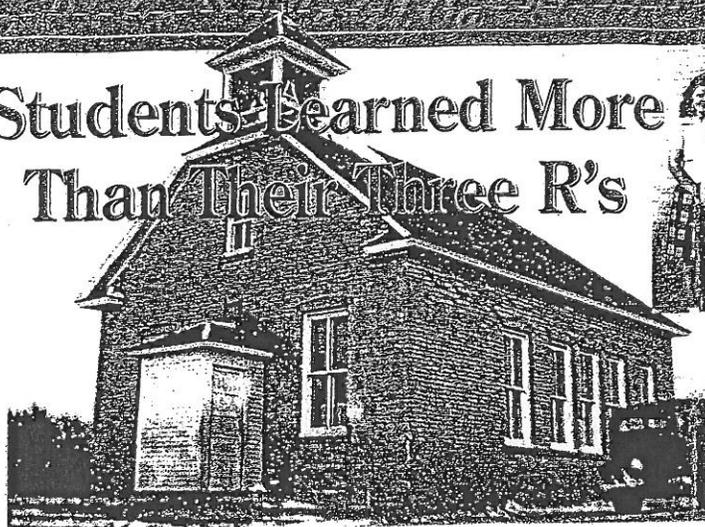


Students Learned More Than Their Three R's



WATAB SCHOOL, shown at left during the 1942-43 school year, housed all 12 local elementary school students, pictured above with two student teachers.



STAYING WARM. A crock of winter soup sits atop the large stove while student teacher also keeps toasty in the author's Watab, Minnesota school.

WATAB, Minnesota. Where was it? What was it?

I soon found out when I accepted a teaching position offered by the St. Cloud Teachers' College in 1942. Watab consisted mostly of a town hall and a beer joint on the banks of the Mississippi River.

There were 12 students—eight boys and four girls—in the second and fourth through eighth grades.

The big challenge was the two practice teachers I had to supervise. Two new ones were assigned every 6 weeks, and the college supervisor came out once or twice each term to evaluate their work.

Besides reading, writing and arithmetic, we had music, which my students usually excelled in. We had sci-



POSING were Mary John and younger brother James, in '43, when she made the change from teaching to nursing.

ence—planting pine trees donated by the federal government that are now 50 feet tall. And we had hikes along the river to study rocks, trees and birds.

For manual arts, we sanded and re-

finished our desks. For home economics, we probably had the first hot-lunch program in Minnesota.

Every morning, I started the fire in the huge stove and would put a kettle of beans or of tomato or potato soup on to cook. In warm weather, we used a kerosene stove.

We probably would be reprimanded for doing so now, but we started every lunch with a prayer.

The six pairs of student teachers were a godsend, not only for sharing the class work and housekeeping, but also for the fun we had after school.

One time, we had to fill out a form that asked the distance from the door of the school to the doors of the out-houses. We had no plumbing, no electricity and no tape measure. The student teacher stepped off the distance, multiplying each step by 3 feet.

One other assignment for me was to be on the rationing board, decid-

ing who should get stamps for gasoline, tires, sugar, coffee, cigarettes and nylon stockings.

Some of the school board members were on the rationing board with me and we met at the school. The people asking for extra rations were farmers, who got more for gasoline and tires than people in town.

Anyone who contributed to the war effort received more stamps.

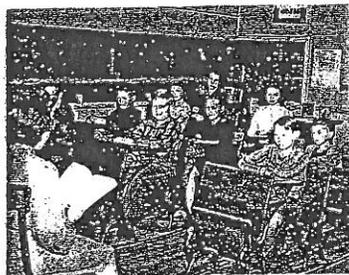
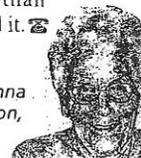
My salary—\$105 a month—was higher than that of most first-year teachers. I paid \$20 a month for room and board. With the balance, I felt rich.

Although my grandmother, mother and several of my aunts were teachers, I felt it wasn't my choice for a vocation. I'd always wanted to be a nurse, but my folks couldn't afford it.

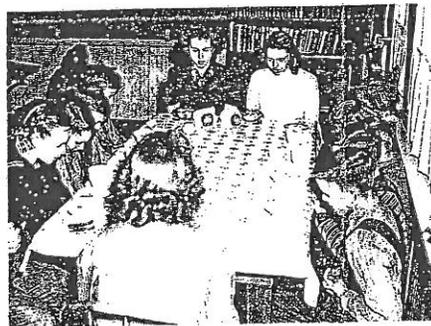
When the Cadet Nurse Corps was started, in the fall of 1943, I was happy to be in the first class at the University of Minnesota.

We staffed the hospitals while the registered nurses were off to war. The work was harder than teaching, but I loved it. ☎

By Mary McKenna
Bloomington,
Minnesota



STORY TIME. The author, known as "Miss John" in her teaching days, reads to students as two student teachers observe from the back row.



BLESS THIS FOOD. The author (front), student teachers (back) and students pray before a meal.



MAINTENANCE CREW. Students sand down their desks for "manual arts" class work.

WWW.REMINISCE.COM

SEPTEMBER 2007