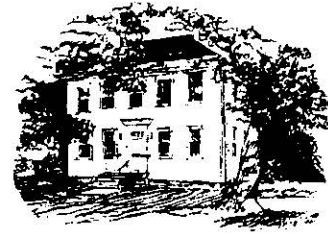


IMAGES

... then and now

From the Indian Hill Bulletin



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Outdoor Recess at One-Room Schools



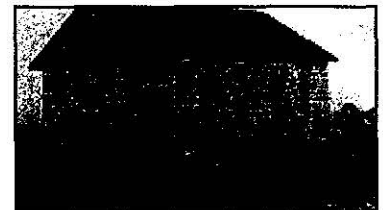
Schoolchildren have always looked forward to recess. Students of the nineteenth century were no exception. Years ago the yards of one-room schools were where recess occurred. It was a release from the stuffy classroom, and encouraged camaraderie, coordination, and social activity. Because there was no designated playground or fenced in area, students could go anywhere outside, as long as they could hear the bell that meant return to class. Children engaged in a variety of activities while

outdoors—jumping, skipping, chasing each other, and playing old-fashioned games that promoted physical and psychological development.

Some games involved a great deal of running. Among these were Tag (which had many variations), Relay races, Drop the Handkerchief, Kick the Can, Red Rover, Fox and Geese, and Red Light. Other games required balance, such as Crack the Whip, Freeze Tag, Statue, Hopscotch, and Lion in the Pit. King of the Mountain and Tug of War were games of strength, while Hide and Seek demanded strategic thinking. Favorites of the younger child were Mother May I, Simon Says, and Follow the Leader. Games demanded skills and were competitive in nature. Besides exercising, children learned to cooperate, help, share, and solve problems with peers while playing outdoors.

Not many props were used to play these games. If a school had equipment for recess, the students played townball or jumped rope. Usually having limited resources for textbooks, schools did not spend funds on playground items. Yet some schools had sandboxes, seesaws, or teeter totters. Ingenious students made their own toys, or brought toys from home to the schoolyard. Corncobs fitted with the quill of a turkey or chicken were used to play darts. Homemade beanbags were tossed into marked circles. Cat's Cradle was mastered with a piece of twine or string, and children played with stones or buttons if they did not have access to marbles or jacks.

Unstructured play occurred outside one-room schools as well. Students climbed trees, chased butterflies, dug up worms and ants, and gained knowledge of the natural world. They engaged in dramatic play, pretending they were at a store, in a hospital or boat, or that they were soldiers, or cowboys and Indians. Using their imaginations, they created dramatic plots, often imitating adults. Some children simply rolled in the grass, made snow angels in the winter, poked holes in the ground with sticks, or made piles of rocks. Girls created flower jewelry from dandelions or clover in spring. Recess was a carefree time, when students' bodies and voices were not under tight control. By engaging in self-paced play, youths began to learn how to navigate their environment. Just being outside in the fresh air was considered healthful.



Recently some U.S. public schools have eliminated recess, saying the time is better spent on academics, that playground injuries promote lawsuits, and that potentially dangerous strangers have access to children at recess. Nineteenth century educational theory was that students benefited greatly from recess. It was an opportunity to relax, to release energy, to learn in a different way; and after recess, teachers felt students were able to focus better on academics.