

The Home Front



by
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Melba School memories

Education among Mennonites in southern Manitoba has undergone many changes since they settled here in the 1870s. Private schools were begun, but slowly district schools replaced them. There were at least 10 established by the mid-1880s and their number continued to grow.

A few weeks ago we told you a bit about the history of the Melba School. It was located northeast of Horndean, Man. and opened its doors for its first term in fall of 1920. At the time, we questioned who had been the very first teacher, and names of other early teachers at Melba.

To our surprise several former students identified themselves, and even one, Justina (Harder) Thiessen, now a resident of Altona, who had attended the school in its very first year.

Mrs. Thiessen, now 93, recalls her early school years clearly. "I was an easy learner," she says. "I began school at Rosefarm, and then switched to Melba S.D. when the brand-new school opened in fall, 1920." Justina and her husband Jacob now reside in Buffalo Point, Altona.

Our first teacher was Mr. Jacob N. Hoepfner. "We all thought he was a handsome man. But we found out he had a girlfriend and they soon got married," says Mrs. Thiessen. A teacherage was quickly built and

the couple was able to reside in it for his second term.

I had two other teachers: J.D. Driedger, a nice Christian man, and Jacob H. Janzen. But regretfully my dad didn't believe in a lot of schooling and so I quit after Grade 6, she says.

"The school was also used for Sunday School, Sunday services and other church events, even for weddings. My brother, Diedrich, was married at the school, notes Mrs. Thiessen.

There were a lot of farms in the district then, and Mr. Jacob M. Martens was a well-known blacksmith, quite renowned in the district. We'd go shopping to Horndean, and occasionally we'd go to Plum Coulee.

The Thiessens, now married 73 years, are a pleasant couple and still in good health.

Henry M. Hiebert, of Altona, also attended Melba SD. "I began in 1926 with Mr. D.K. Doerksen. I think he taught here for 14 years, and he was my only teacher. I also remember Jac. Kroeker, a Pokrant lady, and Wm. Doerksen, who invented a carburetor during his years here."

Several others told of attending the rural school in later years. It closed in Dec., 1966.



Justina Harder (now Thiessen) was a pupil in Melba School when it opened.
(Elmer Heinrichs Photo)