

Oral History Excerpted Transcript of Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse Alumni

Interviewee: Mary Fisher Louster

Interviewer: Sharon Palmer

Interview recorded at Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse April 9, 1986

(“M” represents Mary, “S” represents Sharon)

Mary attended school at the Ichabod Crane Schoolhouse from 1917 -1925.

S: What time did you have to get to school?

M: 9 o'clock.

S: Just like now.

M: No, you're a lot earlier now, and we left at 3:30pm.

S: Oh, a long day.

M: But we did have a recess. And we had a bell, a hand bell. The teacher would ring the bell to let us know it was time to come to school. I would say about 10:30, perhaps, we would have about a fifteen-minute recess. There was a beautiful stream there and we could walk along the stream jumping over the stones. We did have an hour's noon. We brought our own lunch.

S: You walked to school?

M: Oh yes, we walked. I lived up on Fisher Road where it is now, about a mile and a quarter.

S: Even in really bad weather?

M: If it was awful, awful bad weather, my father used to bring us down in the sleigh. A bobsleigh and horses. And then he used to come after us.

S: You were not the only one in your family who went to school....

M: There were four of us, but my sister was six years older than I was, therefore, she was so much further advanced than I was. She did get sick and had to quit school very early because she got typhoid.

S: Was this Kate?

M: No, Julia. But Stanley, Kate and I went to this school.

S: You all walked together?

M: Yes.

S: You said you were here from **1917-1925**, what grades was that?

M: All eight.

S: Including kindergarten?

M: We did not have kindergarten. You didn't have to go to school until you were eight years old.

S: You've told me how there were two outhouses for boys and girls, the coal shed next to the building....

M: Yes and how there were two roads, one on each side of the building. At recess, the boys would be on one side and we would choose partners. We would take tennis balls and throw them over the building. This is what our gym work was. Somebody on the other side would have to catch it. Whoever caught that ball would have run around this building and chased whoever threw it. ..That is the only gym work we had. It was called "Kiddie-I-Over." We used to play giant steps. Girls and boys would play baseball together.

S: When you had lunch would you eat outside?

M: No, we always ate inside, mostly, unless it was in the early fall or late spring...

S: You did mention that right in the foyer, when we first walked in, that you had something in the foyer.

M: Well, we had a bench and on (it) we had a white enamel pail, say a 12 or 14 quart pail...we had an aluminum dipper that would hang on there. I think we had to bring our own cup, one of these that squash down.

S: A retractable cup?

M: Yes, we brought our own from home. That's the cup we had to have...that was our drinking water, that we got down the street ... at a bucket pump across the road at a little house on 9-H.

S: There were the two blackboards behind the teacher's desk?

M: Yes, behind the teacher's desk.

S: And did you have pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln?

M: As I can remember, 1925, 24 we sold pencils and bought these pictures.

S: That's great. Kids still do that now, for trips or things like that. Earlier, you mentioned multiplication tables as one kind of lesson.

M: Now that was for discipline, if you did something that you weren't supposed to do, she would make you write your multiplication tables from one to twelve, and I don't know how many times we wrote them. Regardless of what grade you were in, you had to do those multiplication tables.

S: That could turn you off to math. What other types of lessons did you have?
Did you have reading assignments?

M: Yes, we had Reading, English, Physiology.

S: Did you have a separate text for every subject?

M: Yes. Every Friday we had Physiology which would be Biology today, I think. We had a lot of nature study which they don't have today. Every morning this time of year we would all come in and say we saw our first robin or our first bluebird or our first oriole today, and had a

book of wildflowers. We would all know one wildflower from another, which I don't think the children do today.

S: No, they don't study that particular thing as much now. They do go on field trips out into the woods.

M: But every day somebody would bring in a different flower.

S: So you brought things to school?

M: The flowers we could, if we picked them. We'd see who had picked the best. On holidays like Washington's or Lincoln's birthday, the teacher would get postcards and she would cut them up and we would do, like a jigsaw puzzle. She'd cut them into different shapes. We always kept all the holidays. And of course, we did have our parties. We had cake and she would buy some instant cocoa and she'd heat the water on the stove and we'd have our instant cocoa with our cake and cookies.

M: And we had state papers, they were very thin papers, a very thin tissue paper that we would get from the state. And you had to take those tests to get to the next grade. I don't think they have them now. This you had to pass according to the state. I think you only had so much time to do those tests. They had tests in arithmetic, spelling, they must have had English, yes, you had to have tests from the state. That's what we had to do. That paper couldn't be opened up until quarter after nine in the morning, and they had to be done by twelve o'clock noon, with so many hours for each one. They were timed. They were a very, very thin piece of paper, I remember.

S: Speaking of the thin paper, makes me think of your story about the outhouses, where you did not have any toilet paper and you used...what did you call it?

M: Pencil paper. Or you could bring newspapers or catalogues.

S: Did you have spelling bees? I have read about them.

M: No, we did not seem to have spelling bees because we had the eight grades and there weren't enough kids in the third or fourth grades to have any. You couldn't expect a fifth grader to spell against an eighth grader, so we didn't have that.

S: Did you ever go out of the building on what we might call a field trip?

M: Oh yes, we did. We used to go on a Friday way up in the woods and have hot dog roasts and things like that. Because on a field trip like we had, we had it every day. We had our robins and our flowers... Remember, we all walked, there was no automobile.

S: So your field trips were more for nature study and to have picnics.

M: Yes, we'd have our picnics, that's when we'd have our hot dog roast.