

Three Years at Three Mile School

By Joseph B. Snider

From 1934 to 1937 a young Calhoun County woman found out how much she loved teaching in the one-room school on Three Mile Run. This is how she remembers those days.

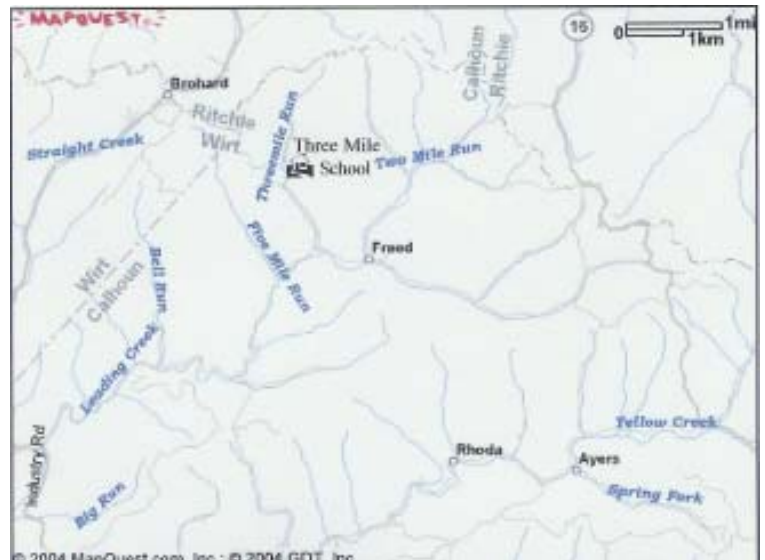
In the spring of 1939 the Calhoun County Republican Party elected Lena Snider as voting district chairman for Freed. She appointed her son Bernard, one of her younger boys, to do the work for her. That's when some interesting backwoods politicking kicked in. The county trustees, most of whom were Democrats, informed Bernard that if he didn't certify the candidates they wanted in the fall election, his wife Louie (Dawson) Snider wouldn't get a school in the fall.

Bernard wouldn't play ball with the trustees, and sure enough Louie wasn't given a third year at Bell School on Leading Creek just above Freed. She wasn't given any school, so Bernard and Louie Snider joined the exodus north to the Akron area in Ohio. West Virginia lost a natural-born teacher.

Louie Dawson graduated from



Louie Dawson's high school graduation picture.



Calhoun County High School at Grantsville in May 1933. She was one of a select group that the principal Mr. Glenn Callaghan talked into taking the teacher proficiency test. She passed the test and received a teaching certificate at age 18. That summer Callaghan moved to Charleston to work with the New Deal NYA (National Youth Administration) program for West Virginia.

School board president John Yoak had his eye on young Miss Dawson. He taught at the Spruce Hollow School on Yellow Creek and had more than fifty students. He could get CWA (Civil Works Administration) funds that would let him hire an assistant. Yoak figured he could hang a curtain down the middle of the school and put Louie and grades one through three on one side, while he taught the older boys and girls on the other side.

Louie was the oldest of five surviving daughters and one son born to Jack and Georgia Dawson. Their farm straddled the road about halfway between

Brohard and Freed. In the fall and winter of 1933-34, Louie stayed home on the week-ends and boarded during the week on Yellow Creek. On Sunday evenings she walked the road past Freed to the Bell School. There she crossed Leading Creek, climbed the



The last class in the old Three Mile School in the spring of 1935.

hill, and ran the ridge to where she went down onto Yellow Creek. Every Friday evening after school, she reversed the trek and went home.

CWA funding for the Spruce Hollow experiment didn't last all school year. By spring, Louie was subbing at schools around the area, such as Annamoriah and Big Bend. Her real teaching adventure started in the fall of 1934 when school board member Al McCray used his influence to secure the Three Mile School for Louie. Al had a daughter named Gwendolyn who would start first grade the next fall in 1935. All his other children were pretty well-grown by then, and the baby was special to him. He wanted Louie Dawson at Three Mile.

There was a problem. By law a school had to maintain an average daily attendance of twelve first through eighth grade students to stay open. A "school bus" would

start running in the fall of 1934 to take older boys and girls to high school in Grantsville. That is to say, Tony Snider had fitted benches into the back of his truck and stretched a tarp across the top to keep out the weather. Twelve older students were leaving the

Three Mile School for high school. There weren't enough young boys and girls to keep the school open, but Louie could have it if she could drum up enough business.

The Three Mile School nestled in the mouth of a hollow where a stream trickled across the lane and emptied into Three Mile Run. "Schoolhouse Hollow" was just north of the road from Freed to Brohard, a little west of Freed. Three Mile Run (just like Two Mile and Five Mile Runs) originally got its name from its distance from the old Hardman Mill on the Hughes River below Smithville. Just up the run and across the road from the school was Mary McCray's log house. Mary was Al McCray's sister. Beyond Mary's house was Al McCray's store.

(Al McCray was a bit of a visionary. His store had a back room that he only opened at Christmas because that's where he stocked toys. People came from all over the countryside to shop at

McCray's for Christmas. None of the other country stores sold toys.)

Local residents were motivated to keep the Three Mile School open. Through the summer of 1934, they came up with twelve students. Eight had studied there before: Willard McCray; Bob, Luella, and Gene Snider; Launa "Ed" Dawson; Virginia and Marjorie Snider; and Pauline Elliott. Four were new first graders: Betty Ruth "Dub" Dawson, Arlie Paul "Skip" Kelley, Margie Robinson, and Naomi Cooper. Betty Ruth, for instance, started first grade at age four, but she bumped the enrollment up to twelve. The two Dawson girls were younger sisters of their rookie teacher.



Ava Marie and Margie Robinson. In the background stands the school "facilities."

All twelve scholars showed up on the first day of school. All twelve came every day, and Louie began to think they could have a year of perfect attendance and keep the school open. Then the whooping cough hit and there was no remedy but to close the Three Mile School until the disease ran its course through the community.

Actually the students did better than their teacher. Louie's sister Leota "Jo" and brother Lewis "Son" had headed off to high school that fall in Tony Snider's truck. These country kids hadn't been exposed to all the childhood diseases. That first year as high schoolers they brought home mumps and both kinds of measles. School marm Louie caught all three in turn from her sister and brother. Nelle Snider, who had retired from teaching that spring, subbed for her.

The Three Mile School building was too big for Louie's twelve students. It had been intended to



The newly remodeled Three Mile School in the fall of 1935.

accommodate all the area children. With the high school drawing away the older ones, it would never be full again. The ceiling was high. The windows along the sides of the classroom reached nearly from

floor to ceiling to catch the sunlight. Gaslights provided artificial light for evening community social

events. A large gas space heater did its best to ward off the winter chill.

Desks were big enough for two or three students. They varied in size for younger and older boys and

girls. They also varied in style because they had been gathered from hither and yon through the years. A blackboard ran across the front of the classroom. An American flag with forty-eight stars hung on the wall. Louie used a brass hand bell to call students to start the day or end recess.

Louie Dawson and the Three Mile School survived the 1934-35 school year. No one threatened to close the school because of an inadequate student body, and things were definitely looking up for the 1935-36 year. Bob Cooper, Emma Jean Kelley, Junior Snider, Gwendolyn McCray, Eva Jean and Lillian Frederick, and Amelia "Tootie" Freed would start first grade. Jimmy Duncan and J. P. Morrison also would join the student body at other grade levels. That summer the school received a complete renovation to make it more suitable for its smaller, younger student body.

CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) workers from Camp Crawford near Elizabeth in Wirt County worked through the summer of 1935 turning the old Three Mile School building into a "modern" school. They moved the school back from the road



The 1936 student body. Back row: Luella Snider, Launa "Ed" Dawson, J. P. Morrison; middle row: Gwendolyn McCray, Naomi Cooper, Amelia "Tootie" Freed, Margie Robinson, Marjorie Snider, Virginia Snider, Bob Snider, Gene Snider, Willard McCray; front row: Ava Marie Robinson, Bob Cooper, Junior Snider, Eva Jean Frederick, Betty Ruth "Dub" Dawson, Emma Jean Kelley, Arlie Paul "Skip" Kelley, and Jimmy Duncan.

and turned it ninety degrees. You could do that when buildings sat on cut blocks of sandstone rather than being attached to block foundations set on poured footers. They took the roof off the school and lowered it. The remodeled school had smaller windows along the long wall opposite the doors and in the short back wall.

Educational theory of the day said light should come over the left shoulder and from the rear.

Builders repositioned the entrance so local scholars entered the south side of the school near the front of the classroom rather than from the back as before. The men mixed and poured concrete for a wide covered porch for the entryway.

They built a partition across the front of the schoolroom and mounted the chalkboard on that wall.

Behind that partition was the expected cloakroom and a totally unexpected library room! Books for the lower grades stood invitingly on the bottom shelves. The school board purchased new single-student desks of varying sizes for the refurbished school. When Three Mile School opened in September 1935, it was a thing of beauty.

(In 1939 builders erected a one room “cook house” behind the school where students and parents could cook hot lunches for the school. The cook house



Uh oh, it's Jimmy Duncan and Arlie Paul “Skip” Kelly!

was a log cabin, but the logs stood on end rather than lying stacked horizontally.)

Everyone for miles around admired the new school. School buildings functioned as community centers for everyone living nearby. School programs were important events. Cake walks and pie socials brought people together and raised funds to buy books for the new school library.

One of the local celebrities from along Leading Creek was a second cousin to Louie Dawson and a first cousin to her fiancé Bernard Snider. At age 16, during the 1910-11 school year, Bill Shimer had taught at Three Mile School. After starting his college education at Glenville, Bill left the hills to go east and study philosophy at Harvard. He even studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. Not that anybody along Leading Creek cared a great deal about philosophy, but it did seem like a good thing to know or be related to at least one highly educated person.

Bill Shimer came home to visit and slipped comfortably back into the pace of hill folk life. After a pie social at Three Mile School, he decided his son Eliot should stay with kin and attend a one-room school for a while. Apparently this was supposed to build character. One can wonder if Eliot was as thrilled about all this as his father.

The 1935-36 and 1936-37 school years at Three Mile School passed in a flurry of learning. Louie had good students whom she enjoyed. They were her first students and the ones she loved and still remembers

best, including Arlie Paul “Skip” Kelley and Jimmy Duncan – two little rascals bent on having fun in the classroom and on the playground.

Odd things happened in



Back row: Eva Jean Frederick, Gwendolyn McCray, Naomi Cooper, Marjorie Snider, Amelia “Tootie” Freed, Virginia Snider, Margie Robinson, Betty Ruth “Dub” Dawson, Ava Marie Robinson, Emma Jean Kelley. In front: Jimmy Duncan and Bob Cooper.

those two years as well. One winter day Al McCray was making his daily trip about noon down to the main road to pick up mail and his bread shipment for the store. Al was easily the most dignified man in those parts, but he loved children and always had a word or two with the boys on the playground at lunchtime. This particular day, J. P. Morrison lobbed a snowball at his grownup pal and hit the storeowner in the head. Mr. McCray blew up at the little boy and read him the riot act. All the kids were surprised and a little frightened by such an unexpected reaction.

One summer Louie had to go to court in a case involving corruption on the school board. One of the board members had been accused of selling jobs. Allegedly, to get a teaching job, you had to buy an Electrolux refrigerator at this man's Grantsville store. Rumor had it the other school officials had turned a blind eye to this abuse of office. Some board members lost their jobs as a result of this scandal. Much to her relief, Louie just sat in the courtroom and did not have to testify.

On April 11, 1936, twenty-one-year-old Louie Dawson married Bernard Snider, whose family lived in Freed. She finished her second year and then taught her third at Three Mile School as Mrs. Snider rather than Miss Dawson. Bernard worked in a store at Freed, and they lived at Lena Snider's house. Lena was at Salem cooking and taking care of her youngest son Colvin's lodgings while he attended Salem College.

All along Louie had been taking summer classes at Glenville Normal School. During the school years she took extension classes as they were available at Grantsville or Smithville. By 1939 Louie would amass enough credits to be a college junior. Every two years she had to retake the teacher's test. In 1935 she took it in Harrisville and in 1937 at Charleston.

In the fall of 1937, Louie Snider left the Three Mile School and taught at the Prosperity School. There weren't many students there, and she only had that school one year. The next two years she taught at the Bell School just east of Freed along Leading Creek. The Bell School was closer to home. She enjoyed teaching there until that fateful spring of 1939 when voting district politics ended her teaching career in Calhoun County's one-room schools.



Louie Snider proudly sports her golden horseshoe won in 1933 as Calhoun County's top West Virginia history student.

Louie and Bernard Snider lived in the Akron area from 1939 until 1978 when they moved to Brownsville in Monroe County, Ohio, where they currently reside. In 1962-63, Louie completed enough course work in education at the University of Akron for contemporary teacher certification, although she did not go back to the classroom. She and her husband raised four children and, when they were grown, cared for four foster children.

Louie still has the school bell she used to summon boys and girls to class at the Three Mile School. She also has several fading pictures and lots of clear memories of three priceless years in the school on the banks of Three Mile Run.

(If you point your car up the gravel road with a grass strip down the middle that winds along Three Mile Run today, you'll find weed-choked "Schoolhouse Hollow" a short distance on the right. Some cut sandstone blocks in the edge of the lane mark the entrance to the schoolyard. The slab that served as the school porch and the chimney of the "cookhouse" stand farther back in the undergrowth. Four maple trees along the schoolyard stream testify to long ago Arbor Day observances. From there you can look up the road to the ruins of Mary McCray's log house. One branch of a huge fallen tree has crushed its roof. Al McCray's store vanished without a trace years ago.)