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One-Room-School Teacher: Louise E. Latimer

by Wenona L. Dunn



She was just past nine years old when she came to Oklahoma Territory from Kansas in a covered wagon with her parents and five brothers and sisters. Actually, there were two wagons — one driven by her father and the other by her mother.

Her father had bought a farm in Cleveland County, sight unseen, from an enterprising land agent. Those unsavory characters sometimes sold the same piece of land to several people, and the first to arrive took possession — not knowing that others had also bought the place. This family of Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Latimer was more fortunate than some of the others. When they arrived at the 80-acre farm southeast of Lexington, they found the two-room frame house unoccupied and moved in. The year was 1896.

Too small for a family of six? Yes indeed, but in the yard was a small one-room log cabin with a sleeping loft. This became quarters for the children, ranging in age from nineteen down to three years of age. When the oldest daughter married in 1900, the lower floor became the home for her and her husband for a time, and the others slept in the loft.

The older children helped around the

farm and the younger children attended the small two-room country school nearby. It was a two-room school by virtue of having a curtain hanging from a wire stretched across the middle of the one large room. At one time, about a hundred pupils attended this school.

When Louise E. Latimer completed this school, which went only to the eighth grade, she attended a State Normal School and obtained a certificate to teach the lower grades. She was about seventeen years old at the time.

In the early spring of 1906, the family moved to a farm in far Western Custer County — located four miles north of Foss. Louise stayed in Cleveland County to finish out the school term, along with her oldest brother who stayed to farm the old home place until it could be sold.

As it happened, school closed early that year because the principal and teacher of the upper grades became ill. Louise caught the train to Foss and joined her family there. Just across the road from their farm was a small one-room school which had lost its teacher, a young man, because some of the "tough boys," who delighted in tormenting the teacher, whoever it happened to be, had "run him off."

The School Board came to Louise and

asked her if she would take the school and finish the term. She accepted, and the young toughs had met their match! That little woman, weighing barely one hundred pounds and standing a mere five feet tall, took the school and finished the term. Those boys knew they had a teacher!

Over the years, Louise taught in several small country schools in Washita County after her parents moved to that county. She usually boarded with a family in the district in those early years, but in 1929 she bought a Model A Ford and she was a familiar figure as she drove to and from her schools. During the summer months, she attended Southwestern State Teachers College in Weatherford and obtained her high-school diploma and a lifetime teachers' certificate.

She retired, after some thirty years of teaching in one- and two-room schools, in order to help care for her aged parents. At 96 years of age, she has outlived many of those children whom she taught. Many others continue to be productive citizens of communities throughout Oklahoma. She lives now in a nursing home in Elk City, Oklahoma and loves to relate stories of those early years of teaching in Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and in the great state of Oklahoma.