



## PRAIRIE RIDGE SCHOOL

by Ned Graham

I called Charlene (Robertson) Harmes when I learned that there was to be a series of articles from the Historical Museum regarding bygone one room schools in Cowley County. She sent me pictures and notes from her mother (Lorita Robertson) that brought back a lot of memories.

The Graham boys, Ted, Ned, and Jerry attended Prairie Ridge in the mid 1940s which was about two miles from our farm. If we ever walked, it was because we couldn't catch "Silver" who was the meanest horse in the township. It took two of us to get the bridle on him, one to put on the bridle, and the other to push Silver off your foot while you did it. You really couldn't blame him because he knew the next thing would be that all three of us would get on and head off to school. Jerry, being the youngest, had to ride on the far back end. He would fall off the back frequently, both from inattention and sometimes being pushed. Well, what were little brothers for? When we reached the school, there was an open lean-to shed complete with individual stalls for the horses.

Anyway, if it was cold, the teacher (one year was Hildred Shup, the next was Lois Hardin) would be building a fire in the coal stove. There was an overhead kerosene light with an air pump, but no running water. We had a well pump outside, with a bucket and a single cup that everyone drank out of. Nobody wanted to drink after Martha because it was rumored she had cooties.

The school was one big room with a long bench at the front where each grade went to "recite". I remember one semester, I was the only one in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This was the only time when I was the smartest kid in my class.

There were two privies, both outside of course. They were pretty fancy in that they were both "two holers". One of the highlights of the school term of 1947 was when "graffiti" showed up in the boys' privy. All the boys were sequestered in the schoolroom and required to submit samples of their handwriting (both right and left handed). There were threats of eternal damnation and, Good Heavens, even worse if the County Superintendent found out. The fallout would have been apocalyptic!! About halfway through the inquisition, I would have been happy to have confessed, but I didn't even know what the offensive word meant.

The Coon boys, Kenneth, Don, and Shorty all had horses. One was called Flicka, the other two were various colorful expletives, depending on the situation. Their horses were all faster than Silver, except when he was headed for the barn...then it was "hang on and hope there were no clotheslines in the path".

Then there was Charlene with her tantalizing red pigtails. She had a horse named Betty who could dance and count to ten. That was way better than Jerry could do.

We had the Shelton girls, Mary and Phyllis, and a little sister nobody paid any attention to. They could really sing, though. We had the Branson boys, Joe and Charlie, the Andes boys,