

Oral History Excerpted Transcript of Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse Alumni

Interviewee: John Peduzzi

Interviewer: Sharon Palmer

Interview recorded at Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse May 2, 1986

(“**J**” represents **John**, “**S**” represents **Sharon**)

S: John, I would like to start by asking you where you lived when you went to the school

J: We lived on the hill behind the schoolhouse, about half a mile away on what is now Fisher Road.

S: You had told me a funny story about every Halloween.

J: Every halloween the outhouses were both tipped over, it was a regular routine. The young people from the town who went to the big school, as they called it, the Martin Van Buren School, would come and team up with us and we'd always manage to get the outhouses tipped over, no matter what.

S: You went to this schoolhouse in what years?

J: 1926 until 1932.

S: That was first through sixth?

J: First through sixth, yes, and from seventh on in the Martin Van Buren School. It was called the Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse.

S: When you were a student you called it that?

J: Oh, definitely, in fact, we were a little bit ashamed of that, you know, the people in the big school in Kinderhook, the big fellows who were 16 and 17 years old, would call us “*Itchy-bod*.” They would fantasize that name and we hated that. There are some of those little “Itchy-bod” kids, and we'd feel like we had some kind of insects on us or something, we didn't like that a bit. When they named the big school, they had a contest to name it, and they called it the Ichabod Crane School, I just couldn't believe they were doing this.

S: From Washington Irving's character?

J: Yes certainly. It was the historic thing to do, but we were considered to be very inferior to be going to the little one-room school when these big children went to this great big high school in Kinderhook.

S: Who was your teacher?

J: The first teacher I had was Ruth Smith McCagg.

S: And she was married when you had her?

J: She was married, definitely. She's the one that told us, "Don't think that the cars will ever completely do away with the horses." she said they can use cars and cars are fine if you're going on a trip or something and most of the time they work handy but, if there's an emergency, then the car's not going to do it, you have to have a horse. ... Well, one of the greatest things a teacher could do was to be on time every day, to be there ahead of the students. In those days there were a lot of horse and buggies, and horses would have bad days or get frisky and run off with the wagon or just not be feeling good, if he was sick you couldn't use a horse. The McCaggs owned the Pinto Ranch up on Pinto Ranch Road.

S: She was your first teacher?

J: Yes, from first grade until fourth grade.

S: So she left in about 1930?

J: Yes, she left about 1930 and it turned out later that she had cancer and she died shortly after that. We never knew why she left, I mean, she would never tell it, but she had some form of cancer, apparently and died. She was my first teacher.

S: Do you remember the next teacher?

J: The next teacher, I think, was Miss Wallen.

S: You mentioned a bench up in the front of the desks.

J: Yes, the bench was in front and that's where each class was "heard." The teacher would announce, "Now I will hear first grade" and you would come up and she would question you on the assignment she had given you the day before. There was something to be said for this system because the smarter children, they "heard" the other classes being "heard," in other words, first grade heard second, third, fourth, and fifth and the smarter children were really ahead and it was no problem for them to go through school because they would already know what the teacher was going to ask them. If you were in fourth grade, for instance, by the time you got to sixth grade you knew what was expected and it made it a lot easier.

S: So when one class was being "heard" up front, the rest of the students were doing their own projects and work?

J: Yes, doing their projects or homework or whatever. I don't ever remember bringing homework home for a while when I was in school, ever. I don't know if anybody did.

S: Did you keep your books? Were the students allowed to keep them? Or were they paid for by the school system?

J: You know, I just think we passed them from one grade to the other.

S: So you didn't purchase them yourself?

J: No, we didn't purchase books. I don't believe we did, but there again, when we went to the bigger school we did that. And we also tried to purchase them from someone who had them before so it would be much cheaper. Yes, recycling, because we're talking about great depression days. 5 cents a week was my allowance, I can remember that.

S: The Great Depression was right during the time you were here.

J: Right.

S: Did you celebrate holidays?

J: Very much so, in fact, yesterday was the first of May and that was May Day and that was the biggest holiday as far as I can remember as far as school is concerned. We would go over into Mr. McGee's woods here, we would go across the fields and the whole school went. That was every May Day and you had no school whatever on May Day, as soon as everyone was assembled and the roll was called, out we went and we spent the whole day and the teacher would point out the berries, types of wildflowers. I can remember jack-in-the-pulpits because they grew over there. ...I think you saw more of third and fourth graders helping the first and second graders. There was a bit of that going on where they would help the others and be proud, of course, to do it.

S: Now they're so segregated in their own classrooms.

J: Yes, completely segregated, you wouldn't have that kind of thing nowadays.

S: It must have been interesting.

J: You were all in one room and knew what was going on as far as others were concerned.

S: And to be exposed to the other kids, and the older kids exposed to the younger ones and trying to help, that must have been nice.

J: It was more like family.