

EDUCATION

According to the records in the _____ school in Portage County, our grandfather, John Peregrin Blaska attended school during a six year period. I say during, as there were considerably shortened school sessions in those days, compared with ours, at present. Our father, John Matthew, attended ^{the one-room} Oak Lawn School, along with his sister, Anna (Fisher) shortly after the school was built. Records from that school, and Sacred Hearts School in Sun Prairie, indicate that he completed a total of _____ years of elementary school. He did not attend high school. Our mother attended Pyburn ^{one-room} school in Deansville, Wisconsin, and also Sacred Hearts Catholic school in Sun Prairie for a period of _____ years. Our mother and dad first met when they attended Sacred Hearts school, and they walked home together, he the $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles and she 5 miles. Sometimes, she said, Pa would walk all of the way home with her, and then walk cross-lots to get back to his own home. Our mother was the advocate for education in our family, making sure that we attended school as she wished for us to have the education she didn't have. There were continuing fights over education between our mother and dad—he feeling it was useless, especially for the girls who would marry, anyway, and as soon as the boys were physically able, they were needed on the farm to help plant and harvest the crops, and otherwise supplement the adult work force. Many times these fights took place in the barn ^{and cursing} during milking the cows. On summer evenings when the doors were open, we could hear our dad yelling ^{and cursing} about education that would "bankrupt him". with her insistence that the children get a high school education. Mother always said that because she was "healthy and strong", she was the one in her family to work in the fields with her father, while her older sisters, both considered anemic, learned to sew, and make hats, and help with the housework and care of the younger children in their family of 11. The time that she could spend in elementary school was always interrupted when help was needed on the farm. As soon as physically able, the children helped plant and harvest the crops, a supplement to the adult work force. In her family, however, there were only two boys, born years after her, and of little help until later on. And, so, our mother continued throughout her life to be the mainstay and ever present co-worker with the men to make our farm productive. The lack of our parents' formal education was not unusual in those years, however, as

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fewer than one percent of the population in the United States graduated from high school one hundred years ago. Graduation from high school in the 1890's was a distinction rather than the norm. Today, over 25% of all young men have earned a college degree, but in their father's generation, only 16% did, and in their grandfather's generation, only about 6% did so. For women, the change was considerably larger.

The emphasis on education in Wisconsin was evident ^{almost} ~~over~~ 150 years ago when Wisconsin became a state. ^{in 1848.} Before 1936, Wisconsin was part of the Michigan Territory, and in that year became separated as the Wisconsin Territory, with Governor Henry Dodge determined to build the capital in Madison. By 1838, the capital was nearly completed and Madison had about 60 residents and a few homes. Public education began that year in a log cabin home for a three-month session with the ^{female} teacher earning \$2.00 a week with room and board in a nearby home. The practice of teachers rooming and boarding in the rural school areas continued into the 1920's. With a growing community, and the town growing with churches, a courthouse, shops, saloons etc., pressure mounted for more school space and better equipment. Ultimately the Board of Education was introduced, and taxation of citizens for public support of the school system became the reality. Not until 1917 did mandatory student attendance in school become a law.

(Relate early use of slates, no desks, paper and pencils in 1876 etc. from Madison article --back to home--Through our mother's insistence, all of her children received a high school education despite the hardships of accomplishing it.

All of us completed the first 8 years of elementary education at Oak Lawn School, a one-room schoolhouse with one teacher, with the exception of the mandatory 2 years of Catholic education required at Sacred Hearts School in Sun Prairie to satisfy the requirement of Catholic religious education to prepare us for our First Holy Communion and Confirmation as a practicing Catholic.

Oak Lawn school was about one mile from our house. We walked to school in all types of weather. I remember walking atop snowbanks that were 10-12 feet high, well packed as there was no snow removal equipment in those years. Toward spring, when melting had begun, we would sometimes fall into the snowbanks as the top crust would break from the melting that had taken place nearer the ground. Oftentimes, we were pretty wet by the time we got home from school. There were chores to be done ^{by the children} in school, and it was something I liked to volunteer for after school as I wouldn't have to get home so early to do the chores that awaited me there. We washed the blackboards, took the erasers

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outside to dust them, filled the ink wells, swept the floor, dusted the desks, and sometimes could write the lessons on the blackboard for the next day's classes. Usually, the wood box was filled by the boys, and they usually took the water pails to the Krebs farm nearby to get the water to fill the water fountain. (Or did we drink from the dipper there too, as what did we use for glasses as there were no paper cups in those days.)

We had the eight grades in the same room. While the teacher was having class for the younger children, we would be given assignments to study until it was our class time. Penmanship was always practiced with the Palmer method using pens dipped in the inkwells in each of our desks. The desks were graduated in size, smaller for the youngest, and a little larger for the older children. I don't recall that discipline was a problem but perhaps I was too young to know what that was in those years. I remember that when Mrs. Droster was our teacher, she didn't feel well at times. Then, she would ask me to have her class for the first and second graders, drilling them with flash cards for learning words, and some simple addition and subtraction mathematical problems, and reading stories to them, and having them listen carefully and then repeat some of the points in the lesson.

Getting to school in Sun Prairie was more difficult, particularly in the wintertime, when the roads were impassable with the model T. Ford, with no snow removal equipment. Then, we would be taken by our Dad in the sled. He would spread hay on the bottom of the box and cover it with a horse hide for us to sit on, Mother would wrap several "hot irons" made so on the kitchen stove, and put them in with us, and cover us with blankets and another horse hide robe. Our Dad, in a horse-hair coat and coon hat with ear muffs stood in the sled to drive the horses through the fields where the snow had drifted less, across other farmer's fences and fields, sometimes nearly tipping the sled over, as some snowdrifts couldn't be avoided, probably taking an hour, or longer to travel the two miles into town to deliver those of us going to Catholic school, and then on to the High School to deliver the older kids. The horses strained throughout the trips, their bodies covered with snow, icicles on their mouths and beards as they struggled every harder with every "Giddyap" from our dad. In the evening, he repeated the trip during the most severe weather. We wore the four-buckle rubber overshoes in those years, and as I had the biggest size foot in my family, I had considerable difficulty getting my feet into Evelyn's or Lila's hand-me-down overshoes, or getting them out of them. One time I remember

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when I was in third grade, about 8 years old, Evelyn was trying to get my overshoes off in the corridor outside my classroom at Sacred Hearts School. She simply couldn't get them off and I started to cry because I was already late for class. Father Salentine came along and asked what the problem was. In my distress, I told him to "shut up". Needless to say, not a nice thing to do, and certainly it was a sin, and how could I go to First Holy Communion having said such a thing to the priest. Apparently, he understood as I didn't have the sense then to go to him to apologize, but obviously, my memory hasn't let me forget it, to this day.

By the time I entered the first year in High School, my brother Cy, was in his senior year, and usually drove the family car to school except on days when our dad needed to use it himself. When he needed the car, he would take us to school, and sometimes pick us up in the afternoon. At those times I would wait in Scheurells grocery store, and I hated it as they were usually long waits, and I seemed like an intruder there. When Cy drove the car, he would take his friends driving somewhere, and usually wouldn't bring me home, as apparently he didn't want to be seen with his younger sister. Then, I would walk home the two and one-half miles. Sometimes, I would stay overnite with my friend, Laura Hayden if all else failed when the weather was too bad, and I had no way to get home. My high school years were among my most trying years as the depression was at its height during that period, and there simply was no money for me, not a nickel for an ice cream cone, or a quarter for a basket ball game, or a prom dress, or a class ring, or class picture. In fact, I barely got to go to the graduation exercise. My clothes were all ill-fitting hand-me-downs, inappropriate styles that perhaps Evelyn had worn for parties and made over, or worn as was.

When I was 15, not quite old enough to work, according to the child work laws, Evelyn helped me get a summer job at Camp Indianola for 8 weeks as a dish-washer for \$1.00 a day. I was excited about that as I thought I could buy some clothes to wear to school. But, when I got home at the end of the summer, both Jerome and Gregory needed to have their tonsils removed, and so the \$60.00 paid for the two tonsillectomies that year. The next summer, I returned as a dishwasher, and earned the same amount of money. That year I bought a new, black dress with a wide white satin collar, and some shoes and silk stockings that I thought such a luxury. But, Evelyn needed a dress to interview for a job, and so I loaned her the dress—mostly a long term loan it turned out.

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I graduated from high school in June 1934, just having had my 17th birthday in the previous March. There was no money to help me go to college, and so I thought of nursing as the quickest way for me to become independent. But, 18 was the required minimum age for entering nursing school, and I needed 90.00 as an entrance fee to buy the required books, uniforms and black stockings. I can't remember clearly if I asked her, or if she offered, but my high school physical education teacher loaned me \$90.00 to pay my entrance fee, and our aunt, Sister Alcantara, a Sisters of St. Mary's nun in that nursing order, interceded with the authorities at St. Mary's Hospital to permit my entrance at age 17. We worked 12 hours a day, studying attending classes, and working on the floors with one week off sometime during the summer for the three years of the course to become a registered nurse. At the end of the three years, I again had a problem because of my age as the required age for licensing was 21, and I had just turned 20. Then, the Superintendent of Nurses interceded for me and I was granted an exception to take the State Board of Nursing Examinations. Fortunately I passed, and became a registered nurse. At that time, in 1937, registered nurses were receiving \$60.00 per month for 12-hour ^{general} ~~floor~~ duty in hospitals, and \$7.00 per day for 20-hour duty caring for private patients. I did some general duty, but mostly private duty, caring for the patient, sleeping on a cot in the room at night, and giving the care through the day with the exception of four hours in the afternoon from 1-5 PM when the relatives visited, or the patient was on floor care when I could go home to take a bath, and do my own chores, and put on/clean ^a uniform. We had a locker in the basement of the hospital where we could change into a nightgown and robe for the night except when the patient was so ill that we felt it more appropriate to stay in uniform when doctors/^{and other personnel} were needed to see the patient or give treatments. I had some periods of caring for patients in their homes, also, and one was so far out in the country, that I never left that house as I had no car, and there was no one to pick me up, or take me back to give me a break from the routine in the home where I not only took care of the patient, but did the cooking and housework, as well. I did this type of work for four years until a Navy Reserve doctor on the staff at St. Mary's interested me in joining the Navy which I did in February, 1941, just prior to the declaration of WW II in Dec. 1941. I stayed in the Navy until 31 July 1972 when I retired as a Captain, and haven't worked since