

Miss Bessie Barrett
One-room School Teacher 1908-1910
November 19, 1980

John Kroner and Kay Yeomans drove to meet Miss Elizabeth Barrett at her apartment in South Orange. She had seen an article about the Historical Society and sent us a letter. She was an amazing woman. Following are notes taken during the interview:

Bessie taught in Upper Saddle River's one-room school in 1908 to 1910. She came from Hudson, Pennsylvania, outside of Wilkes-Barre. Her father, a mining engineer, was killed in the mines at the age of 30. Bessie and her three younger sisters all became teachers. Bessie attended a normal school in Stroudsburg. She found her position in Upper Saddle River through an agency in New York. She was 18.

Miss Barrett took the DL&W train to Paterson where she changed to a train to Allendale. There she was met in a surrey by Hen Zabriskie, the brother of Albert Zabriskie with whom she would be boarding. She wanted to start school the next day so they stopped along the way to tell people there would be school the next day.

The Zabriskies lived where the Church of the Presentation is now located, and Miss Barrett walked the distance to and from school each day. In the winter the roads were not plowed so people made their own path or followed a sleigh track. Miss Barrett could not recall school ever being called off.

When Miss Barrett first entered the little school, she was delighted to find an organ in one corner. When she opened it and started to play, mice ran out. There was a glass bookcase which exhibited some excellent taste in literature, but that too had been invaded by mice.

Miss Barrett said the students were all good. She couldn't remember any discipline problems, and the older students helped the younger ones. They had long, double seats, and sometimes three students occupied them. When she taught a particular grade, she would call that class to the front and they sat on a bench near the blackboard.

Every Friday they had recitations or "doing pieces". The students practiced hard for these and gave their performance on a little stage with a curtain. "Do you know your piece?" was a frequent question among students. At Christmastime they had a student entertainment and the Board of Education attended that as well as parents.

George Berdan, a teenager who lived on the farm next door, was the school custodian, but Miss Barrett never saw him. He came in early in the morning and late in the afternoon to check the fire and do whatever chores needed to be done.

Some of the students Miss Barrett remembered were Ruth Carlough, Martin Hennion, Weaver Carlough, and George Blackledge. Some summer families left their children to go to school here. The Bohens, who lived in Brooklyn, had a summerhouse halfway up the Lake Street hill towards Montvale (now a cobblestone house), and they left their two boys to be taught by Miss Barrett. [The Bohens were related to the Hennions through marriage. Another student was Percy Silverstein. Miss Barrett gave us a leather postcard he sent her.

She also gave us a small leather volume of the writings of Emerson, now in the display room.]

Miss Barrett enjoyed her time in town. "Night visiting" was a popular diversion and she remembers particularly visiting the Goetschius family and having a lot of fun.

She went fishing many times. They caught eels in the brook by Zabriskies. At night, after a rain, they would dig up night crawlers for bait for fishing.

She found many good friends who enjoyed showing her around. Hen Zabriskie, brother of Albert, became a good platonic friend. He introduced Bessie to the world of horse racing at the HoHoKus Race Track. They also held a County Fair there which Henry took her to. The horse tract was off present Route 17 on the right side of Race Track Road. Hen had a lovely carriage but the horse would rear up every time it saw one of the newfangled autos. They did bet at the races, and Miss Barrett won a box of candy once. There were several people in Upper Saddle River who were interested in good horses and horse racing.

The Blackledges, Nathan and Annabelle, were very kind to Miss Barrett while she was here. They lived at the corner of Pleasant Avenue and West Saddle River Road, and later moved to the home that is now the Saddle River Police Dept. Their first home is no longer there. They took her many places including to Paterson on a Saturday to sell eggs, either by the dozen or so many by the quarter. That was a two hour trip by horse and wagon. And they took her to Pompton Lakes.

Once she went fishing with the Blackledges starting at 3 a.m. by horse and wagon. They caught perch and bass, brought them home and cooked them outside. An early American barbeque. Miss Barrett remembers catching 23 fish.

After the Aabriskies, Miss Boarded the next year with the DeBauns, Irv and Wal and Minnie who lived on the southwest corner of the West Road and Ackerson Lane. She learned to play pinochle from them. Minnie DeBaun taught her how to sew.

Miss Barrett taught in Pennsylvania, in Hillsdale, NJ, and eventually in New York City. Miss Barrett went on to get her college degree, her masters and most of her credits towards a PhD. She retired in 1953 after teaching 46 years. She traveled to Europe many times as a chaperone for student groups and went around the world all by herself.

At 91 Miss Barrett's memories are many and her interests varied. She continues to read widely, to study and to take courses of interest. She loves to learn new things. If Miss Barrett is an example of the kind of teacher they had in the one room school, then the students were well taught and can only have been inspired by their teachers.

In the 1910 USA census of USR, Bessie Barrett was boarding with Wal DeBaun on West Saddle River Road. She was age 21, listed as a teaher.