

How We Worked

Commonplace among rural communities, one-room schoolhouses dotted the country in the 1800s and early 1900s. A single teacher would see to the academic education of multiple children at once ranging in grades one through eight. Topics covered generally consisted of reading, math, writing, and history. Students were typically given their own slate to practice their hand writing or work out a mathematical problem.

Everyone had a job to do at school. Beyond seeing to the children's education, teachers had to open the school, start the fire, and handle all the custodial duties. Mary-Lou Isenhagen, a one-room school teacher in Sherman County, recalls having a terrible time lighting the fire, and that the school would only warm up by the time school was ready to close for the day.

Chores for the older students included the task of bringing in water, and carrying in coal or wood for the stove. The younger students would be given jobs according to their size and gender such as cleaning the black board, and taking the erasers outside for dusting.

In addition to their school chores, children returning home had work to do on the family homestead. Children didn't have homework due to their duties at home. The school year in Sherman County was short, as the children were needed at home to help with harvest.

Greater mobility allowed for rural children to move into town schools. The last one-room school in Sherman County closed in the 1960s.

Rural children are no longer isolated from global happenings as they once were. The internet along with social media has brought instant access to the world and therefore broadens the possibilities of careers and also the minds of rural children. Teachers, parents, and community members are now confronted with new challenges on how to engage and educate the rural youth of today.

What was school like for you? How has technology affected your education? What chores did you have as a student? Tell us!