

What's for Lunch?:

The image is a common one, students trudging along a road to a distant one-room school house, clutching their school books and lunchboxes. What do you think is hidden in those lunchboxes? My mission is to find out. My research has covered reports in both teacher magazines and in parent/women's magazines, teacher instruction manuals, and extension leaflets. In addition, I've been distributing a survey. The difference between what was called for in magazines and what people actually took was interesting.

I thought a comparison of what people really took with what was recommended would be the main body of my research, but it turns out that what they actually ate was only a starting point. Although what they ate varied by family, very often students ate something similar every day. This was usually characterized by a sandwich and a piece of fruit early on, gradually replaced by junk food as it becomes available. The attitude I struck again and again, was being glad there was anything that they didn't really have anything they didn't like as long as it was food. This attitude begins to fade over time.

Logistics was another area I came up against. What did students carry their lunches in and how did it change over time? There were many homemade and reused devices. Early on they seem to be lunch baskets, slowly edged out by a workman's style lunch box, and finally a surprising number of brown paper sacks. The syrup pail did make an appearance, but wasn't as dominant as generally has been reported. Sandwiches were wrapped in wax paper and families were urged to re-use small glass jars with lids.

Student hand washing also varied by school and seemed to be an ongoing fight in the profession judging by the professional tips about it. Students sometimes ate outside or at one big table, but often they ate at their desks which created a problem of how to protect the desk from the food.

Hot lunch appears early on as the forces of consolidation used the lack of a hot lunch as a weapon leveled at one-room schools. This answer ranged from the pint jar method, one-common dish, to full hot meals cooked by students, some schools even had kitchens. These efforts seemed to lesson in general once the Thermos was commonly adopted, but the WPA program support and continued federal support kept them running in some schools.

Resources Beside Survey

- Teaching Magazines
 - Primary Instructor
 - Rural Schools Bulletin
- Parent Magazines
- Cookbooks
- Newspaper Articles and Advertisements
- Government Publications

Sarah S. Uthoff

One-Room School Lunch - ALHFAM

June 2013

For more information on school lunch and Sarah Uthoff, visit:

<http://www.trundlebedtales.com> or <http://trundlebedtales.wordpress.com>

For more information on the one-room school listserv, visit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/oneroom>

E-mail me to join at info@trundlebedtales.com

Statistics from Survey

- 369 Surveys have been completed and tabulated
- School Attendance on the surveys range from 1911 to 2012
- Responses range from Canada to Mississippi

Responses said:

- 203 out of 369 said they washed their hands before eating.
- 101 of 369 said used a round or syrup pail
- 63 out of 369 said took paper bag, starting 1930s-1940s
- 271 out of 369 drank water
- 119 out of 369 drank milk
- 32 out of 369 drank cocoa
- 9 out of 369 drank Kool-Aid
- 6 out of 369 drank pop (late 1940s on)
- 1 out of 369 drank coffee
- 6 said outside, recent question not many responses yet
- 14 said at desk (recent question)
- 133 of 369 reported taking cake or candy
- 196 of 369 reported taking cookies
- 3 of 369 reported taking frosted graham crackers
- 96 out of 369 said had a Thermos
- 25 out of 369 said brought a Thermos with milk
- 16 out of 369 said brought a Thermos with soup
- 5 out of 369 said brought a Thermos with hot dog (Majority of Thermos in 1930s and 1940s)
- 60 out of 369 said remembered using the Pint Jar Method

Initial Patterns

- Potatoes to warm or cook at school on pot bellied stove or on shelf of furnace.
- Some attempt to provide a hot dish.
- Drink water or milk in Thermos. Non-refrigerated milk a failure.
- Usually sandwich and something else, often the same sort of thing every day.
- As junk food becomes available, fruit begins to disappear from list.
- Paper bags were surprisingly common.

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