

## Taylor recalls Aitkin of old

(letter to Aitkin Independent Age, no date)

To the Age:

Having subscribed to your paper for some months now, I feel that maybe I have something to offer to you in the line of history.

I note that the Dotzler family is involved in part with the paper. I remember a Mr. John Dotzler as one of my father's patients.

My mother and her two children, my brother, Raymond and myself, moved to Rossburg in about 1920. Our little farm was next to that of a family named Engstrom.

I went to a one room rural school taught by a Mrs. Ferguson; she later moved to Aitkin. Of that neighborhood, two friends of my mother were Annie Angstrom and Olive Cormier.

The marriage of my mother to Dr. McHugh brought us to Aitkin in 1921. I remember that winter as being bitterly cold and with snow drifts so deep that the larger school boys had to lift the little ones over the drifts. Gordon McGregor was one and Jim Dennerly was another who did the lifting.

Aitkin had some remarkable teachers at that time. The first grade that I attended was taught by a Miss Mabel Swanson (I think). She was very patient and kind to a youngster who was much confused by a "big school." Another fine teacher was Miss Esther Volk who taught the third grade. She was, as I remember, a quiet person who listened to her charges. Miss Austin was one of those rare individuals who could make those she taught believe in themselves. She never stinted on the time that she gave and in her efforts.

Miss Oleson (she married Clark Boekenoogen) was one of the kindest people I have ever known. One of the students in her class had been "sewed in" her winter underwear by her mother. As time went by the problems of odor became so bad that no one wanted to sit near her. Miss Oleson took the girl to her (Miss Oleson's) home, got her bathed and furnished her with appropriate clothing – this at a time when teachers' pay was very low and when sometimes they were paid in warrants. My parents thought she was one of the best and so did her pupils.

Mr Hall taught Manual Training, now called shop. He was a quiet man but one who let you know that he expected you to do your best. He had high standards and expected us to follow.

My last year at Aitkin Grammar School was under Mr. DeLong (Dudley DeForrest DeLong). He enjoyed what he was doing and projected the joy to those he taught. He did not take himself all that seriously, he signed his paper D-3, and he could get us to laugh at ourselves. He was a wonderful teacher.

If you wonder why I write of these teachers, this of this: I was but one of hundreds of children who went through school there. We learned from our parents, from our churches, and from our peers, but a large amount came from our school.

Oscar and Sarah Berglin, Walter and Gillette Glad, Karl Nickander, Walt Wagner, and on and on were people I knew who were also students. The effect of these good teachers and others like them on Aitkin, on Minnesota and on our country can never be measured. It's too bad that we never told them so.

Some day, if anyone is really interested, I will tell you what Aitkin was like when we first went there.

If any of my old friends are still around please give them my very best regards.

Gene E. Taylor  
Lt. Col. USA Ret.  
6138 Madeline St.  
San Diego, CA 92115