to beat the tardy bell. We fell a lot. I remember one particularly bad fall when we both went skidding down the gravel on our hands and knees. Francis was carrying his lunch in a Karo Syrup pail so it would hang on the handlebars. I sat on the luggage carrier holding my lunch box. Both popped open and everything went flying with our still-warm chocolate cookies rolling ahead of us. Francis says he can still picture me chasing our cookies. We jumped up, jammed everything back in our lunch boxes and arrived at school with our hands and knees seriously bloodied. Mrs. Landon could handle most emergencies, but this time she sent us home to get cleaned up and bandaged by our mother. Kathryn's got her bike during WWII when bikes were made as cheaply as possible with narrow flimsy wheels. They made negotiating the ratty dirt road especially difficult.

Each fall off the bike or simply banging our lunch boxes against something usually spelled disaster for our thermos bottles. Our parents tried to keep us in thermoses so that we could carry milk or hot soup to school. However, thermoses were metal with a very thin glass lining which shattered easily. It was always a downer to open one's thermos and discover that it was broken once again. Besides there being no drink for lunch, replacement liners cost money, which was not in abundant supply in any Spruce families.

Usually our lunches consisted of a sandwich, fruit (sometimes canned) and a cookie along with a thermos of milk. Sometimes my mother would give me a small container of potato salad or coleslaw or a hard-boiled egg in my lunch because I didn't like lunchmeat and usually had a bread, butter and brown sugar sandwich, which was not very nutritious. I remember that the lunch boxes "smelled funny" even after they were washed, which may be the reason that I don't particularly like sandwiches to this day. Once in awhile, the school would receive a bushel of apples or a large piece of government surplus cheese, which Mrs. Landon would divide among us.

Both Kathryn and Francis remember the treat it was when Grace McKinnon would bring soup or chili to celebrate one of her son's birthdays. She would bring enough soup bowls and spoons for all of the children in a basket. She was a good cook and Francis says her chili was wonderful. Kathryn was reminded by her friend Eleanor Tacia that one day Grace McKinnon came running to the school for help. The hay in the McKinnon barn was smoldering. This could happen if the hay was still too green when it was put into the barn and it heated up in the curing process. The children all ran across the street to the McKinnons' and made a chain to pass buckets of water from the well to the barn. They put out the potential fire and the barn was saved. A few days later, Mrs. McKinnon came over to invite all of the children over for ice cream.

Children were still allowed outside to play for recess and noon without supervision, though Mrs. Landon looked out frequently and sometimes came out and organized games. We played such games as A Tiskit A Taskit; Duck, Duck, Goose; Fox and Goose (when there was snow); and Red Rover, Red Rover. I absolutely hated Red Rover but never had the courage to refuse to play as I didn't want to appear cowardly. In that game, the children were divided into two opposing lines holding hands. Then one line would call for an opposing team child to come over: "Red Rover, Red Rover, Let Helen Come Over." That child then ran as hard as she could against the clasped