

Times were tough for Class of 1940

By MARY LOU OLSON
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Times were tough for everyone during the "Great Depression" and the dust bowl days of the 1930s when members of the 1940 class enrolled at Decatur Community High School in the fall of 1936.

"Coming from a small country school to high school was quite a change for this farm boy," said Gail Marcuson. "Our school, Swede Home, had about 20 students in all eight grades and to be a part of 350 or more students was overwhelming to me.

"Batching" was a way of life for us country kids. We lived in a rented small house or basement apartment. One of my favorite classes was blacksmithing. We had no electric or wire welder, but heated the iron in a forge, then hammered it into the shape we wanted. I remember the first thing we made was a log chain and we also learned how to sharpen tools and plow shares.

The Oberlin Herald reported, "With 62 teams fighting for honors at the Farm Mechanics contest at Manhattan, the Oberlin team of Wayne Larson, Walter May and Dean Watkins, alternate, captured first place to top the vocational agriculture students of Kansas. The judging team of Allen Wurm, Bob Fraker, Kenneth Brainard and Gail Marcuson, competing with 90-odd teams, also participated and Walter May was believed to have set a record by placing first in three out of six divisions in the shop contest. He was high individual by receiving 5005 out of 6000 points."

Mr. Marcuson added, "Another favorite class for me was American History. Our teacher, Miss Elvin, kept us up on current events as she read us The Topeka Daily Capital editorials and news items, a habit I have followed all these years."

A classmate, Phyllis (Armstrong) McCartney, said, "We lived about two miles from the school and my sister, Avis, and I walked most of the time.

"I went out for debate; I'm not sure why, but probably because I knew Mrs. Stowell, the teacher, and she asked me to try it and I did. I made the team and it was fun. Our debate was "Should we have a Unilateral Legislature? She put me on the affirmative side with Jack Hendrix, and Leo Bendon and Maxine Walker were on the negative side. I took lots of teasing from Leo about having a 'canned speech,' but most of it was fun. We got to Colby once or twice and most of us had 10 or 15 cents for our lunch at a cafe, but those 10 cent hamburgers were good.

"I especially remember Mr. Hawkes, our superintendent. He always expected immediate attention and quiet when he walked into the assembly room, and he got it! Very few were able to attend college, but instead found jobs."

Ivis Hanson, who lived south of Kanona, said that he attended Norway Country School for two years before completing grade school at Kanona.

"When I was in high school, I stayed with Mrs. Simpson for \$3 a week, which covered room and board. Mr. Hawkes was superintendent and also taught manual training. My



THE 1940 CLASS gathered for their 40th reunion in 1980. Shown, row 1, (from left) Bob Fraker, Rex Lohofener, Harley Kathka, Bob Emerson, Russell Jenkins Jr., Allen Wurm, Russell Jenkins, Jr. Row 2: Martin McKisson, Dorothy Counter Bainter, Opal Thornburg Paul, Mildred Miller Holmdahl, Lois Rezner Carlson, Millie Esther Stowell, Ola Maggard Yauk, Nola Ridgway Garver, Mary Vernon Bethell, Cecile Williams Jordan, Melvin Beneda. Row 3: Maxine Glee Huff Cargill, Patty

Pierce Landau, Letha Schoeni, sponsor; Lois Nicodemus Platt, Patty Mines Carswell, Avis Armstrong Beneda, Phyllis Armstrong McCartney, Mildred Jording Cochran, Zola Maggard Brown, Norma Brown Lilly, Dora Orthmann Boan, Dorothy Woolley Kaus, Frederick Rezner. Row 4: Norman Bainter, Eris Wenger Young, Martin Chapman, Dorothy Carter, Gail Marcuson, Leo Bendon, Fern Erikson Wenger, Raymond Adams, Rex Garver, Sam Frickey.

favorite teacher was Miss Elvin. Entertainment was mainly going to the picture show, which cost 10 cents for kids and 25 cents for adults," he said.

Mildred (Miller) Holmdahl added, "Seventy years ago many things were different in our school system. I attended all 12 years in Oberlin. In grade school, we always started our first class of the day with the flag salute. I think my favorite classes were geography and history — studying about different countries, their customs, food and activities. I have been fortunate to have visited some of these places in Europe and the United States.

"I remember in grade school history class, we were required to memorize important things such as the Gettysburg Address, as well as poetry in reading class. In high school, I have great memories of music, the Halloween Clean-up, proms and school plays.

Many of the classmates went out for sports. Bob Fraker said he only weighed 65 pounds when he went out for wrestling as a freshman, but finally gained another 20 pounds and made the team his junior year. As a result, he was a state champion his both his junior and senior years.

Junior-senior prom was held down main street on May 11, 1940, with Leo Bendon as prom marshal. Theme for the banquet which followed at the Masonic Temple was "In An Old Dutch Garden."

The mixed chorus, directed by Nelson King, received a highly superior rating at the district contest in Goodland, making them eligible for the regional national contest in Kansas City. The band, directed by Bert Hosinsky, also qualified for the national contest.

The class play, "Here Comes Patricia," featured Clara Pryor, Mary Vernon, Janice Jacobs,

Mildred Miller, Dorothy Towery, Gloria Benson, Norman Bainter and Raymond Adams.

Classmates will gather at 1 p.m. on Saturday for

Welcome Back Alumni



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