

# Interview of Lowell and Van Mathre

By  
JoeMagliari  
And  
Monica Prombo

**Joe:** How many years did you attend a one-room schoolhouse?

**Lowell:** Well, I went to McCaslin school for first through eighth grade. It was at the end of Hughes Road and Helmar Road. My first grade teacher was Harry Sheets and then second grade I think was Dorothy Olson. And part of third was Dorothy and then Marian Christian and Elma Christian. I'm not sure which year but they taught kind of together.

**Monica:** Were most of your teachers women or men at that time?

**Lowell:** Mostly women. In first and fifth they were men teachers.

**Monica:** What was a typical school day like? What subjects were you taught?

**Lowell:** Reading and arithmetic, geography, penmanship. Also there was orthography I think in sixth grade. See when you were in a one room school house you could hear what it was they were teaching in first grade and through all the grades so if you didn't hear it one time you might get it the next time. So it worked out. I thought it was great because you could hear what was going on in other classes and learn it to. I was worried about orthography because it was such a hard class. It was the definition of words and how you put them together. Many people don't even remember orthography or know what I'm talking about.

**Monica:** Since the older kids had been through these classes so many times, did they usually help the teacher teach the younger students?

**Lowell:** Oh they did I'm sure. There was a closeness in the school.

**Monica:** About how many students were typically in a one-room schoolhouse?

**Lowell:** Probably about a dozen. Maybe more. Maybe less.

**Monica:** Was talking allowed or were the teachers really strict and they expected you to remain very quiet?

**Lowell:** Well if you acted up my first grade teacher, Harry Sheets, would come up next to the boy I sat behind and whack him on the head. The noise was enough to scare you. They could punish or reprimand a kid more in those days than they could today. If you got in trouble at school you got in trouble at home. You got a double licking.

**Monica:** What pranks, if any, did you play on your teacher?

**Lowell:** In first grade I remember the older kids, the teacher had a model A Ford, they would take thorns off of a hedge tree and put them under his tires. I don't know if it ever worked or not. I'm sure there were other pranks. I just don't remember.

**Monica:** What games did you play during recess?

**Lowell:** Well there was Andy-I-Over. You would throw a ball over the schoolhouse and then whoever caught the ball would run around the schoolhouse and tag as many people that you could. I remember one this one kid and I were both running around the school and we hit each other by the corner and almost knocked each

other out. Also we played ball. We played Fox and Geese. And May I and Hide-the-Thimble. We did have a nice Merry-go-round that we played on.

Monica: What were Box Socials?

Lowell: The girls would make up boxes of maybe candy or food and decorate it, and they were hoping they would get somebody they liked to buy it.

Van enters

Lowell: She went to school for eight years. She can probably remember more than I can.

Monica: Hi. We were just talking about box socials.

Van: Well, our mothers would pack a lunch and the girls would take them to the social and the guys would bid on them.

Lowell: And then whoever's box you bought you got to eat lunch with.

Van: I don't know if Lowell already talked about it, but something that we did at school was put on plays. There was a company that went around the countryside selling drop screen that had advertisements. Some of them advertised elevators and grocery stores. There was a large frame with the advertisements around the edge and then a pretty scenery picture of the woods with some animals in it. And that was hung up the front of the school. And I don't remember what the plays were, but I do remember being in the plays.

Monica: Did you ever get vacations such as Spring Break or Christmas break?

Lowell: I know we did get a couple of days off for Christmas probably.

Van: But not a lengthy period of time like you do now.

Monica: What type of clothes did you wear?

Van: Well we never had jeans. We (the girls) always had to wear dresses.

Lowell: Knickers and high socks. If you were lucky you may have a pair of overalls.

Van: And I think there was only one style of shoe – laced up leather ones.

Monica: Could you share a favorite memory of attending a one-room schoolhouse? Is there anything in particular that stands out in your mind?

Van: Something I remember and this is more of a personal basis is there was this little boy and he was a little mischievous. But he wasn't old enough to go to school yet. And his dad farmed right across from my family. Our schoolteacher was his neighbor, and she was a real character – strict but a real character. And one day the boy came over to the school and saw that the back window was open. So he climbed up on something and put his puppy through the open window. He went home and later on the teacher talked to him about it and he could never figure out how she could know that he did that. He was just little enough. He didn't know she would ever find out who did it. Also one thing that was unique to my school was the bomb shelter. I went to school during WWII so they built one in the ground. We never had anything down there such as food or water. It was just there in case of a bomb threat. Of course it was a neat place to play also.

Monica: What school did you attend?

Van: That was the Wright SchoolHouse.

**Monica: If you had to choose between a modern school or a one room school which would it be and why?**

**Van: That's a hard one to choose because you have so many more opportunities now. The pace of living was much slower back then though and that was better to learn.**

**Lowell: Well there was a certain closeness, and the kids. We were all together. If one got sick we all got sick.**

**Van: And we didn't fight. There was no fighting or brawling.**

**Lowell: I think you got more help in a one-room schoolhouse. A lot of times I think the teachers were more dedicated. They didn't get paid hardly anything.**

**Van: They were definitely there because they wanted to be. They enjoyed teaching.**

**Lowell: Sometimes anymore it seems they are there just because it is a job.**

**Van: Well in a one room school house there was maybe only nine or ten students, and the teacher could pay more attention to individual students.**