

ONCE UPON A TIME

ONE-ROOM COUNTRY SCHOOLHOUSES AND WAGON TRAILS WERE CENTRAL TO LIFE ON THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE

IN THE LAST 30 YEARS of the 19th century, the Porter family owned a farm near the now named Oak Knoll and Buckley Roads. Elliot Porter gave land just north of the present-day entrance to Tudor Oaks Farm for a schoolhouse. He and his son Lorenzo (Ren) were directors of the school. In 1889, Ren hired a new teacher.

Hattie Brown was 22 years old, and lived with her parents, Joseph and Emaline Hawley Brown, in the Octagon House on Barrington's West Main Street. In April 1889, Emaline and her daughter Hattie began writing letters, some 700 of which survived, to Hattie's sister Laura, who, after marrying Joseph Nightingale, had moved to Fairmont, Minnesota.

The early letters describe how Hattie came to teach at the Porter School for a year, and her subsequent courtship and marriage to Ren Porter in 1893. Hattie was a substitute teacher at the Village School—the original Hough Street School—and she was required to attend a Teacher's Institute in Libertyville before taking up her post at the Porter School.

Her mother Emaline wrote to Laura: *"He (Ren) hired her for the winter and spring terms both, he said he would rather hire that way, they pay her thirty dollars a month for the four winter months, and twenty-five dollars a month for two spring months, and they hire her fires built. She intends to go to the Lake County Institute."*

Hattie needed to board during the week. In your mind's eye, follow the wagon trails from the Octagon House, along Main Street to Old Hart Road, north to Oak Knoll, west to Buckley, then north to the school—a distance of about 3.4 miles. On October 6, 1889, Emaline wrote to Laura: *"Pa got Crabtree's horse and carriage the other day and took Hattie to see her schoolhouse and to see about a boarding place, and Mrs. Porter (Ren's mother) said she did not want to be bothered with a boarder and Mrs. Johnson said the teacher they used to have paid three dollars a week Monday till Friday night, and Hattie told her she had never paid but two*



The Porter School on Buckley Road. Nearby was a woodshed where the first student to arrive in the morning found wood to start a fire in the stove. Photo: Tales of Old Barrington.

dollars, so Mrs. Johnson said she would talk it over with her husband and let her know what they would do about it. She is delighted with the schoolhouse, it is new, has nice seats, plenty of desks and blackboards and a nice map."

The letters to Laura told the story of Hattie's life as a teacher. She settled with the Johnsons on a boarding fee, returning home for holidays and weekends. The Porter house is still there, on Oak Knoll Road, just southwest of the Buckley Road intersection. After their marriage in 1893, Hattie and Ren lived in the Porter farmhouse, where their son Howard was born on October 19, 1896.

In the mid-1940s, sales of the one-room schoolhouses began after the Second World War. Most were sold as residences. The Porter School was sold to well-known artist Ruth Mead and moved to her property on Ridge Road. A devastating tornado tore through Barrington in 1967. Both the Mead residence and the schoolhouse were almost destroyed. Some old clay pots remained on one schoolhouse wall that survived. U



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