

George Fenton and the Old Glenrosa School House

by Gordon H. Ficke



"I've walked through that front door many times." declared George Fenton, local Glenrosa pioneer. He also admitted to spending time out in the small cloakroom when he misbehaved in Miss Gorman's one room classroom.

George's father arrived in Glenrosa the first time at the turn of the 20th century. He was single at the time and spent a couple of years working before heading back to

Lloydminster Saskatchewan. He met his wife there and moved back to Glenrosa around 1920. His three brothers and a sister had already settled here a few years earlier. They had established orchards, but George's dad didn't like farming and did odd jobs at first. Times were tough and there was not much work to be had. Later, he spent most of his life working for The Department of Highways.

"I have seven brothers and sisters," said George. "Four of them were born in Lloydminster and four of us were born here. Two in Glenrosa, one in Westbank and one in Kelowna."

"My dad really never owned a house," George revealed. He rented a house up on Last Mountain Road for a while and moved to the old Harvey house on Fenton Road. Later he did build a house on McIver Road.



George was born in the late 1920's in Glenrosa. He recalled, "It was so great living in Glenrosa at the time, as there were only about five families living here, and you had the whole country for a playground!" George went fishing in Powers Creek, hunted in the back woods, went to the lake to swim in the summer and virtually walked everywhere.

George attended school for seven years in the old Glenrosa School House, starting at age five. Helen Gorman was his teacher

for all those years. As George explains, "In a one room school the teacher taught the pupils from grade one to eight. After teaching each grade she would give each class an assignment. When the teacher was giving the other classes their assignment you would be carrying on with something you were not supposed to do." Miss Gorman was a very strict teacher, but a good teacher. "You got away with nothing," George admitted.



The men of the village cut the wood for the stove in the school that was used in wintertime. George's father had the contract to light the stove every morning. When George was old enough, he took over that responsibility and came to the school at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning five days a week to light the stove, raise the flag, go over to Mrs. Hitchner next door to get a gallon of water (there was no running water in the school) and pour six or eight cups of water for the students. Each school day Miss Gorman would put two drops of iodine in each cup. The purpose of the iodine was to get rid of goiter. Iodine salt later replaced the drops.

The school day was from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Each day would commence with the singing of the national anthem followed by reciting The Lord's Prayer. Arithmetic, Grammar, Spelling, History, Geography and penmanship, learning how to write well, as well as learning basic manners were taught. There were two fifteen-minute recesses and one hour for lunch. Those students that brought a lunch shared their meal with less fortunate students that didn't have anything to eat.

The one room classroom was illuminated with only the natural light coming in through the windows. There were no kerosene or coal oil lamps to aid in doing your schoolwork, especially on those short winter days. Sometimes during those winter afternoons it was just too dark to do your schoolwork and the teacher dismissed the children to go home early.

There was no assigned homework for the children to do. "I don't ever recall doing an hours worth of homework," Fenton recalled. All the work was done in class. Helen Gorman taught grades one to eight, teaching three or four different age groups at one time, sometimes only one or two children in each grade, and then issuing them assignments before moving on to the next age group. Between teaching and issuing assignments during class, Miss Gorman was very busy. She simply had no time to assign homework.

“There was a great big blackboard,” George laughed as he commented. “I would have to stand up there on more than one occasion and write ‘I will not talk while the teacher is talking’, fifty times. Slate boards were available for each of the students but by that time that system of taking notes was

antiquated and was abandoned. Paper and pencil were the norm, purchased by the parents, but the school had some supplies and provided the textbooks.

Helen Gorman had a gramophone to play records during the music sessions, history and drama classes. The students sang songs. “I couldn’t sing or hold a tune if my life depended on it,” George admitted. In the wintertime when there was just too much snow to go out and play, the classes played a number of games inside like ‘Ring around the Rosie.’ “I couldn’t see the sense in that,” Fenton said. “I was sent to sit in the corner many times.”

There was one outdoor biffy for both girls and boys. “May I leave the room teacher?” was a common request. Occasionally during sunny warm days some students used that line as an excuse to get out of class and go outside for a while.

From the May 24th weekend until the end of the school year all the children shed their shoes and went barefoot. “I couldn’t stand it,” George admitted. “I hated to go barefoot. It bothered my feet and today I still don’t like to even walk in the sand with bare feet.”

Despite the poignant memories of his rebellious nature while attending the Glenrosa School, George has some wonderful memories too. Like his father, George liked to draw. Miss Gorman, also an able wildlife artist who enjoyed sketching birds, encouraged him in his drawing projects.

What was George’s worst memory while going to school? His nemesis was grammar. “I couldn’t spell cat,” Fenton revealed. “My spelling was atrocious.”

Helen Gorman was a strong disciplinarian. She didn’t let you get away with anything. ‘Getting the strap’ was a common method of punishment in those times whenever a student was insubordinate. “One time,” Fenton recalled, “my younger brother Clarence, who had just started grade one, had done something wrong and Miss Gorman was going to give him the strap.” George, in defense for his brother, piped up. “You can’t give him the strap.

If you give him the strap then you have to give me the strap.” Helen Gorman replied. “Then I’ll give you the strap too, George!”

George’s older brother who was also there offered the same challenge to Miss Gorman. As a result all three of them got the strap! Justice was delivered swiftly.

There was no playground attached to the school, so the children played on the road allowance in front of the school.

Ab Shetler and Fred Beaton, two single gentlemen who lived in the little one room bunkhouse across the street from the school, would come out and play games with the children during lunch hour. The older girls, Dora Hitchner and Enid Gates would also come over and play with the children.

When George started attending the Glenrosa School there were approximately eleven students and after he completed his seventh year the number of pupils had dwindled to five. The year was 1942 and the school board made the decision to close the school at the end of the school year in June. It was no longer economically feasible to keep the school open.

George attended grade eight in Westbank and left school after that. “Basically in those days,” Fenton said. “After grade eight the young men went to work to make a living and the girls got married.” Unlike today, very few people pursued a higher education.

George’s fondest memory of his childhood days was helping Mrs. Hitchner make ice cream on Sunday mornings during the summer months. George would continuously turn the handle of the old cream churn until it was ready. George would be rewarded with a big bowl. Other memories included just having fun playing with his siblings and friends. They would sneak in the Hitchner barn when they weren’t home or rode their horses when they weren’t around.

Those were wonderful times and will never be repeated. “I am amazed at what has happened to my Glenrosa,” George lamented. “There is a mass of houses, cars and people.” He continued. “Everything we enjoyed while

Growing up is now gone. I don’t know if these changes have been the best for Glenrosa.”

Photographs:

1) The light streaming in through the windows of the Glenrosa one room school provided the only illumination to do school work. There was no electricity, nor was there any coal oil or kerosene lamps for lighting.

2) George Fenton walked through this front door many times during the seven years he attended here.

3) George was responsible for lighting the original wood stove that provided heat in the one room Glenrosa schoolhouse during those chilly Fall, winter and spring days.