

Whatever Happened To All Those Third Graders?

by Warren K. Deem

The third grade class at Champaign's Avenue School, was a pretty spiffy looking group, compared to the school children of today. Just imagine- the boys with neat haircuts, wearing jackets or sweaters, and even neckties. Knee pants were in. There was not a lot of variation in either the boys or girls haircuts, but everyone was pretty neat (original meaning).

I think we learned pretty well: how to read, how to hold a pencil or pen, how to make thousands of interlocking circles in pursuit of Palmer Penmanship perfection. We learned how to write, and how to add a column of figures.

And there was discipline. Most kids in that era would have nearly died of embarrassment and shame if they had done something so bad, it required going to the Principal's Office. Bad- was whispering in class--chewing gum--throwing a spitball or passing a note to a classmate.

It has become almost a humorous classic for Grandpa to tell the kids, "Why-when I was a boy-we walked through snowdrifts waist-high to get to school." Well-- we did!.

Nobody had even thought of a school bus or school lunches. Champaign was not very big at that time, and there were enough grade schools. No one had far to go, so we walked to school. Where we lived, determined where we went to school--our classmates were our neighbors.

I think nothing is left of the Avenue School. According to my memory, it was located a bit west of West Side Park on University Avenue. Home was on Park Street at that time, so it was a six or eight block walk through West Side Park, past the fountain where the Indian prayed for rain, past the band-shell and out onto University Avenue, not far from school.

Odd that I have nearly as strong a recollection of my first and second grade classes at Gregory School. That was not far from a railroad line used by the Wabash Railroad. (Yes Virginia--there was a WABASH Railroad). We knew it was almost time to go home for lunch when the low throaty whistle of the Wabash announced its arrival.

Odd that the Gregory school was still standing (at least on my last visit)--although it was an old school when I entered first grade, in about 1922.

I spent only 1 year at Avenue School. Thereafter my pursuit of learning was carried on at the new South Side School for grades four through seven. At that time, I thought Miss McCall was an impressive teacher--and that Ruth Margaret Wilson was the prettiest girl in the whole school.

The down hill sloping land beside the school was great for sledding in winter, and in better weather, the downhill sidewalk was super for skating. (Remember how the skate clamps ruined lots of shoe soles?)

After the seventh grade, we converged from all the grade schools, for the combined 8th. grade at Central School at Randolph and Hill--a forerunner, I suppose, of what was later to be Junior High. After High School-lots of people scattered here and there. Maybe some are still around.

Wouldn't it be interesting to hold a 60th. Anniversary Reunion of the Champaign High School Class of 1934. Some exploration of that idea is going on right now and if any readers of this publication were in that class please get in touch. (See Address under AVENUE THIRD photo.)