

History of Schools of the Upper Row River Valley

Dorena School is the only original school upriver that is still open. It started out as Chrisman School in 1891. The name Dorena did not come into being until 1899 when Postmaster Alfred Bigelow named the town after two local women, Dora Burnette and Rena Martin. As the town obtained a Post Office and an official name, the name of the school followed suit.



"Old Dorena" about 1938

In the very early years school was only in session 14 weeks a year, with one teacher who taught as many as 40 kids from 1st through 7th grades in one room.

A new two room building was added in 1907 and another teacher was hired. In 1909 schools were required by law to be in session for 6 months a year. Dorena School added a High School class around 1912. In 1914 there was a big community celebration at Dorena School with 200 people in attendance celebrating the schools progress.

In 1936 the last graduating class left Dorena High School, after which Dorena teenagers were bused to Cottage Grove High School. When Dorena Dam was constructed, the School moved to a new building a few miles upriver from its original site reopening in 1946. That school building still serves Kindergarten through 8th grade Students.

Disston School was in operation from 1912 until 1961. The school and the town both took their name from the Disston saw blades used at the local lumber mill. The old gym is still standing on private property. The oldest first-grader at Disston School was a 17

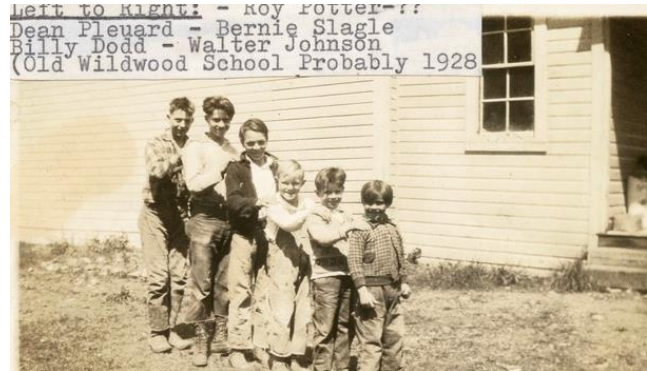


year old named Signe. She had just **immigrated** from Sweden and decided to spend a year in the first grade to learn English.

In an interview with Lena Carr taped in 1979 she tells this story about the school:

“The teacher would have the littlest kids sit on his lap during lessons. He wore an alarm clock around his neck to let him know when the lessons would end, and the little kids would surreptitiously turn the hands of the clock forward so that they could get out of school earlier. One little girl accidently turned the hands the wrong way, prolonging the agony of the class.”

Wildwood School was the oldest school in the Row River Valley, opening in 1884. It closed down in 1940. The old building remains on private property on Lower Brice Creek Road.



Culp Creek School enjoyed a long run. It opened in 1885 and closed in 1989. The large gymnasium at the school was the pride of the area and many events and activities were held there. The Culp Creek School building enjoys new life today as Child’s Way Charter School.

There were some other small schools in the area that came and went quickly. The Doolittle School near Cerro Gordo was open from 1906 until 1916 and served children of the Doolittle and Crites families.

In the old days each school was often its own School District. At one point there were 200 School Districts in Lane County. Some years ago, a law was passed that required every School District to have a High School. At that point the many small Districts surrounding Cottage Grove merged to become the South Lane School District, which included the little schools of the Row River Valley.

Discussion Points

1. Which two schools still serve students?
 2. Why did so many schools exist in an area with such a small population?
-

Vocabulary

Immigrated: come to live permanently in a foreign country

Prolonging: continuing for a long time or longer than usual; lengthy

Surreptitiously: in a way that attempts to avoid notice or attention; secretly

