



Clinton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 174
Saint Johns, Michigan 48879

THE CLINTON INDEPENDENT

February, 1987



Clem Sohn prepares for his last jump.
Courtesy of Marian Sohn

EVENT: "A 50th Year Remembrance"...of Clements A. Sohn who gave his life in Paris, France, April 25, 1937. It was his quest to promote aviation by attempting, as the original batwing jumper, the perfection of his art.

DATE: April 25, 1987 - 1 p.m. Most Holy Trinity Cemetery, Fowler with reception following at 2 p.m. at Most Holy Trinity Parish Hall, Fowler.

DISPLAYS: The Michigan Historical Museum will loan Paine-Gillam-Scott Museum at St. Johns Sohn's bat-man wings; and an aviation display will also be at the cemetery. Anyone with memorabilia, vocal or artifacts should contact Catherine Rumbaugh at 224-7402 or Charles Coletta, CCHS president, at 224-4577.

'I have taught in schools by the side of the road...'

(Editor's note: Excerpted from an article written by CCHS member Dorothy Cressman and published in the Clinton County News Dec. 9, 1986)

One thing that was expected of the country school teacher was that she put on a "major production" Christmas program. Each year you had to try to outdo all other teachers as well as your own program of the previous year.

So, about the first of November I would go through all my Christmas material....

I learned early on ... that I had to have a copy of who got each name, as someone would surely lose one (gift exchange)....

...there was always a goodly number of children who came in nearly in tears with "Mrs. Cressman my play part got lost,"....or, "the dog chewed up my song sheet."

...Oh, how we did practice! There were popcorn chains;...we had to decide on the best Christmas gift to make for mother. I remember the plaster hand casts, gilded macaroni plaques; the shadow boxes...A beautiful Christmas invitation had to be made to take home and one for Grandpa and Grandma too.

...Boxes had to be filled with candy and nuts for each school child; and extras for little brothers and sisters.

In my case, "Hubby" was always my "Santa." ("Hubby" is Almond Cressman).

...the school board...put up a makeshift stage, usually a board platform set on some cement blocks. Recitation benches had to be unscrewed from the floor and the seats all made portable. Folding chairs...brought in from a neighboring church or Grange Hall.

...there was the helter-skelter of decorating it (tree) with those precious red and green daisy chains... Popcorn all over the floor and paste all over the desks.

(Referring to program night)...
...teacher runs home long enough to grab a bite to eat and change clothes before getting back to the school house by 6:30 p.m. She must have the fire stoked for the evening; and be ready to receive the early families.

...children start to arrive in their finest attire; faces and neck and ears duly scrubbed. Hair is freshly cut, curled or plastered down....coats and hats are piled or hung wherever possible.Parents greet each other and search out the best seats.

...children mill around the makeshift curtain, not being nearly as quiet as they have been instructed to be. ...the room is soon packed but they keep coming - cousins by the dozens. ... the overflow has to stand in the cloak rooms.

BUT WHERE ARE MARY AND JOHNNY?
Mary has the lead part and Johnny is our strongest singer. We can't start without them.

...We'll just have to have the audience sing some Christmas songs while we wait...teacher leaves her vigil and goes to the piano. Part way into "Jingle Bells" there is a crash behind the curtain... someone has tipped over a table.

....(program begins)...."in a very tiny voice she recites.... of course, mother and teacher can understand every word.

Tommy is next...he says (one line) and his mind goes blank.... After repeating "And I never could forget it" two or three times, someone in the audience said, "I guess, by God, you did forget it." The audience roars and poor Tommy runs off the stage in tears.

...a drill, each child having a letter to spell out "Merry Christmas." All are lined up in proper order and start onto the stage. Betty trips...falls...she is crushed. She picks it (her letter) up, bottom side up.....



Dorothy Cressman

*I have taught in schools by the side of the road,
Where the children of time pass through...
— from On Retiring by Dorothy Cressman*

Dorothy Cressman, of St. Johns, was a teacher in Clinton County for 25 years. She taught at the Sherwood School from 1932 to 1934, the Olive Center School during the 1934-35 school year, the Plowman School from 1953 to 1956, the Chapman School from 1956 to 1959 and the Gunnison School from 1959 to 1975.

These are her memories of Christmas at a one room schoolhouse.

.....Lynn, looking for some mischief to get into, reaches and grabs Duane's suspenders. He gives it a good stretch and then lets go. Poor Duane has a good stinger. Lynn's grandfather bursts into a howling roar. Then everyone laughs.but the show must go on.

Finally it is time for the ending pageant. Behind the curtain, Mary and Joseph, dressed in their long robes, are kneeling behind the manger, which contains a doll....the curtain opens and the Wise Men enter. Then come the shepherds but Frank catches his foot in his robe and falls into the manger. The Baby Jesus rolls off the stage....Poor Frank.

Some fathers soon retrieve Jesus...the show goes on...

About the time Santa's bells are heard outside the schoolhouse the teacher can breathe a sigh of relief. Santa can take over the show for a while.

....In spite of the unforeseen mishaps it has been really a very good program and perhaps more entertaining than if all had gone without a hitch.

....its all over...happy but tired children try to unscramble the coats, boots and mittens; and depart for home. The teacher and a few stragglers are left amidst the Christmas wrappings; popcorn and peanut shells. Thus is culminated a months worth of very hard work, and oh, such stress.....many hours of overtime and no extra pay.

As teacher sinks back into her chair in complete exhaustion, the sounds of happiness still ringing in her head, she can't help but musing, "Was it really worth all the effort?"

Now, many years later, the answer is clear - I look back on those Christmas programs and so many other country school experiences as some of the happiest memories of my teaching career.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CCHS GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

- Feb. 19 7:30 Capitol Federal Savings & Loan, St. Johns
No program plans available at press time

GENEALOGY DIVISION

- Feb. 2 Family history tapes by Janet Tiedt; Capitol Federal, St. Johns, 7:30
- March 2 Mich. History by Arlene Lounds, Capitol Federal, St. Johns, 7:30 p.m.
- April 6 Election of officers; Janet Snyder on "Gazateer & Directory." Archives at DeWitt Township Hall, 7:30 p.m.

ARCHIVES At DeWitt Township Hall, Brook Road, one block SE of U.S.27 & State; Hours, 8 a.m.- 3 p.m. Mon-Wed.

PAINE GILLAM SCOTT MUSEUM

(On Maple Street, across from Courthouse, in St. Johns).

Closed for Winter; Reopens April 5. (See first page for inf. on special April display at museum on Clem Sohn)

PGS's reprint of "Headlight Flashes Along the Grand Trunk Railway System" can be purchased from Treasure Chest or St. Johns Chamber of Commerce, both in St. Johns.

For museum information while PGS is closed call Paul Roof at 224-3542 or Sharon Worrell at 224-6195.

DUES ARE DUE --- DUES ARE DUE.....

Dues for the current year are now due. \$4 for single; \$7 for couples. Mail checks to Janet M. Tiedt, 551 N. Main St., Fowler, Mi. 48835-0044.

Your dues support CCHS programs. And, your name on our CCHS current membership roster will keep the Independent being delivered to your home. Send your checks, please.



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