

## Memories of Pine Grove School House ca. 1947-1949

On a bright sunny day in early June, I met with a local long-time resident of Avon who had actually attended the Pine Grove School House shortly before it closed in 1949. What a treat to meet this individual who recounted her recollections of attending there for her first and second grades. Her cornflower blue eyes sparkled as she related these pleasant tales to me and I will set them forth now for your enjoyment.

I started the conversation inquiring about what memories she may have had about her daily school life. She recounted that School No. 7 was known as Pine Grove School and at the time she attended, there were about 20 students of various ages comprising all 6 grade levels. She recalled that Hilda Mutch was her teacher for both years. There was a lesson plan drawn up for each week and it included the subjects of reading, spelling, arithmetic, penmanship, geography, social studies and science. What today would be termed 'fine arts', music and art were also taught.

My subject described the school room itself telling me that the teacher had at her disposal two large slate boards and an actual blackboard, the latter being suspended on ropes with weights and pulleys so that the board could be raised and lowered to access maps or the cabinets behind. Something she recalled was that the teacher would check each student's hands for cleanliness and overall appearance. On very cold days the teacher would warm up milk or soup for the children who could not go home so they would have a hot meal. If a child was sick or hurt, she would send one child to the neighboring farm to get someone who owned a car to drive the child home. Mrs. Mutch would simultaneously teach each grade level having some of the younger children working on one subject and the older ones on another. My subject said it was sometimes difficult for her to focus on her work without being distracted by other students doing their studies. Although somewhat of a challenge, learning in this manner gave students a valuable life skill on how to concentrate in a group setting.

I asked about recess time in the school yard. She told me that the children played games such as tag, red rover, steal the bacon, one old cat, jump rope and hopscotch. She recalled that some of the older children would be rather possessive of the swings that hung from the large oak trees on the property.

I asked her to relay her typical school day from start to finish. She told me that she and her brother arose early and were fed breakfast by her father who was a farmer and therefore already up early to milk the cows. In winter he would warm their clothes before they left for school on the hot water heater in the upstairs bathroom or by the woodstove in the kitchen. Then she and her brother walked to school. The teacher would stand on the steps and ring the hand bell when it was time for the children to come in from the school yard to start their studies and she said that if they were late leaving home they could hear the bell and knew they had to hurry up. Each morning the flag was raised on its wooden mast and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited and the National anthem or some other patriotic song was sung by the children. Inside the school room was an oil heater to keep the children warm in winter. There was an iron sink with a hand pump inside the building but also a water bubbler for drinking that was filled from the spring at Cold Spring Farm directly across the road. She recalled that they walked home for lunch and then returned for more studies later in the afternoon. I asked what her favorite subject was and she told me that she always enjoyed spelling and reading. I inquired if homework was assigned and she didn't recall that there was at her young grade level but supposed that perhaps her brother, who was three years her senior, may have been given homework or allowed to finish work the next day. I asked if there were any special tasks the children did to assist the teacher. She said that she sometimes cleaned the blackboards or swept the front steps.

I asked my interviewee to recount a favorite school memory. Her face just lit up in happy recollection as she told me this story. She said that the retired Rural Superintendent of Schools, Lewis S. Mills, paid the Pine Grove School House a visit one day. She recalled he was an imposing figure dressed in his black suit. In order to interact with the students, Mr. Mills involved both the younger and older children in projects. My subject, along with another child, was asked to participate in a little play. She said she was rather shocked to be chosen and her heart was just pounding as the three of them stood in the cloakroom entry way discussing the play. She says that to this day she does not remember the content of the play, but that she felt very happy leaving school that day as she enjoyed being a part of it. She also mentioned that the older children, including her brother, were shown how to draw a log cabin using a ruler to measure specific places on the paper that were then connected with straight lines to create a perspective drawing of a perfect log cabin. This was something of amazement and made a lasting impression on her.

It is clear that my subject has many fond memories of attending the Pine Grove School House. She speaks of her time there in such a loving manner and proudly told me that everyone who attended there went on to become successful adults which was quite a tribute to the teaching abilities of Mrs. Mutch and the other able teachers before her!

The Pine Grove School House located at 3 Harris Road and the intersection of West Avon Road is owned and maintained by the Avon Historical Society. It is open on Sundays during the summer from 2 to 4 p.m. Please stop by to see this relic of early education as there aren't very many one-room school houses left.