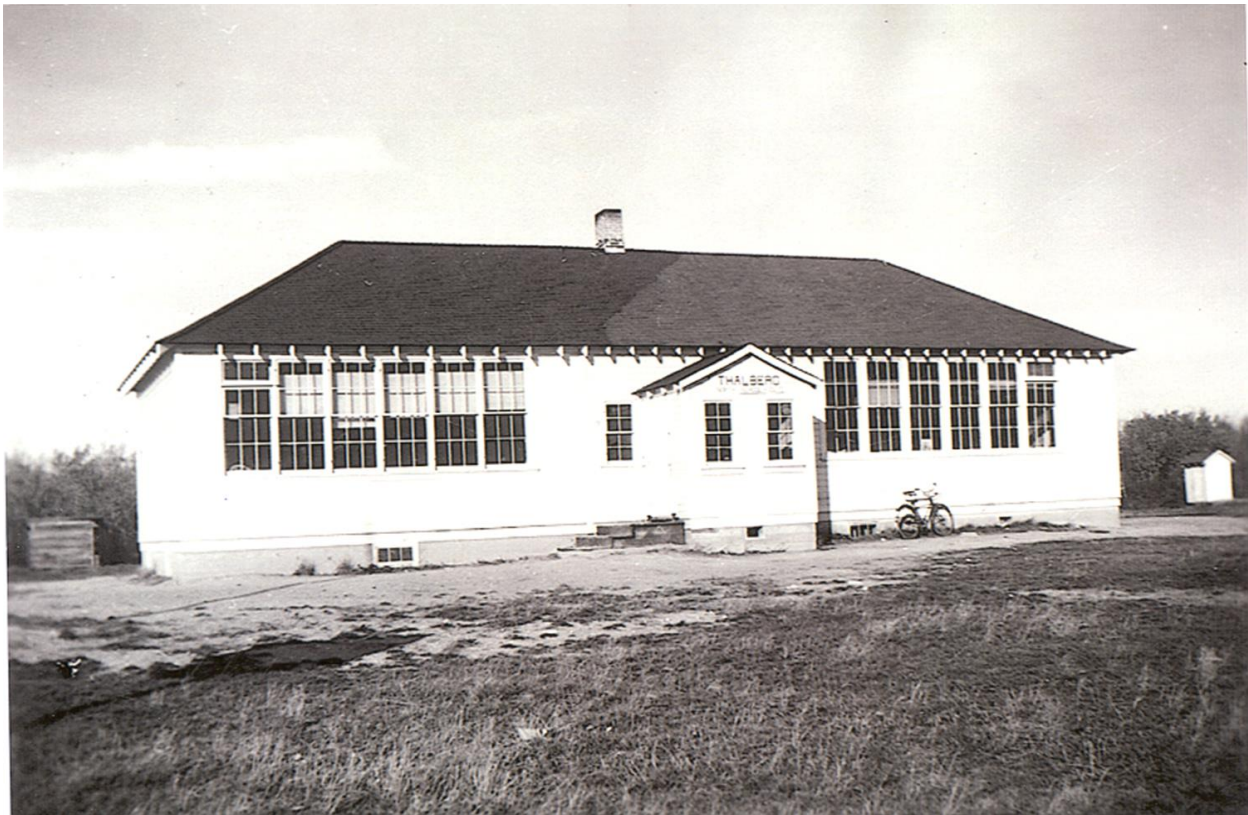


Thalberg North School Days During the 1950'S & 1960's 210213

The following are school memories of a student of Thalberg North School from the mid 1950's to the early 1960's.

In the mid 1950's and early 1960's when my brother and I went to Thalberg North School, the elementary grades were in one classroom and the high school was in the other classroom. In different years, the elementary classroom housed Grades 1 to 6 with Grades 7 to 11 in the high school classroom and in other years it housed Grades 1 to 8 in the elementary classroom with Grades 9 to 12 in the other classroom.



Thalberg North School #2270 shown with the 1947 high school addition on the left. Notice the new shingles on the roof on the left half of the building.

The central part of the school contained the entrance area and a separate coatroom for each classroom. This is where the students hung up their coats and school bags and left their lunches. In each coatroom there was a large crock with a tap at the bottom for drinking water. Water was carried by pail from the well outside and poured into the crock for the day. There was also a washbasin on a

small table in the coatroom with a pail below for emptying the washbasin. A mirror hung on the wall above the table.

The heating system consisted of a wood furnace in the basement with a large grate in the floor to let the heat up to the classroom. Wood for the furnace was cut and hauled from the school section. The school section was the 160 acre parcel of land that the school was situated on. Most of the school section had large trees on it except for the school yard. Long lengths of wood were hauled to the school yard and cut into shorter pieces that would be thrown through the basement window of the school. The furnace was in the basement of the school near the basement window. The furnace was filled with wood early in the morning so that the school would be warm when the students arrived at school.

Washroom facilities were outside at the far end of the school grounds; the outhouses (one for the girls and one for the boys) were cold drafty places in the winter. It was kind of funny. If you had to go to the bathroom in winter, you had to put on your parka, headgear and mitts so you would be warm enough to walk to the far end of the school yard to go to the washroom and then sit on a frozen drafty toilet seat.



Winter picture of the school showing the children coming in for class. The two white washrooms can be seen in the picture at the far end of the school yard behind the teacher. The wooden flag pole is in the foreground of the picture.

Each morning, one of the students would have to take the flag and raise it up the flag pole. And at the end of the day, the flag had to be taken down. A different student was assigned this task each day.

The well on the school property was a shallow hand dug well. Sometimes the water tasted extremely terrible. When this happened, the school board would go to the well and pull out all the snakes and frogs and whatever else that fell into the well. Then they would chlorinate the well with Javex.

For educational tools, the school provided a tray of gelatin and special purple pencils for making photocopies, a yardstick, a portable handcranked gramophone for playing records for Christmas concerts, a brass bell for start of classes and a strap for disciplinary action. Also, the room was provided with 4 corners so that a maximum of 4 students could be punished at a time for bad behaviour by being sent to sit in the corner. Should the number of offenders exceed four at a time, the extra offenders could “write lines”. Text books were not provided by the school district. Students had to buy their own books as well as scribblers, pencils, etc.

The tray of gelatin was important for making copies of tests and assignments. The special purple coloured pencil was used to write words on an original paper. This original paper was then put face down on the gelatin and the pencil markings were transferred to the gelatin by pressing down on the back of the paper. Blank paper was then pressed onto the gelatin and the words were transferred onto the blank paper. One copy at a time could be made. The original page was good for only a small number of copies. To make more copies, the original had to be re-written with the purple pencil. Then more copies could be made.

School desks were double seaters arranged in continuous rows from front to back in the room. Each desk had an inkwell in the desktop. These inkwells were from earlier days when pens were used that had to be dipped into ink after every few words that were written. Several desks would be assigned to Grade 1, several to Grade 2, etc. A row of desks might have 2 or 3 grades in it. The total number of students in Grades 1 to 8 during this time at Thalberg North was about 30.

A typical day would start with the morning walk to school (up to 2 ½ or 3 miles for some students). Walking didn't seem so bad in those days. The children would all meet along the way as they made their way to school so that by the time they

reached school there would be a group of 10 or 12 children arriving at school. The only time that was not pleasant for walking was during heavy rainstorms in the summer or during blizzards or blowing snow in the winter. In our case, we walked a mile and a quarter to school, but the last $\frac{3}{4}$ mile was the worst in the winter. It was wide open to the north winds. We would sometimes walk and practically crawl in the ditch on the odd occasion for the last $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to keep out of the cold winds during blizzards. In the winter we wore felt boots to keep warm. In spring when it was wet, we wore big rubber boots with steel buckles.

Upon arriving at school, everyone would hang up their coats, have a drink of water, comb their hair and settle in for classes.

The Grade 1 to 8 teacher would tell each grade which subject to take out and get started with. The teacher would then spend a small amount of time with each grade. A lesson taught to one grade from the blackboard or from the front of the class could be overhead and shared by all grades. What the teacher had to do was instruct 8 grades with approximately 5 subjects per grade during the course of a 5 hour school day. That meant, by simple math calculation, that the teacher could spend about $7\frac{1}{2}$ minutes per subject per day for each grade or about $37\frac{1}{2}$ minutes per subject per week for each grade. Not a lot of instruction, but it seemed to work. It meant that the students had to do a lot of work and studying on their own. In reality, the teacher had to spend more time with the lower grades (particularly Grade 1) to teach them how to read, write and learn math. As a result, the higher grades had considerably less instruction from the teacher. Oral reading was a daily event with Grade 1 students lining up against the wall, and taking turns reading until the story was finished. Also, the older children were expected to help out the younger children. When the students graduated to Grade 9 and attended Beausejour Collegiate, the method of teaching was a big change (separate classroom per grade, separate teacher per subject, the teacher actually spent the whole 45 minutes teaching a subject).

Some teachers would hold spelling bees or matches. Sides would be chosen, and the teacher would pick words from the grade speller that suited each child.

School was not all hard work. Most students remember school as a fun place in those years. It was where they met their friends. It was where they played with friends their age and older and younger. Thinking back to those days always brings back good memories.

During the course of a school year there were big events to look forward to and to get ready for.

One of the big events was the annual Christmas concert. We spent weeks getting ready for it (practicing our Christmas plays, Christmas carols and square dances, getting costumes and props ready). Most of the fun was in the daily rehearsals. I remember the gramophone and having to run backstage to wind it up when the music started slowing down in the middle of a square dance. On the evening of the Christmas concert, family and relatives would come to the school for the concert. A stage occupied the front of the classroom and all the parents and would be crammed into the small classroom. Standing room only. At the end of the concert, the students would all sing "Here Comes Santa Claus". At the end of the song, Santa would appear and hand out to each student a paper bag filled with candy, peanuts and a Mandarin orange. A good time was had by all at these concerts. In later years, the concert was held at the Thalberg Hall. The hall had a large stage and plenty of room in the hall to set up chairs to accommodate the audience.

One of the other big events was the annual Field Day held in June at Gull Lake. For weeks we would practice running, long jump, hop-skip-jump, standing jump, high jump, dodge ball, relay races and other field day sports such as 3 legged races, sack races and wheel barrow races. There were even bicycle races where the last person to cross the finish line without touching the ground with their foot was the winner. On the day of the field day, we would all be loaded onto the back of a big grain truck for the 4 or 5 mile drive to Gull Lake. All the way to Gull Lake the students would be shouting out the school yell. At field day we would compete against neighbouring schools. Six to eight schools participated at this field day. Among those were Glenmoor, Gull Lake, Thalberg South, Stead, Overwater and Brokenhead. Over the years, different schools would sometimes compete in the field day. Family and friends would also attend as spectators. The field day was always a big event. Ribbons and trophies were handed out to the winning athletes. Wins for each school were charted and a shield was given to the highest scoring school. Thalberg North won the shield five consecutive years, from 1951 to 1956. There was a chip and ice-cream stand that was set up for that day. The stand was built out of boards and had a counter. Candy, chocolate bars, drinks and other treats were sold at the stand. Drinks were kept in a washtub that had some ice in it to keep them cool. In later years, Zakaluk's Chip Stand was

open. The day ended with a baseball tournament. This was the highlight of the day. There was plenty of cheering, yelling and excitement during the championship baseball game. Thalberg North's school yell was loudly shouted out during the competitions to cheer on their athletes. When the day was over we would get back into the truck, tired and happy to be going home.

School yell

Rip ram, zip zam, reever, ryever, row
Thalberg, Thalberg, watch us go.
Little ones and big ones,
We're all full of pep.
Thalberg, Thalberg, watch us step.
T-H-A-L-B-E-R-G.
Thalberg.

Second yell

Hicka hacka, micka macka, hola gala zoo.
Rip saw, buck saw, hacka tacka too.
Nothing to it, we can do it, bravest in a fray
Thalberg Ever Readies, hip hip horray!

There was the annual Halloween party as well as the annual Valentine party held every year.

The students worked hard making Halloween drawings and decorating the classroom for the Halloween party. Bobbing for apples in a tub of water was a favourite with the students.

For the Valentine Party, each student brought sandwiches, cookies or cake and everyone shared together. The students exchanged valentine cards and participated in activities to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Sports played an important role during the entire school year. At the start of the school year the students played football until snow ended the season.

A skating rink was set up for only two years or so during my time at Thalberg North School. It was too difficult to haul the water for flooding the rink. Water was hauled from Stead four miles away.

One of our teachers organized jam can curling one year. A length of ice was made and large jam cans filled with frozen water were used as curling rocks. The curling rink was right next to the well. This was so that it was closer to carry the pails of water to flood the ice. The pails were filled at the well with the hand pump. Each pail of water was carried to the rink and poured onto the rink to flood it.

Most of the time during the winter, soccer was played. The soccer field was not cleared of snow. We played on top of the snow until it got packed. The first few games after a heavy snow were always the toughest.

In the springtime, when it was too wet to do anything else, we played cricket. The cricket posts consisted of two short pieces of firewood stood up on end vertically about 15 inches apart and a piece of firewood placed horizontally on top of the two uprights. Cricket started early in the spring, even before all the snow was completely melted. Sometimes the game was played with portions of the field covered with snow and portions of the field covered with water from the melting snow. A spectacular sliding catch by a cricket player sometimes resulted in a very cold wet belly slide through icy water.

Later, in the early summer, baseball was the big sport. We also played baseball against other neighbouring schools.

The students were always inventive and busy. Apart from sports, the students engaged in many other activities such as kick the can, easy-easy-I-over the school roof, hide and seek, crack the whip, skip rope and others.

When recesses or lunch breaks were over, the teacher would pick up his brass bell from his desk and stand on the steps of the school ringing the bell. He would ring it as long as necessary until all the students came back to class.

The 4-H Clubs provided another opportunity for extra-curricular participation and leadership. Thalberg North had the Seed Club for several years, where samples of crops were grown on the field kitty-corner southeast of the school yard. Parents would help keep the crops free of weeds.

There was also the 4-H Sewing Club. The winner would go on to compete at the huge 4-H Rally at Beausejour in July.



The North Thalberg Busy Stitches parading at a competition

The one and two room schools and methods of educating children in the 1960's and earlier seem antiquated compared to today's standards. However, we all learned valuable lessons, not only in education, but in associating with people and in learning how to get along with people. We learned how to help others and how to accept help from others. We learned how to be an important part of community and family life. These are all important assets that are necessary and that we use constantly in our daily lives.