

Excerpt from Apps' book, 'One-Room Country Schools'

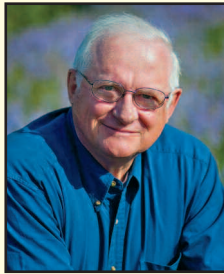
Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from "One-Room Country Schools: History and Recollections," by Jerry Apps, published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. The book is now a companion to the Wisconsin Public Television documentary, "Jerry Apps: One-Room School." This excerpt is reprinted here with permission from the publisher.

When I begin telling my children about my country school days, they often interrupt and ask, "Were those the years, Dad, when every day was winter, you walked five miles to school, and it was up hill both ways?" The truth of it is I walked a mile each way, and one way was indeed up hill, at least part of the trip. Winter also seemed to go on forever. Walking to school each day, you got to know winter well, from its early hints in November, its full blown fury in January, and its last reminders in April.

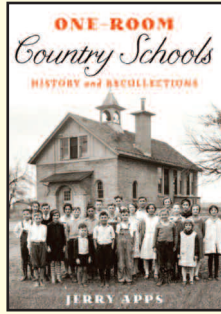
The walk itself was part of country school education, for some children an important part. Mary Bray, a student at Finch School, Walworth County, in the early 1940s, said, "One of the most delightful parts of those long ago days was the walk to school. To go by the road would be two plus miles, but it was shortened by going cross lots-trespassing by today's rules." We would go down the long lane-like driveway to

Anderson's Resort and along the shore of Turtle Lake, checking to see what washed up dead or alive along the shoreline. Sometimes all we'd see would be maybe a turtle or snake resting itself. Then we crawled through a fence to pass the only other dwelling on that side of the lake. Here there was a plank to cross a narrow stream of water flowing from the spring where we might get a drink of cool, clear spring water. Then on along the willows to the next fence to crawl under, later a stile was made at this point. Now we were in a woods which was a cow pasture, too. If it was a very cool morning, it was a precious delight to step on the warm earth where a cow had slept all night, and there warm your toes, for of course, in those days we were barefoot until there was no way to postpone putting on those sturdy shoes necessary for fall and winter. Many plants to check in the woods from spring time to fall: a lone gnarled apple tree in fall and a patch of dainty, fragile hepatica in spring and nest of birds in the trees. Then to the last fence and under it to the road to the two places on the north side of the lake, and the school. The teacher and other students would be there." (Source: Walworth County Historical Society, Good Old Golden Rule Days. Elkhorn, WI: Walworth

County Historical Society, 1994, p. 13.)
 Esther Luke Niedzwiecki, a student at the South Bright School in Clark County, recalled, "I lived about a half mile from the school. My mom had a very hard time getting me to go to school when I was six. I was always busy with 'things,' and being shy I just didn't want to go. I did make a couple of friends early on, but Mom still had to watch me. In those days our road wasn't paved. So quite often the big old road grader came along. I was deathly afraid of it, so when I even heard it coming way over the next hill, I would scoot under the fence on our hill, and wait until it passed, and was clear out of sight way down the road over the next hill. "When the frost came out of the ground in the spring, the road softened and got like Jello®. Then, too, Mom had to watch me. I was always intrigued with how things happened, and how they got here-sticks, bugs, trickles of water, birds. I did well once I got to school, but it was before and after that took so much time. I guess I'm still that way, always curious."
 Jerry Apps has written nearly 50 books on rural history, nature and environmental topics, including "Old Farm: A History," "The Quiet Season: Remembering Country Winters," and "Garden Wisdom: Lessons Learned from 60 Years of Gardening." Wisconsin Public Television has produced several of its fourth documentaries based on his books. Apps and his wife, Ruth, divide their time between their home in Madison and their farm, Roshara, near Wild Rose.



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