

ELM GROVE SCHOOL MEMORIES

By Zelia (Eddington) Daily and Zella (Eddington) Davis
From *Our Yesterdays*

Note: Zelia and Zella Eddington were identical twins born in 1893.

Country schools are now consolidated. The old one-room country school is gone. When driving through the countryside and passing the old school house buildings, I feel very sad. Some are used for storing grain or hay, and some have been allowed to just go to pieces, porches and roofs falling in, etc.

I have seen a few made into small homes. My mind goes back to our old Elm Grove School. The old road leading to and on by the school is seldom travelled now, but mostly used by farmers as a way to get to their farm fields to work. Stock is pastured all around it and the porch roof has fallen. The window glass is all out.

I can just see it as it used to be, a well-kept building and grounds. The week before school was to start, one of the three directors would take his mowing machine over and cut the grass and weeds around it. The well had been cleaned out earlier, and if there was not enough water, it was hauled from the creek, and the school house was freshly cleaned and supplied with chalk – both hard and soft chalk, erasers, etc. There was generally a new well bucket and rope and several tin cups to drink from. These were placed on a bench near the well. You waited sometimes for a cup, as when the bell rang five minutes before BOOKS, everyone ran to get a drink. Maybe the cup you got had been used by someone with a sore throat or very bad cold. Sometimes they would be coming down with one of the childhood diseases. No wonder we were sick so much. If one scholar got sick, it would go through the school.

Cords of wood were brought to the yard for the winter's supply. The out buildings we called toilets and some called them privies, were cleaned and a path cut through the Spanish Needles to them. The boys carried the wood in for the long wood heaters. In wet or bad weather, the damp wood was piled all around the stove to dry out.

Our desks were all double seats and the ink wells were on top with grooves for pen and pencils. There was a space underneath for books.

The first Elm Grove School was just north and west of the school we knew.

One morning, Emery Weldin, who was teaching, came early but there was no school. It had burned down during the night. It was thought that the wet wood was placed near the stove and left to dry. It probably fell over on the stove and caught fire.

Schools were used then as polling places and sometimes for Sunday School and Church. Our school was managed by three directors who hired the teacher and took care of the school. These directors were chosen by a school election in the spring. Sometimes there were two factions, who each ran their choice, and the elections at that time were hot ones. Maybe they had a certain

teacher they wanted to hire, so they tried to put in a director who would be for him. Sometimes it caused hard feelings between neighbors.

Sometimes an itinerant showman would come along and have a show at night at the school, with the director's consent. They charged a small fee to get in, and Papa would carry our lantern and take us. Of course, the director's children got in free, and we were so happy when Papa was a director. John Sapp from Belle City was such, and we did love to see his Punch and Judy show. He was a ventriloquist. Some entertainers had lantern slides.

Our school faced the east, with a large playground in front and woods on three sides. There was a front porch with a door set back a piece to make an entrance. The girls all set on the north side and the boys on the south side. By setting the door back a piece, it left room for a coat room on each side of the door; nails on the walls held the wraps and the dinner buckets were set on the floor.

The teacher's desk and chair were at the west end facing the two long recitation seats. A blackboard was all across the west end of the room with dusty felt erasers and chalk. There was a bookcase or library for extra reading. Windows were on the north and south. Of course, there was a bell and belfry. There were only two outside toilets (one for the boys and one for the girls) and you had to wait your turn. There was a cistern on the south, bench with bucket and cups. We waited our turn there and would say, "Can I have your cup?"

The boys had the big front playground and the girls, the smaller one on the west. Sometimes the boys asked us to come play with them.

The pupils used slates and pencils, as they were cheaper than tablets. The slates were cleaned by rubbing with paper. Some boys used spit and their sleeves. I now have Martha Bette's old slate, over 100 years old. We did have some store tablets for special that cost one cent each. We would get awfully big ones for five cents. Some pencils were given for one cent, but better ones, one cent each.

The old Webster's Dictionary stood up front on a stand. There were a must. How big we felt when we knew how to go up front and look up a word! And to be a standard school, there must be a roll of all kinds of maps on the wall. Far away places and far away people.

Some boys went to school until they got married. Their legs would be too long to sit comfortably, even in the largest seats. They were not bad boys, but just mischievous and bored and tired of school. There wasn't any farm work to keep them busy in winter, so their folks were glad to have them get more education. School was out along the first of March – plenty of time to start the farm work. They really did more harm than good. Their thoughts were on girls mostly, and they sent notes back and forth. They gave our school a bad name. They sort of banded together and dared the teacher to correct them. One year, they ran off three teachers. Some of the teachers went home for lunch, as they generally lived or boarded close to the school. Once the older boys made the rest of us sit in our seats and they locked the teacher out. He took it as well as he could for he saw they were ready to whip him if he wasn't pretty careful... They thought he was a good sport, and unlocked the door.

Other times, the big boys pulled each other up in the school loft at the noon hour to smoke. They probably smoked corn silk or grapevine cigarettes. Maybe some snitched a little tobacco from home. Once one big boy pulled a knife on the teacher. The directors expelled him.

In winter, the teacher never allowed the boys to snowball the girls, but how the boys did love to catch their best girls and wash her face with snow. The boys could have snowball fights; if you couldn't take it, you had better stay away.

School took up at eight o'clock a.m. The teacher rang the big school bell at seven-thirty and again at eight. There was a hand bell rung at five minutes before eight to remind the children to go to the toilets or get a drink before "Books." When the last bell rang, we all settled ourselves in our seats. Our first few years, we had no organ. Our teacher used a tuning form to get the pitch of the songs. He then led the singing which was the first thing before classes. How we did love the singing!

Our subjects studied were reading, writing, arithmetic, history, grammar or language, orthography, geography, and spelling. We had copy books for practicing writing. There was a dunce stool in the corner for pupils who wouldn't study or who sassed the teacher. Sometimes, when the teacher wasn't looking, the person on the dunce stool would turn around and make faces at the others. The pupil had to wear a dunce cap too. I have the old Aden School dunce stool. I'll bet my husband sat on it as he went there when a boy.

Some teachers read a verse from the Bible. Some had a short prayer. It was just up to the teacher. The older ones had a chance to study their lessons while the Primer Class and First Grade recited. The teacher would say: Primer Class 1 – they stood; 2 – they marched round front to the long recitation seat; 3 – they sat down. The teacher used a Primer Chart and a pointer to point out the words. The Chart hung on the wall, showed the alphabet which they learned first and must know each letter before they learned to read. The first page was, "Dog, Cat, I see a dog, I see a cat. I see a dog and cat."

During the class supervision, the teacher must watch over the schoolroom, too, call down a scholar who was whispering or not studying, stop a boy who was throwing paper wads (they made pop-guns out of hollow elder branches). If necessary to go outside, a scholar could hold up his hand, the teacher would say, "Yes." "May I be excused?" "Yes." He should keep in mind how long they were out. Another would put up his hand. If the teacher did not see him, soon he would loudly snap his fingers. Sometimes they would be wanting help with their lessons and Teacher must sometimes come back to their seat to show them. If there was an interesting discussion going on in a class, it was hard for the others to not listen and forget to study.

There were many poems in the Harper's Readers, and we had to memorize them. I can say most all of them yet.

The advanced class then had history. Sometimes, they had to have an A and a B class, as some learned faster. Some of the advanced class could argue with the teacher once in awhile. They had to be sure first – but it was a thrill to catch him. Lots of the time, he was learning nearly as much as they were. We did have some awfully good teachers, Albert Mitchell, George

Snyder, Will Snyder, Penny York, Willard Witer, Walton Elliott, Elisha Lowery, Sam Dale, Omer Redfearn. When Omar taught, his wife went to school that year. He treated her the same as the rest of us. When she turned to talk to the ones behind her, Omer would say: "Lena, turn back this way."

After history was first recess, 10:30, which lasted fifteen minutes. A mad rush was on at the first five-minute bell. Sometimes you waited until the last minute for a drinking cup. After recess came arithmetic for all. The state put out a course of study which the teachers went by. The seventh grade work was fractions. If you didn't happen to have a good teacher through the 7th and 8th grades, it was bad.

We weren't allowed to whisper, and prizes (mostly new pencils) were given to those who hadn't whispered for a given time. Head marks for spelling were pencils. We were given Merit Certificates for perfect attendance and not being tardy. When caught whispering, we had to stand on the floor up front. Some would cry.

Once in a while, a boy got a whipping. The teacher kept some nice-sized tree limbs up front. Boys had to go to the woods to cut them for him.

When some of us were lucky enough to have some store wax (what we now call chewing gum), someone would say: "I'll let you have my pie if you'll let me chew your wax a while." Mama soon told us what to say. But wax was so scarce and hard to get, we did stick it under our desk top at school to redeem it and chew later.

We mostly wore sleeved aprons to school. They were gingham made plain with Dutch collars, two big patch packets in front and buttoned all the way down the back. They were worn over dark dresses. On Friday afternoons, we most always had a change of exercise, and we wore our Sunday dresses. The County Superintendent visited each school during the year. He gave us uplifting talks. T. W. Biggerstaff and Whitson Daily were County Superintendents in our time.

Our first teacher was Albert Mitchell. He was such a fine man and a good teacher – 1901-1902. One of our subjects was Morals and Manners. The boys were taught to get that farm dirt from under their fingernails. Back then, all the girls had long, thick hair. It was too easy to take cold, so they hardly ever washed their hair in the wintertime. We combed ours every day with a fine comb, and washed it about once a month. But there was head lice in school. The girls sitting just in front of us had them. It looked like the lice were playing ball. They would drop off on our desk. We told Mamma about them and she sent a note to the teacher. We were moved next day, and the following weekend, Mamma washed our hair in kerosene, then a good scrubbing with soap.

Before school was out each year, a photographer came out from town to take a school picture. The smaller boys sat on the ground in the first row. How lucky was the little fellow that sat in the center of the row and held the slate which gave the year and the name of the school!

At the noon hour when the weather was nice, we gulped our lunch so we could play. Sometimes, some of us would just walk through the woods and gather wildflowers, hazelnuts or

haws, according to the season. Down in an adjoining field was a wild crabapple tree with large crab apples that we dearly loved. We visited it often. We also cut slippery elm to chew. It was nice if our special boyfriend went along and cut it for us. Then he would cut a piece of real green sassafras about one half inch thick and two inches long and carve his and his girl's initials on it and give it to her. What a thrill! Or maybe they would lag behind and he could cut his and her initials on a tree. We loved to roam the old buffalo trail just south through the woods. It was beaten low like an old road.

There were also Indian mounds, and sometimes we would find an Indian rock or arrow. We loved to swing on grape vine swings. The woods were really enchanting to us. One day at noon, we heard there was a new baby at a neighboring house on the other side of the woods. Some of us girls decided to go see it. We stayed longer than we thought, and when we got back, Books had taken up! We had to stand on the floor up front, which was very humiliating to us.

What a task to fix dinner bucket lunches for six healthy, hungry, growing youngsters. The two boys, Clyde and Jim, had their own half gallon dinner buckets. Madeline and Irene ate together and had a gallon dinner bucket,. Zella and I ate together. Molasses buckets were used and we punched nail holes in the lids to keep the food from sweating. A pan of extra biscuits were baked at breakfast time for the lunches. We always had lots of meat for our sandwiches, such as ham, bacon, sausage, head cheese, chicken, etc., eggs to boil or fry. Some pupils remember one darling little girl, (Ermel Echols) who lived close by. It was her first year and she sometimes would wait too long to hold up her hand to be excused. I would always take her home for dry clothes, as I was five years older. That led to a sweet friendship that has lasted through the years.

Books took up again at one. This period was used for language and grammar and spelling. The last recess was t 2:30 for fifteen minutes. The last period of Books, we had geography and orthography. Reading and writing were sandwiched in. School was dismissed at four o'clock.

The boys and girls would write love notes to pass to each other at recess or given them to someone to pass on. My first one was so sweet: Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet – and so are you. We finally got bold enough to answer, such as: To you – I'll be true, etc. One day a boy attempted to pass one in the advanced class. It started down the line and the teacher saw it, and made them give it to him. He read it before the class. That wouldn't have been so bad, but he didn't stop. He asked the couple to tell what others were doing the same thing. They wouldn't tell, but, of course, he found someone who would. My twin and I were among the ones called up front. Some couples storied out of it and we knew they did. Four couples of us were brought up front. He told us he was going to marry us right then and there. He got a library book from the shelf for a Bible, had us hold right hands and began the wedding ceremony. We all felt like he was sure going to get the job done, and decided we didn't want to get married. After all of us shedding a few tears and promising never to do this again, he let us go. We never passed any more love notes in school. I forget who the other two couples were, but two were Zella and Wilburn Cullins, and Sam Lane and me. Wilburn's wife today laughs and calls Zella her husband's first wife.

We studied hard all week, than most always we had a change of exercise, as we called it, on Friday afternoon. It might just be a spelling match. We learned a lot about spelling then. The school would choose up with two sides. Two advanced scholars did the choosing. The teacher gave us the words to spell. As you missed a word, you sat down. The side who had one standing was the winner.

The smaller children got easier words. Cyphering matches were fun, too. The school chose up in two sides. Starting at the foot of the line, one from each side went to the blackboard. The one getting the right answer first had turned the other one down. The next one from that side then came up. We had some awfully quick ones. Irene Epperson was one of them. As we came up, we chose what we wanted, either addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and some advanced scholars, who wanted to show off because they thought they were good, chose fractions. We had a good teacher when we learned fractions and learned them well. One boy I remember couldn't add without the "peck" system, just counting by pecking with his chalk as many times as the figure needed. My, but he was quick, and worked so hard! This was as exciting as any big league baseball game. Sometimes, the entertainment was at night before an audience of parents and neighbors. Or another school would come visit us.

When there had been a big snow, Papa had to take the horses and sled and break the roads so we could get to school. In good weather, we went to school through the fields which was much closer. We could climb the rail fences and at the only barb wire fence, the men put a stile on each side so we could get over. One day after a big snow, I was going to school by myself. I don't remember why I was by myself, but I imagine Zella and Jim went around the road, telling me I shouldn't go through the field. I made it fine until after I climbed over the stile just across the road from the school. I had forgotten about a big ditch between there and the school. It was filled with snow. I walked down into it over my waistline, and the teacher came with a broom which I held on to and he pulled me out.

Most of us had to be pretty sick to miss school. We enjoyed so much being with other children. We walked the mile through muddy or dusty roads, rain or snow and cold. Many went much farther. And as we got into the teens, most every scholar had high ideals and a strong desire to make a name for himself. I knew that urge well. I remember a boy in our class who didn't make the highest grades, but had great determination to teach. He made a good teacher.

PIE SUPPERS AND BOX SUPPERS

To make extra money for use of the school, we had pie and box suppers. Each girl would take a pie. The pies were numbered, so no boy would know whose they were, for a good boyfriend wanted his girl's pie and would just bid on it. That way the girl who didn't have a special boyfriend wouldn't get bids. But – if you got a chance, which most of us did, you managed to let your boyfriend know when your pie came up for bid. Some boys, maybe from a neighboring school, would bid against this boy and either make him pay for the privilege of eating with his girl, or have more money to spend and take the pie away from him. I have known of fights taking place afterward.

The box suppers were the same. The boxes contained sandwiches, fruit and pie or cake. Also other things were auctioned off. A cake for the prettiest girl. The girls' names were placed on the blackboard, and the boys bid. A cake of soap for the dirtiest feet. Just to keep anyone from getting angry, a nice clean boy was chosen for this. He must be a good sport. And socks for the ugliest man.

At a "supper", parents and people of the community came, as there was a program first. There were geography matches, spelling matches, speeches, dialogues, songs, etc. Other schools always came.

One night a crowd of us (Irene, Madeline, Lena, Zella, Paul, Same Lane and me) were going to a pie supper at Possum Creek School. Sam, my boyfriend, had put his horse to the wagon, and he and I sat in the wagon seat and drove. Mamma had made all we four girls raisin pies. They were rich and delicious. When we got to Possum Creek School, Madeline and Irene saw their boyfriends weren't there, so they left their pies in the wagon. Of course, Paul and Sam bought Zella's and my pies and we ate them.

Sam and I went out a little ahead and put the two extra pies, Madeline's and Irene's, on the seat with us. We knew the girls intended to eat them on the way home. Sam and I ate raisin pie all the way home just to tease them, and we did not divide. But did we ever pay for it! I haven't eaten raisin pie since, and I doubt if Sam has. This was some fifty years ago.

LITERARIES

We always went from school to school to Literaries. Two boys would use their horses and borrow a wagon, and all the advanced scholars who could, would go. We would pick them up. How we did enjoy these trips. The teacher went along, and we learned much about the stars on the way. On a clear night, they were so bright and beautiful. We found the North Star, the Big Dipper, the Seven Sisters and so many falling stars, and we would say:

Star light, star bright,
First star I see tonight.
I wish I may, I wish I might
Get the wish I wish tonight.

Someone would start a song, and we really made the night ring, as we had learned to sing all parts in school.

At the Literaries, schools all sat close together and tried to show how smart their school was by answering all the questions they could.

We had one teacher who filled in a few weeks for a sick teacher. He was a whiz (Penny York). We learned so much while he was there. He liked to show his school off, so one night as the Literary was to be at our school, he was to give the questions. He told us to always hold up our hands to answer. He said, "If you don't know, held up your left hand. If you do know, hold up the right." We did. It looked great, but one question came along that no one knew. There

were no hands but ours. The teacher had to call on one of his smartest ones and hope for the best. He didn't know. That almost cooked us.

One night, two couples, myself, my boyfriend and another couple borrowed a surrey with the fringe on top, and the boys used their horses, and we went to a Literary at Garrison School. My boyfriend drove and we had the front seat. The ones in the back seat petted a little. It made me mad for my boyfriend just to put his arm on the back of the seat. Coming home pretty late, the driver stopped at a farm house. He kept yelling "HELLO". A sleepy old man came out on the porch. This boy said, "Have you got any meal?" The farmer said yes. This boy then said, "It's a good thing to have in the family. Gid-dap," and he used his whip. I was so ashamed; but it was fun.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

On the last day of school, the families began to gather about 10:30, after the first recess with trunks, egg cases, boxes, tubs and large baskets filled with good things to eat. If it was a clear day – wooden horses were set up in the yard with long planks covering them, which made good dinner tables. If it was too bad for that, the planks were put on top of the sears inside. Anyone could go and be sure of all they could eat.

Of course, we all wore our best dresses that day. We practiced for our last day program for a month, and the entertainment was good. The program songs were sometimes sad and many a tear was shed by the eighth graders who were finishing school. After the program was over, the directors and parents were asked to speak. They were generally profuse in their praise.

SCHOOLS IN 1915

Such odd names as:

Barefoot	Big Hill	Burnt Hill	Buckskin	Bunker Hill
Cherokee	Cut Off	Doeskin	Elm Grove	Fairview
Hickory Corner	Little Hill	Lost End	Mary's Chapel	Middle Creek
Oak Grove	Opossum Creek	Pig Ridge	Plainview	Shady Grove
Sulphur Springs	Sunny Side	Walpole		

There were nine-ty four schools in the county then. Highest salary was paid to McLeansboro Supt. of School, L. A. Uhe, eight and a half months at one hundred twenty-five dollars per month. O. H Epperson was second highest.

Once a year, some scholar would write a prophecy of twenty years hence. Sometimes they were pretty good and sometimes very humorous. I do wish I had kept some of them. Our brother Jim was picked to read one. He did fine until he said, "George (or was it John), was going to be a Fizi – can (physician).

We studied hard to be one of the top ones in the class. After passing the seventh and eighth grades, a few of us would meet and study for the County Teacher's Examinations in town. It all seemed very worthwhile when we passed and were issued a Teacher's Certificate.

Six weeks in 1910, I attended a Select or Normal School through the summer in McLeansboro. It was made up of teachers and would-be teachers and was taught by our best county teachers – Whit Daily, Charles York, and Charles Hawkins. I learned a lot and enjoyed being with these scholars. I stayed at Grandpa Rice's through the week and went home for week-ends.

I taught a spring term of school, which is only six weeks, at Elm Grove the next spring. I was working in Harry Sloan's General Store in McLeansboro and the Directors came in and asked me if I would like to teach their school the spring term. I had just passed the Teacher's Exam and had my certificate. Teachers always signed a contract. I was so thrilled and I think I learned just as much as the pupils did that Spring. I had to study to keep ahead of them. I received \$35 per month.

I taught the next year at a neighboring community, \$40 per month. I was beginning to love teaching. But about then, the marriage bug bit me. When my school was out, my boyfriend wrote me, "I want this to be your last school." It was.

OLD SCHOOL BOOKS:

The same textbooks were used in thirty-seven states. The same books were used each year and passed through the families. The old school books were:

Primer
Harper's Readers
White's Arithmetic
Gowdy's Grammar
McGuffey's Readers
Blue Back Speller
Barnes History
Ray's Higher Arithmetic
Tarr and McMurray's Geography
Making of Illinois
Orthography