

A Memory of School Days Gone By

In the spring, schools adjusted their schedules for their older pupils because they were needed on the family farm. Brighton was still a rural town in the early 1900s and spring plowing and planting was a priority for a good harvest in the fall.

Brighton's district schools were usually one-room buildings in those days with children from ages six to fifteen in the same classroom. The accompanying photo shows a larger Brighton District #7 School in 1910 with about 50 children in front of the clapboard building that had two school rooms, one for the younger and one for the older children. Most children ended their education with graduation from the district school at about age 15 and then they went to work. High school was available in the city but Brighton did not have a high school until 1928.

Frances Corkhill of Fairport was a former teacher at the Brighton #7 school on Landing Road. She told about her experience as a teacher in a 1949 interview.

"I taught at Brighton #7 school from 1900 to 1905. When I came it was the first year they had two teachers...The other teacher was William Slater; he had the four older grades and I had the four younger with between 40 and 50 pupils. We had four more weeks of school than the older group in the spring...so that the older youngsters could work on the farms. It was all farmland along Penfield Road with houses far apart, and the same along Kelly Road [Landing Road]. There were no houses between the railroad and East Avenue along Penfield Road – a very lonesome stretch.

I used to go back and forth [to school] by train, taking my wheel [bicycle] with me and riding in from train to school in the early fall and spring months but in the winter I had to board in the neighborhood. Winters were bad because the snow drifted so along Kelly Road and Penfield Road. The town did not plow those roads in those days. Each property owner was responsible for the road in front of his property.

Sometimes we would have to let school out early so that the children could get home from school through the deep snow. Sometimes parents would come and carry the children home on their shoulders or come with a cutter [a small, horse-drawn sleigh] to take all the children from their section. They had to carry shovels and cut a way through.

Our school hours were from 9:00 to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:00. The day started with roll call. The teachers had to keep track of all absences and tardinesses and report them to the truant officer. After roll call we had reading classes and arithmetic or number work, as we called it. In the afternoon we had some geography, some language work, and spelling and maybe more reading. They were good children."

Frances Corkhill continued her career as a teacher after leaving Brighton #7 school and eventually retired in 1932 from the East Rochester school system. She remained in the family home on Parce Avenue in Fairport until her death in 1963.

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian
9 March 2022