

## **Rex L. Alexander (oral history, Shoreline Memories, volume I, pages 7-11)**

When good old do-gooder Chas. Taylor asked me to write about early times at Ronald School, I had to probe into the recesses of my memory, back some 57 years when Dickie and I moved into the community about 1914. We had just gone broke in the Seattle Heights Shingle Company as we could not compete with the tariff free shingles from Canada at \$1.25 a thousand.

We bought a half acre from John Whitham and put up a shell of a house in which we lived, finishing it as we could during the next three years. We paid John \$25.00 a month on the land which didn't leave much to live on. Sometimes we had to sell some of our few belongings to raise \$25.00 a month in addition to our really going hungry. My one horse buggy went for \$10.00, my pet double barreled hammerless shotgun for \$20.00; \$10.00 down and \$10.00 the next month and finally in a pinch sold 200 feet of one inch pipe I wanted for irrigation, for \$4.00. Money was, oh, so scarce and so were jobs.

Seattle paid their jobless \$.75 a day for mucking and digging ditches, but we couldn't get on as we lived north of 85th, the city limits at that time. Then the County Commissioners started a road building project near Richmond Highlands paying \$2.00 for a 10 hour day. None of the local people who were paying taxes could get to work on that job as they had brought in slave labor from Sweden, which we were told had to kick back to the boss contractor part of the measly \$2.00 wage, and they were in no position to complain, due to their ignorance of the law and handicapped by the language barrier.

When the janitor at the Ronald School quit three months before the end of the semester, I was fortunate enough to get the three month job, which was a lifesaver for us so we could come back home—such as it was HOME. I had been working on a farm 12 and 14 hours a day for \$30.00 a month and was happy to get that as it was all the farmer could afford. Dickie worked for her board so we could be together. It is hard to believe, but good men came along that offered to work for 10 cents a day, so they could have money to buy a little smoking tobacco and have a dry place to sleep. The \$30.00 a month gave us enough to make our land payment of \$25.00 and we had \$5.00 left for clothing, taxes, a small life insurance policy, car fare and the rest for riotous living. Ha!

You might say that I entered the teaching profession through the back door as a janitor. I had taken a business course at the Puget Sound Academy in Snohomish, graduating in 1905. The Academy used the old court house as a school house, after Everett stole all the records from it and took them to Everett claiming it as the county seat. They couldn't steal the building which is now part of the Snohomish High School, from which I graduated as the first boy in the first graduating class in 1903. My name is the first in the Snohomish High School Roster.

One of the reasons I got the janitor's job at \$50.00 a month was because I was "experienced," as I had done janitor work at the Everett High School in my junior year for \$10.00 a month, otherwise I couldn't have attended. There were several applicants for the job and I was so lucky to get it.

Having had several years of bookkeeping and office experience in my varied career, I got the idea of helping some of the girls in the community that wanted to make something of themselves and didn't have an opportunity. I met with the three school directors, B. W. Schneider, Mr. Cox and Mr. Morton Clark the principal, explained my plan and was given permission to partition off one end of the hall on the first floor for a Commercial Room, if I could

do it at no expense to the school. Well, somehow I managed, with a few tables and chairs, and the bookkeeping class was in full swing. The little room took on the office atmosphere and I had the most dedicated and hard working class of girls you ever saw.

With no class book for reference, I may overlook some of the names of "My Girls" and as I pry into my memory recesses of over 50 years ago, I come up with the names of Gladys Whitham, a girl with the last name of Hutchins, Maybelle Smith, Marie Gregg, Esther Carlson, Florence Hinton, Arlie Dick, and a girl with the last name of Campbell.

Later on I rustled several typewriters and typing was added to the course, after I had gone to night school at the Metropolitan Business College and the good old Broadway High to observe teaching methods and learn Gregg Shorthand. They never had a harder working student than me and I wouldn't have been able to attend if it hadn't been for the help of Florence Hinton who helped me with the janitor work so that I could make a run for the Seattle-Everett Interurban in time to catch it and get downtown to Seattle in time to attend the 7:00 classes in either the Metropolitan Business College or walk up the hill from the Interurban station of 4th Avenue to Broadway High, because I didn't have a \$.05 car fare.

I always saved a nickel for car fare so that I could take the street car to 85th and then it was only a four mile hike home on the old brick road arriving about midnight, grab a few hours sleep until 5:30 and run over to the school and fire the peanut sized furnace, suitable for one room, but it had to heat four. Little redhead Caufield was the primary teacher and she was a sticker on the thermometer registering 72 degrees which hung on a string from the ceiling in the center of the room. On real cold days it was almost impossible to get it up to 72 degrees, especially Monday mornings when the walls had cooled down over the weekend, so when I would see her get off the Interurban, I would go into her room and breathe on the thermometer so it would register above 72 degrees and she was happy when she checked it. Pretty sneaky wasn't it?

There have to be some laughs as we go through life. Here is another one; I had to ring the bell which was in a tower above the entrance. If you were not in your seat when the bell stopped ringing you got a tardy mark, so when I saw a kid running like the dickens, I would ring the bell until I would hear him close the door to his room.

Another time Professor Metraw, who succeeded Professor Clark, went to sleep during a class, so the entire class, led by Bud Schneider, slipped out and the little pudgy Professor was alone when he awakened. You understand how it was don't you? The class didn't want to interrupt his afternoon siesta. They were so very thoughtful.

Through the cooperation of Mrs. Eva Sheppard, manager of the Sheppard Service Bureau, I was able to place all my students in responsible office positions in Seattle offices, and soon they were bringing back into the community more money in one month than I was paid for an entire year. Good investment wasn't it? Several times I walked on a Sunday from Ronald to see Mrs. Sheppard, who lived next to the Green Lake Library, to talk over the training "My Girls" needed for certain positions that might be available when they were ready. A good stenographer's job then paid \$15.00 a week for beginners. Ten miles a round trip was a long "stroll" for a Sunday when I went to see Mrs. Sheppard about positions for my girls. It proved worthwhile, as the girls were soon earning a "salary" larger than mine. Genevieve Saxe alias "Ginger Parker" was one of the teachers that gave me help and encouragement during this experiment which turned out so well.

Dickie was a dressmaker, so she helped some of the girls modernize their dresses as we were all poor as church mice, and new dresses were out until they got their first paycheck.

Twenty five years later, while office manager for the Olympic Steel Works, one of the students, the little Hutchins girl, was still with the Seattle Hardware Company, on her first job where we had placed her. Esther Carlson started at the Port of Seattle and finally worked into a permanent job when she met a very fine Naval officer by the name of Jordon, who changed her name. They moved to the east coast, but when they come west they always come to visit me. It means so much to me as I am the lonest since Dickie was taken away March 7, 1970.

Florence Hinton was a wonderful student and ended up in a law firm while Marie Gregg's first job was with a rubber company as a secretary. Gladys Whitham made a success in her business career until Ken Howe, manager of the large Westinghouse operations here in Seattle, married her. The business world lost another fine secretary.

This story is getting too long so I'll hurry along with fewer details. The Superintendent of Schools at Enumclaw heard of my students being so successful that after observing my work, induced us to move to Enumclaw to take charge of their Commercial Department. That was a fine step in the right direction at more than twice the salary, where I had another wonderful class of dedicated students that I hated to leave.

A couple of years later I accepted an offer from the War Department to take charge of all the schools at Camp Lewis in the fall of 1920, again at double the salary, where we remained for nearly three years. We had a large Post Exchange bookkeeping and typing classes, foreign languages, cooks' and bakers' school, animal husbandry with chickens and sheep, all grades from the first to the eighth and a very fine automotive department. I had about 30 teachers on my staff, many of whom were university graduates. One of the requirements for my position was to have a college degree. Now after 50 years it can be told! I passed my exam at the end of the first year with a grade of 99.80%, and I never did learn what I failed in! I had only a high school diploma from the Snohomish High where my name is first in the register starting in 1903. It was probably assumed that I was a college graduate. They never asked me, so I never told them. Tell me, "Dear Abby," did I do wrong? Anyway, when Congress failed to appropriate funds for the continuation of the schools, they retained me as one of four supervisors out of 130 teachers in the 9th Corps area for an extra year, to establish schools in the western states with the best military personnel we could find in each fort, which we did. Tell me again, "Dear Abby," did this poor country boy with little book learning do wrong?

From there I went to work for the State Auditor, auditing Co-Ops, but didn't stay with it many months as we were instructed to get something on that guy or some other guy. My work all my life had been to build up, not tear down and I couldn't adjust to dirty politics so I quit and ended up with being the Accountant and Office Manager for the Olympic Steel Works for 31 years until they cut my throat, or should I say retired me. Sounds better doesn't it. After being at loose ends for a year, I was glad they did as I wouldn't have known enough to quit. Yes, I said "bridges" and not "britches".

My little dog, Ditto, and I keep house alone and would be glad to see you. Same address for 47 years as I haven't been able to get enough money to move, so, my address is still 4615 Wallingford North, Seattle, Washington, 98103. By helping others, I made progress, too.