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# Dongola School was part of the family

by Nancy Jappe

Dongola School is a part of family history for Nate Collins, Webster. Nate's grandfather, Philip Kuhnly, donated the land the first school was built on. His parents, William and Ivy Collins, bought that building for \$33.33 when a second school was built, with WPA help, in 1936.

Collins remembers well the day the school was to be moved three-quarters of a mile to his parents' 20-foot log cabin. The building was put on skids behind a hired county snowplow. Everything went well until the rear left corner of the school hit a clod of dirt. "The first thing we knew we had school all over," Collins said. What remained of the building was taken apart and put back together as the family's barn.

That first school was located on CTH X one-half mile south and east of the present Sand Lake Town Hall, which was once the second Dongola School.

Collins went to the first Dongola School from first grade to sixth grade. At that time there was a front entry where students hung their outdoor clothing.

The school had its own hot lunch program. Every day at 11 a.m. the teacher would fire up the kerosene stove. Students would bring soup or cocoa in mustard jars. The jars would be warmed in a pan of hot water on the stove. Invariably someone's jar would break while being heated.

To go with the hot liquid, Collins would have a peanut butter sandwich carried to school in a syrup pail. Only the rich kids had their sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, he said. Most were wrapped in newspaper, brown paper bags, or anything the mothers could find. The bread was homemade.

"People talk about poverty (now). They don't know what poverty is all about," Collins said. He paused to remember three neighbor boys who died after eating tiny green apples in the spring. The boys were hungry and spotted the apples, thinking they would be good to eat. There was a nearby family who lived in a cave. Some children had no shoes, forcing them to come to school barefoot in the snow in November.

"We were poor but not as poor as some people," Collins commented.

His childhood memories include wanting a Buck Rogers pocketwatch that a classmate wore to school. The watch cost \$1 but Collins' parents couldn't afford to buy it for him. Nor could they come with the money for the red sled he dearly wanted to see under the Christmas tree. "Everybody had sleds that could steer," Collins recalled. His determination up, Collins sold garden seeds and Christmas cards, anything to get the money to buy his own watch and sled.

Collins has good memories of his teacher, Pearl Nolan. "She had an effect on all of our lives. She knew how to handle all of us. She was a very caring person," he commented. Nolan had to take care of the wood-burning stove. She paid Collins 25 cents to get wood in at night. "Maybe I bought the sled with that," he said.

"Times and values change. I think we had a lot more human values and caring people. We helped each other out. If the people who starved to death would have asked for food, we would have helped them out," Collins continued. He talked about being taught the basics in school and about discipline in the classroom. Students knew that getting in bad with the teacher was only the start of punishment. There would be more to come from their parents when they got home.

There was the time when Collins threw a snowball at a girl's head. His teacher came up to him, pulled his stocking cap down over his ears, looked him right in the eye, and told him he shouldn't do that. There was nothing physical, just a scolding. There was no talking back. The students wouldn't have even thought of that.

There were no grief counselors to help students when a classmate died after a sledding accident or when another drowned in Horseshoe Lake. There were no school buses. Collins only had three-quarters of a mile to walk but some students had three miles. He had to walk home alone the day he and other students fell while sliding down a hollow by the school. One of the students, the biggest boy in the school (at over 100 pounds), ended up sitting on Collins' head. The teacher had Collins rest for a bit and then sent him home.

Other memories included: the whole school walking to Viola Lake or Mattson School for softball competition, taking picnic lunches with them; playing drop the handkerchief, prisoner's base, king of the hill, antihighover (and calling pigtail if the ball didn't get over), and marbles as soon as there were bare patches of ground in the spring; and the boys bringing bouquets of cowslips to the teacher.

"I would be singing and yodeling as I walked home from school," Collins recalled. "You remember the happy more than the bad things."