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Carter County Museum displays this setting on Main Street of Ekalaka. There were once several country schools in Carter County, but today there are just three.  
| COURTESY PHOTO

# Back to school

**EDITOR'S NOTE** - As students head back to school after a very different ending to the previous school year, we show a new appreciation for teachers. Staci Hall shares her perspective on teaching at a country school. Hall lives with her husband, Andrew, in southeastern Montana. They have four children ranging in age from 3 years to 9 years. Staci has taught in rural schools in Nebraska for almost 10 years, and home schooled her girls for a little over six years.

Column by **STACI HALL** | School Teacher

**I**n the fall of 1999, I walked into my first class as a teacher. The school had been added onto since my interview and hiring. It was almost double the size it had been, and yet, still tiny. I had eight students in five grades, and was very nervous to be the one in charge. Parents brought their kids in, stayed for the pledge, and then stood outside talking while we started class.

I started a teaching journal that year. Going back, there are some interesting stories that took place, especially the first few years. We had lots of adventures. The bookmobile would get stuck in our schoolyard, we had various live-stock visit us in our schoolyard, snakes came in the school, poison ivy grew by the basketball court and we even had

issues with cacti when we were sledding!

One example from my journal:

“One day all the kids came running inside and asked if R could call his mom... when I asked why, it was because their bull had jumped the fence and needed to be rounded up! Later that week I stood at the door and watched some more cows crawl under the fence into the schoolyard.”

In the year 1900, there were 220,000 country schools in the United States. Compare that to 2014, when there were less than 200, in only 22 states. I was curious to see how that number had changed in my home state.

I grew up in Furnas County, Nebraska. My father and grandfather attended the New Era country school,

See **SCHOOL** on page 6

**SAVE THE DATE:**  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2020

SPECIAL MEETING AT SOUTHEAST ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC. SUPPER WILL BE SERVED. 5:00 PM.

# School

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about two miles southeast of our home. My grandmother grew up down the road and attended the Girch country school about two miles northwest of our home. The two schools were only about four miles apart. After looking at the 1904 plat map for Furnas County, I was able to count 87 school districts (elementary), some as close as two miles apart. Today, they are down to three schools that are K-12.

Many people have the attitude that "Bigger is Better," causing many country schools to be combined to make bigger schools. But there are some great things the country school system offers. In many ways, it is similar to home schooling. The kids had one-on-one attention from the teacher. The most kids I had in the same grade level were three. I was also able to form a

personal relationship with my students. Their families invited me to their homes, or to attend church with them.

Lots of people think there are bad sides to country schools. One being socialization. How many times have you been asked how the kids can learn to get along when there are so few of them? And just like home schooling, we found ways to make it work.

First, I was able to control attitudes and behaviors much easier. My students very quickly learned that there would be respect and kindness shown to everybody.

We learned how to stay respectful to other teachers, and parents commented on how well our kids behaved. We also did activities and trips with other country schools in our area. That gave the kids another chance to learn to work with others.

I feel very privileged to have been able to be a part of the country school system. There are not a lot of teach-

ers today that can say they taught in a one-room school. I was able to attend a country school as a child, teach in one as an adult and now my kids get the privilege of attending one.

The country school of 100 years ago looked a lot different than the country school of today. The kids learned many lessons together. They were taught straight from the Bible, or from readers such as McGuffey, that taught many Godly principles. One thing that hasn't changed in the few remaining country schools, is that parents still have a great influence in their child's education. Parents make up the school board and have personal contact with the teacher.

The key to our children's education is parents. Always parents! Whether in the country school system, or home schooling, education begins at home. We, as parents, are the greatest influencers on how our children will do educationally. RM

## Census 101: Why it's important to participate

**D**ID you know the third United States president, Thomas Jefferson, directed the nation's first census in 1790? Fifty years later, in 1840, the Census Act authorized the establishment of a centralized census office. In 1902, the office became a permanent organization within the Department of the Interior.

Today, the Constitution requires that everyone be counted every 10 years. The census is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, a non-partisan government agency.

### Why is the Census important?

Participating in the Census is a civic duty. It's a way to contribute to the democracy and say, "I count." Every 10 years, the results of the Census are used to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives, determining how many seats each state gets. It's also a way to determine how federal funds and grants are dispersed, which bene-



fits schools, hospitals, roads and public work projects. Local governments use the Census data for public safety and emergency preparedness plans, and businesses consult the data to decide where to build factories, offices and stores, which creates jobs and fosters economic development.

### How to complete the Census

For the first time, the Census is accessible online and available in English, as well as 12 other languages. Invitations to respond to the Census began in March.

The online questionnaire follows latest web accessibility guidelines, and a video in American Sign Language is available. The Census can also be completed by phone in English, and in 12

additional languages. Every household should have received an invitation and paper questionnaire. If necessary, participants can also respond in person. Due to COVID-19, house-to-house visits are still being discussed.

Strict federal law protects Census responses. It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish any Census information that identifies an individual or business.

The Census Bureau will never ask for your Social Security number, bank or credit card account numbers, money or donations, or anything on behalf of a political party.

To make sure you and everyone you know is counted, visit [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov). Help your community and complete the 2020 Census today. RM