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# TEACHING IN A ONE ROOM SCHOOL

**LORRAINE WAHOSKE JESS, 1929-2025**

Lorraine Wahoske Jess graduated from Ripon High School in 1947 and from the Wisconsin Rural Normal School in Berlin in June 1949. Her five-year teaching certificate, issued by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, enabled her to educate students in “rural schools and elementary grades.” After five years, when her teaching certificate would expire, she was required a third year of elementary training to continue teaching. Jess first taught at Round Prairie School on Highway 49 on the way to Brandon.

In an oral history recorded by the Ripon Historical Society in 2018, Jess recalls her time teaching in a one room school:

*“I loved that school. I had 7 or 8 students. 2 first graders, 2 second graders, 1 fifth grader and I had a ball. I’d go out on Sunday night to start the fire so it would be a little warmer.”*

*— Lorraine Jess*



In October 1950, she married her high school sweetheart, Eugene Jess (1929-2005). At one time, teachers who married were forced to quit teaching, causing the average tenure that a teacher was in the classroom to be only two years. By the time Jess became a teacher they were allowed to marry, however if she became pregnant she had to quit teaching. In 1952, Jess quit her job at Round Prairie because she thought she was pregnant. After learning that she was not, she found a job at another school, Locust School, northeast of Ripon on Highway 44.

But soon after, Lorraine discovered she was pregnant. Since she did not want to quit her new job, she decided to wear a large “art smock” over her dress each day to hide her pregnancy. Since the school was in the country and most of the parents were busy working on their farms Lorraine never saw any adults who might notice she was pregnant. If the School Board or parents knew she was pregnant they would not have let her finish the school year. Her son, Cooper Jess, was born in June 1953 one month after school ended.



Left: Lorraine Jess and daughter, Connie, at Susan Apps Bodilly's presentation on one room schools in 2024. Lorraine is holding her teaching smock worn while teaching at Round Prairie School in 1952. Right: Lorraine taught for two and a half years at the Round Prairie School. Her father's 1947 Plymouth automobile is parked alongside the building.

