

COUNTRY SCHOOLS

Mike Lieser writes book about District #63

Author captures history through research and living memories

By Gretta Lemke

"I treasure my rural upbringing. I feel I was very fortunate to live at a time and place in our country's history where large families were out on farms," said Mike Lieser, author of *Once Upon a Country School: History and Memories of District 63*. He attended District 63 located halfway between Lake Henry and St. Martin on Co. Rd. 32.

"Growing up in that environment has had a positive impact on my life. At this point here, when I look back on that, one aspect of that was attending a country school," he explained.

Lieser's brother decided it would be neat to set up a reunion for District 63 – which was held in the summer of 2022 – and Lieser thought that some information about the school should be shared. He dove into what was available and was immediately hooked. "I started doing some research on the history of the school, and one thing led to another, and I'd go, 'Wow, this is very fascinating'. My abilities lie in how I write this book; the skills are imbedded in me because of my career," he said.

Mike worked as an oil and gas exploration geoscientist. As a geophysicist and geologist, his career involved making presentations, answering questions about why you would drill here, and essentially telling the story of why or why not to drill in places around the country.



Mike Lieser, who attended District 63 between Lake Henry and St. Martin, organized an all-school reunion in 2022 and now has written a book about his country school experience. He believes the repetition in country schools was helpful to learning.

The elements of design and research that he used in his career were crucial when designing the layout, title, and research he conducted for the book. "Isn't 'Once Upon a Country School' a more interesting title than 'History and Memories of District 63'?" he stated.

He then subtitled the book 'History and Memories of District 63' to give more information about the contents.

Lieser used the Stearns History Museum for a large portion of his research. He had land title abstracts to determine the sequence of events and residents as they happened. These abstracts included the specific acreage amounts, the timing, and the names of families to help draw an accurate map of the space.

"I interviewed people. I got verbal information by calling them up. For instance, if I wanted to see what teacher was when, I would get an idea, and

then try to get it corroborated by someone else," he said.

Putting the pieces of three or four interviews together, Lieser was able to retrieve most of the teachers names and major events affecting the school. "What emerges is that it was moved into after Christmas break, the end of 1952, beginning of 1953, and we know this because there was a gal who had a distinct memory," he explained. "That information fits perfectly along with everyone else's, although she is the only one who had that bit of information."

Using methods like these, Lieser was able to pinpoint exact dates and names to fill in the gaps in the information found at the museum. "I also ordered a book about country schools and put all that together sort of as a deposit. It really helped to pull everything together," he said.

"As the school was being opened, and pioneers were

settling, the very same time and year, they started it immediately. It must have been very important to have an education, German-speaking people, from Prussia, that became Germany within 10 or 20 years," he said.

Lieser hopes that his book highlights the importance of education in the community in an interesting and inspirational way. "Having a small community in the classroom with all different ages, people had their tasks and duties, and people learned how to cooperate and be part of a functioning community where everybody has jobs and responsibilities," he explained.

This community and family-based education system helped to document earlier members of families when researching as well. "You couldn't do that with different ages in modern-day schools, but one could say there were benefits of that," Lieser noted. "In this fast-paced world with all of the electronic devices, your mind goes so fast and doesn't have a chance to slow down and study something with self-discipline. One thing leads to another, but self-discipline is what it takes to drill it down."

Lieser believes that repetition is the mother of learning, highlighting this theme in his book. In a country school, learning through repetition occurred by younger and older grades having the chance to hear lessons multiple times and then work at the pace they needed to master a topic. "Today we live in a world of immediate gratification," Lieser explained.

"They give up so easily. It's not that they aren't smart enough; they just haven't taken the time to get the hang of it."

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"I think that people who have an interest in reading or history at all will find this an interesting read. Future generations will look at this, and at a time when no one living knows what a country school was like, and have documentation of it," he said.

Recording this history will be crucial to allow a taste of the experience of a country school to live on in years to come. "Even though the school closed in 1970, over 120 to 130 students are still living. You fast forward from there another few decades, and these people will no longer be here, and we captured a little bit of history," he said.






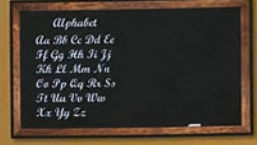

In the book, a chapter includes pictures of people who attended the reunion. "You will see pictures of students in their family units. A lot of times you were in a classroom that you shared with siblings and cousins. The purpose was to be within walking distance of all the farms," he said. Many of the family names that composed

the country school are still around today.

Lieser began writing the book in August 2022 and finished in May 2023, working on a part-time basis. This was a continual process of updating, editing, and filling missing gaps in information. Lieser added quotes from Laura Ingles Wilder. "If you read her quotes, they match perfectly," he said. Little elements of design like these bring the entire book together.

Although this book is specific to District 63, it is informative when learning about other country schools in the area as well. "I pull in a U.S., Minnesota, and Stearns County school history," he added.

If interested in Lieser's book, he can be contacted directly. His email is mlieser@yahoo.com and his phone number is 469-693-6058. Lieser asks those who read his book to kindly make a donation to the American Legion. Today, the District 63 school building serves as the Lake Henry American Legion post.



Once Upon a Country School

*History and Memories of District 63/1966
Stearns County, Minnesota*

Mike Lieser
2023

Mike Lieser, a 1970 PHS grad who worked in the oil and gas industry as a geoscientist, wants donations for his book to go to the American Legion. Today, District 63 on Co. Rd. 32 is the Lake Henry American Legion hall.

One of Lieser's favorite parts of the book is the memory section. "I captured the memories of the people who attended directly, and I think

that is pretty important. That is history right there," he said.

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What to know about AFib

Aging is associated with certain ailments, some of which concern seniors more than others. One of the conditions many older adults worry about is dementia, particularly in the form of Alzheimer's disease. Though there's no cure for Alzheimer's disease, recent research suggests reducing blood sugar may be associated with a lower risk. Doctors and researchers have determined a link between high blood sugar levels and the formation of dementia, which includes a loss of memory and thinking skills that afflicts millions of older people. A 2013 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that, even when diabetes was not evident, there is a correlation between sugar and dementia. A blood sugar level above normal levels (depending on activity level and weight, among other factors) can contribute to an elevated risk of developing dementia. Furthermore, a longitudinal study published in 2018 in the journal Diabetologia, which

followed 5,189 people over 10 years, found those with high blood sugar had a faster rate of cognitive decline than those with normal blood sugar – whether or not those blood sugar levels classified the people as being diabetic. The link could be due to an enzyme that breaks down insulin. Insulin-degrading enzyme, a product of insulin that breaks down both insulin and amyloid proteins in the brain, which are the same proteins that can lead to Alzheimer's disease, is a factor in the connection to dementia. Melissa Schilling, a professor at New York University, reviewed studies and found that people who have type 1 diabetes and don't produce enough insulin can't break down the amyloid proteins naturally. Furthermore, those who take insulin to treat diabetes can end up with a surplus of insulin in the body. The insulin-degrading enzyme gets used up trying to break the surplus down. This doesn't leave enough

enzyme to tackle amyloid brain clumping proteins. These same scenarios can occur in people if their blood sugar levels are elevated, even if they don't have diabetes yet. Data published by Harvard Health Publishing indicates "any incremental increase in blood sugar was associated with an increased risk of dementia." Individuals who have elevated blood sugar levels, or roughly 100 mg/dL or higher after a fast, can tame sugar levels by exercising,

losing weight and shifting away from highly refined grains. Individuals also may want to favor a Mediterranean style of eating, which focuses on fish, olive oil, fruits, vegetables, and beans over a processed carbohydrate- and sugar-laden diet. High blood sugar is another factor linked to the formation of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Making lifestyle changes can keep seniors healthy throughout their golden years.

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