

Teaching
in
Rembrandt
1934-1938



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Part I: The Teaching Story

Preparation

Nurse, teacher, stenographer: those were the three career options for young women of the 1930's, or so it was assumed and generally accepted. Born in 1915, I was just such a young woman approaching the 30's decade with a need to choose my career path. My decision to train for teaching was simple enough: I knew I didn't want to be either a nurse or a stenographer. So teaching it was!

Teacher training at that time consisted of two years of general course work at a college. Waldorf College in Forest City, Iowa, was my choice because it was one of our Lutheran colleges, and it was somewhat near (about 60 miles) to our home in Thor. In addition, Father was a Lutheran minister and a Waldorf regent.

I had grown up needing to manage money carefully, and I remember keeping careful financial records during those two college years. One complete year, including tuition, room, board, and miscellaneous expenses, cost a total of \$492. This was at a time when it cost 1¢ to mail a postcard and 2¢ to send first class mail. Routine shoe repair cost

10¢. And yet a perm (where each curl was attached to the heating element) cost a whopping \$10. We avoided the expense of beauty parlors by doing each other's hair in the dorms.

Course work specific to teaching was minimal. I recall only a course in methods, psychology, and testing. Otherwise, the courses were spread among the various disciplines. I had some research to do for an intermediate reading paper. We had less than half a dozen visitations to a nearby grade school for observation. Practice teaching lasted only two weeks, and I recall being left in charge of the class only once for one period. My supervising teacher for this experience was the girl who had been my roommate the previous year at college--not exactly an experienced professional! That was it: that was the extent of my preparation for a profession I had slipped into because I knew I didn't want to do the other two.



Job Search

In the spring of 1934, I was one of twenty-four in my Waldorf class vying for the existing teaching positions. There were far fewer openings than there were applicants. I recall sending my applications to fifteen different schools in Iowa, hoping for a position in the middle grades. That process involved mailing a bulky resume completed in Palmer method penmanship. In two cases I also applied in person by visiting the board members at their homes. Then there was the eventual letter stating, "The position has been filled."

But the sixth grade opening at Rembrandt was different from the rest. It came to my attention through the back door, so to speak. My father had learned of it when visiting with Rembrandt's Lutheran minister at an area church conference. He had also secured the name of a person to whom I could send my application: board member John Mosbo (uncle of the man I would eventually marry). I believe this "inside track" set my application apart from all the others Rembrandt received through the customary route of board president. After a process of going to the homes of the board of education members and visiting with each, I was hired.

Job Conditions

My salary that first year was \$70.00 per month for nine months. That was one of the better compensations available to beginning teachers in 1934. Only one other fellow classmate of us twenty-four was compensated as well. I know of classmates who accepted positions for as little as \$40.00 per month. These were mainly in country schools, grades 1-8. My \$70.00 per month (\$630 per year) was total take-home pay, as we had no withholding for taxes, social security, or retirement plans. In my second year of teaching, that salary was increased by \$18.00 per month to give me the standard 10% raise everyone received plus an additional \$10.00 because as a starting teacher, I had begun at a salary \$10.00 per month less than the others.

In exchange for this pay, I was expected to perform my classroom duties, maintain my single status, remain in the community three or four weekends per month, and teach Sunday School. We teachers in training at Waldorf had been advised that there would be miscellaneous duties requested of us and that we should agree to whatever was asked and expected.

Once school began in the fall of 1934, I found the school demands to be rigorous. The school day with students began about 8:30. I had only a twenty-minute break from classes, and I spent that "break"

supervising study hall for two grades. Dismissal of students was at 3:45 or 4:00, but I often stayed until 6:00 PM in order to finish up and be prepared for the next day's classes. Occasionally we had a lunch hour away from students, because supervision was on a rotation system. It was not uncommon for us teachers to return to the school building on Saturdays to keep abreast of our paper work.

One particular Saturday stands out. I was the last of the teachers to leave the school building at about 6:00 PM. It was dark and bitterly cold. As the door latched shut, I noticed that a portion of my coat was caught in it. Since we teachers did not have building keys, there was nothing to do but wriggle out of the coat and run north to one of the residences for help.

In the 1934-1935 school year, Rembrandt Consolidated School employed nine teachers to serve nearly three hundred students in grades 1-12. One of those staff members was the superintendent, who also taught a couple classes. He, along with three others, managed the high school curriculum.

My own assignment involved all of the sixth grade and half of seventh. The eighth grade teacher shared the other half of the seventh grade needs, with the students traveling between our two rooms. They learned some of their subjects from me and the rest from my colleague. I was responsible for seventh grade instruction in geography, history, spelling, reading, art, English, and penmanship.

Additionally, I instructed sixth graders in all subjects except music. That was taught by one teacher hired to teach only music in all grades 1-12. The sixth graders remained in the room under my supervision when I taught my seventh grade classes.

I was even the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade girls' physical education teacher--a real stretch of my personal capabilities. Consider that when I had been involved in a girls' basketball game as a young girl and had seen the ball approaching me, I clenched my hands, jumped up and down, and merely watched excitedly. My baseball qualifications were equally lacking. I remember playing in my mid teens when boys and girls were on the same team. I stood in the field with both hands up, waiting expectantly to "catch" the ball. Needless to say, it landed a yard in front of me!

In my second year of teaching, I was moved down to assist with the newly departmentalized elementary. An additional teacher was hired to share some of my upper grade duties during the 1935-1936 year. I taught sixth grade arithmetic, geography, grammar, penmanship, and probably art, too. Added to this was seventh grade U. S. geography, fourth grade history and penmanship, and an assortment of other levels and courses.

My room for this year and the remaining two years in my Rembrandt teaching career, was the narrow space between the northwest and northeast classrooms on the main floor. This room, large

enough for just a few desks, was lit by a window on the north and one bare light bulb. I remember having my texts and references spread around in this space as I made lesson plans. I found it worked best to integrate the various subjects. I believe we called it "correlating" then. It wasn't necessarily the "in" teaching strategy nor was it expected by administration. I did it whenever possible because things just seemed to go better when they were synchronized.

Those years were not without their most embarrassing moments for me as a professional. Once when the music teacher had finished leading my class in the "Star Spangled Banner," I was so proud that the students had known to stand. Unfortunately, I found that I was still sitting!

On another occasion, my night-owl nature apparently got the best of me. I loved to read far into the night. That did not make it so easy to rise the next morning. It must have been one such late night that led to a different awakening than the usual Ames radio "Music Shop." This morning it was the landlord's message that school had already begun and that I had best hurry. In the meantime, a high school student had been dispatched to my classroom to read to my class until I arrived.

Our textbooks were good, but we had almost no supplementary material. There may have been one or two texts that were accompanied by

workbooks, but we mostly came up with our own activities and tests.

For this material that we created ourselves, there was a need for duplicating. We used the hectograph, an 18" x 8 1/2" device with rolls and cranks at each end and a sponge-like substance stretched between and rolled either direction. You began by creating your original with a hectography tool (for hand-written imprints) or hectograph carbon (for type-written imprints). This special original was then pressed against a fresh portion of the gelatinous, spongelike substance. Moisture was applied to transfer the image. The new image formed on the sponge, providing the surface against which blank sheets of paper were pressed one at a time and then peeled off. The last step in the process was to turn the roller on the hectograph to expose a fresh portion for the next user. Given enough time, the used portions dissolved their images and could be reused again and again.

During my four years of teaching from 1934-1938, students brought their sack lunches from home, keeping them in the cloak rooms until lunch time. It happened more than once that a mouse nibbled its way into the contents before lunch time rolled around.

At some point in this four-year span--at least for the last two years--the superintendent decided the school should provide something hot to complement these sack lunches. It fell the lot of a

teacher to coordinate this daily offering with the help of her high school home economics girls. They provided such hot foods as cocoa and tomato soup. I'm not sure how the teacher managed that, because in addition to the home economics class, she also taught typing, bookkeeping, shorthand, history, and girls' basketball.

While the students enjoyed their lunch time, the teachers who were not on supervision duty would walk back to the boarding house where a well-balanced meal awaited them for 20¢ each. Our version of a carry-out lunch was usually taken back to the teachers who had remained on duty.

Supervision of lunch and recess time was no special problem, as I recall. There are no incidents that come to mind that called for my intervention--the students just had a good time playing. During one indoor recess in the gym, I remember sitting on the brick wall of the balcony level and being able to sing at the top of my lungs without being noticed.

The only classroom discipline situations that remain a strong memory arose when students may have needed to share a textbook. This sharing activity sometimes disrupted the learning atmosphere for the thirty-six students in the room.

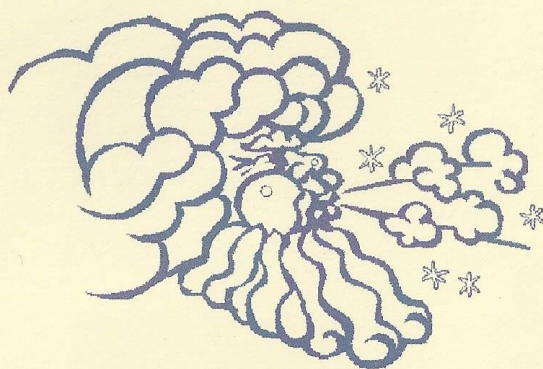
Winter of '36

During my second year of teaching, the infamous "winter of '36" had its impact on Rembrandt. We did not have school for about a month. We never knew from a Friday through the next Monday morning if this would be the week they would be able to open again. In the meantime, many of us whiled away the hours playing Bridge or Pitch. This was an especially curious dilemma for me. I had been raised in a Lutheran parsonage, with the evils of card-playing deeply impressed upon me. So I watched as others enjoyed Bridge, but I was ready to play Pitch with the player who ended up with the dummy hand. That was crazy--how the judgments were made of what was "dangerous" and what was okay.

That winter the snow was so high that when they finally dug out a path for the train, my companions and I were standing as high as the top of the train when it arrived at the depot. The Lutheran minister took a sled into town going cross-country from the parsonage about four miles out. He was needing to restock enough coal to keep them warm. With the snows and blizzards interrupting train deliveries, many goods such as coal were in short supply.

Two of the Rembrandt teachers tried to get to the train in Sioux Rapids. The path of least resistance--the one that was shoveled out--was

twelve miles. By the time they covered this added distance between the two towns, their train had already departed.



Part II: Life in the Community

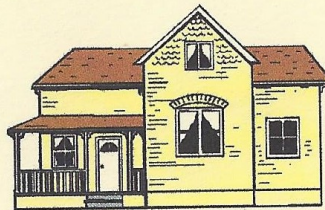
Living Arrangements

Living arrangements for single teachers in the Rembrandt community were ample and varied. Many homes stood ready to rent rooms and prepare meals. Once my teaching contract was signed and secured, I was given a list of these available room and board options. After investigating the possibilities, I chose to stay in the Sven and Bessie Hesla home directly south of the Lutheran town church. Mine was the northwest bedroom on the second floor. The room itself was tiny but comfortable. A large closet separated it from the bedroom to the south. The four windows overlooked the church and the street with its residences on the west and north. A hot water radiator under the north windows provided a cozy spot for my feet as I sat at my card table work surface.

One bathroom was shared by all who resided in the house. In addition to Sven and Bessie, this included Sven's brother and at least one other roomer besides me. During my second year, that person was another single female teacher. She was replaced by an osteopath the next year, so it wasn't

just single teachers who sought room and board in Rembrandt in those years.

Included in my rental fee of \$2.00 a week (\$8.00 a month) was laundering of the linens and even my personal clothing. I know that another teacher who roomed elsewhere paid only \$7.50 a month, but she was expected to share her double bed with another person on occasional weekends. Unlike many of the room and board arrangements, mine included a Saturday and Sunday evening meal with my landlords. I do not know what the other teachers might have done for food on their weekends. I suppose the cafe could have been an option on Saturday, but nothing was open on Sunday.



Food & Clothing

Food throughout the week days--three meals a day--was prepared at several homes. Breakfasts were 10¢, noon meals 20¢, and evening meals 30¢ or 35¢. For breakfast I remember cinnamon rolls and steamed rye bread. A noon lunch might find us enjoying creamed dried beef on toast, spinach, pie, and coffee. The evening meal would be the standard a meat, potatoes, and vegetable fare. Bread or rolls, salad, dessert, and beverage completed the dining experience.

Several of us had a breakfast and supper eating arrangement with Elmer and Leota Peterson, whose home was directly south of Sven and Bessie's, so it was a handy location for me. Bertha Cannoy prepared our lunches the first year. The next year Iva Odor was our noon cook. For my final two years, we ate this third meal at the Petersons'.

These board and room situations for teachers were understood to span the nine months of the school year. During the summer, we would return to our parental homes, in most cases.

It did not take a great deal of clothing to sustain us in those days. I had a half dozen or so dresses at any given time. That's what you wore, and you pretty much wore them out before replacing with anything different.

Social Life

Our leisure time in the community was spent in a variety of ways. We often went for walks after supper. Luther League met on Sunday nights and provided fellowship for young people through twenty or twenty-one years of age. I recall accompanying an instrumentalist for a Farm Bureau meeting and attending a 10¢ movie or two. The Barretts of Browning Street stands out in my memory, along with a travelogue of some sort.

Saturdays were often absorbed with paper work at the school, and Sunday mornings meant teaching Sunday School and attending church. Reading was a popular pastime. For me, the addition of my piano to the Hesla living room during my fourth and final year meant hours of musical enjoyment.

I helped Bessie with numerous tasks as needs arose. She liked for me to write name tags on funeral flowers where the writing needed to be small. I also remember helping make shower decorations, among them some Santa Claus figures fashioned out of apples.

Eventually, of course, the teachers' social lives progressed from individual and group activities to dating situations with various bachelors in the community. Nearly every young woman who taught in Rembrandt in the thirties decade, married a local

man. Most remained in the community to live and raise their families.

This pattern of professional women staying to raise the next generation of the relatively small Rembrandt community, is thought to have contributed to the school's reputation for academic excellence. One of the classes rated in the 98th percentile of all similar-grade students on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The system produced at least one National Merit Scholar and several other students who advanced to the honorable mention and runner-up categories of this prestigious testing program.

Once the war years began in the early forties, a greater need for teachers arose. Regulations about remaining single were relaxed so that married women were allowed to join or remain in the teaching ranks. Eventually the two-year teacher training requirement was boosted to four years. Neither of these developments affected me directly. After my four years of teaching from 1934-1938, I was marrying a Rembrandt farmer and was happy to settle in to family life. Besides, those four years of teaching had seemed like a lifetime as a career woman. It was certainly enough for me, anyway!

APPENDIX



Sample Lunch Menus

noodles & dried beef deluxe
red kidney bean salad
peach pie

macaroni & cheese
beef sandwiches
cabbage/carrot/tomato/peanut salad
chocolate roll

beef with noodles
grape/marshmallow/banana/celery salad
chocolate cupcakes

toasted cheese sandwiches
beef/carrot/potato/pea/onion hot dish
orange jello/coconut/pineapple/whipped cream salad

ham sandwiches
baked beans
orange/apple/marshmallow salad
chocolate pudding & graham cracker dessert

fish flakes, potatoes, & eggs
peach cheese salad
lemon pie

ham & scalloped corn
cabbage & grape salad
white cake with coconut frosting

goulash
cabbage & tomato salad
lemon cake pie

salmon supreme
kidney bean salad
red baked apple with whipped cream

minced ham & egg sandwich
macaroni & cheese
cabbage & banana salad
chess pie

hamburger & canned spaghetti
sliced tomatoes
cream puffs

vegetable soup
cranberry salad
cake with frosting & nuts baked on

meat pie with baking powder biscuits
1/2 banana with nuts & dressing
whipped jello with prunes & cream

lima beans & bacon
pea/cheese/egg/pickle salad
blitz torte

veal loaf sandwiches
rice with cheese
raw carrot salad
surprise pudding

scalloped corn
lettuce & ground meat sandwich
pea/cheese/egg/celery salad
raisin tarts

Sample Dinner Menus

swiss steak
mashed potatoes
boiled cabbage
cake topped with jello

meat loaf & hot rolls
onion scalloped potatoes
carrot/celery/apple/orange salad
pineapple & banana dessert

liver & onions
fresh fried potatoes
jello & fruit

pigs in blankets
scalloped potatoes
lettuce & mixed fruit salad
egg on toast dessert--apricot on gelatin froth on cake

steak & dressinig
baked stuffed potatoes
corn oysters
baked apple with dream bars

browned pork chops
mashed carrots
kidney bean salad
chocolate pudding

baked salmon with egg sauce
buttered spinach
baked potatoes

macaroni & corned beef
tomato & lettuce salad
chocolate cake

beef stew & noodles
boiled potatoes
hot rolls
buttered carrots
orange cupcakes

porcupines
buttered potatoes
hot buns
buttered beans
gooseberry dessert

fried chicken & dressing
mashed potatoes
lemon jello/cabbage/carrot/apple on lettuce
chocolate cookies dessert

ham loaf
shoe-string potatoes
stewed tomatoes
fried egg plant
lemon pudding

mock duck
baked potatoes
creamed corn
prune/jello/whipped cream dessert

baked ham
riced potatoes
scalloped string beans
pumpkin pie

weiners, cheese, & bacon
rutabagas
hot buns
chocolate ice box dessert

Some of Leota's Recipes

Ham & Scalloped Corn

Place small pieces of ham in bottom of casserole.

Over them pour:

1 tbsp minced green pepper

1 tsp salt

2 tbsp butter

1 can whole kernel corn

2 tbsp sugar

2 tbsp flour

2 eggs

Combine all and sprinkle top with corn flakes or crumbs. Bake 40-50 minutes.

Goulash

2 lbs hamburger

1 onion

1 box macaroni

1 quart tomatoes

1 can kidney beans

salt

Fry hamburger with onion until meat changes color.

Cook macaroni. Add all the rest. Put buttered crumbs on top.

Baked Rice & Cheese

1/2 c rice

4 c milk

2 tbsp butter

2 tbsp flour

1/2 tsp salt

1/3 lb cheese

2/3 c buttered crumbs

Cook rice in 3 cups milk. Make white sauce of rest.

Add grated cheese. Stir until cheese melts.

Ham Loaf

2 lbs pork

1 lb ham

1 c milk

2 eggs

3/4 c crumbs

1 pt tomatoes

onion, pepper, salt

Grind pork & ham. Place meat, milk, eggs, onions, salt, & pepper in pan. Add crumbs on top. Pour tomatoes over this. Bake 2 hours.

Lemon Pie

4 egg yolks

1/2 c sugar

juice & rind of 1 lemon

Cook in double boiler. Beat 4 egg whites. add 1/2 c sugar. Mix in other ingredients. Bake fast in one crust.

Butterscotch Pie

1 c brown sugar

1 3/4 c water

pinch of salt

2 tbsp flour

2 egg yolks

vanilla

2 egg whites for top

Prune Pie

1 c mashed prunes

1/2 c cream

1/4 c sugar

2 egg yolks

2 egg whites for top

Mock Cherry Pie

1 or 1 1/2 c chopped cranberries

1/2 c raisins

1 c sugar

2 tbsp flour

1/2 c water

Mix sugar & flour. Add to cranberries & raisins.

Add water. Bake with 2 crusts.

Chocolate Pie

1 c sugar

1 heaping tbsp cornstarch

1 heaping tbsp cocoa

1 c boiling water

vanilla & salt

beaten egg whites on top

Sour Cream Pie

1 c sour cream

1/2 c raisins

1/2 tsp cinnamon

1 c sugar

1/4 tsp cloves

3 egg yolks & 1 egg white

2 egg whites beaten with 2 tbsp sugar for top

(to the best of my memory)

Boarding Options

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