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Grand Canyon History Tidbit by Kim Besom

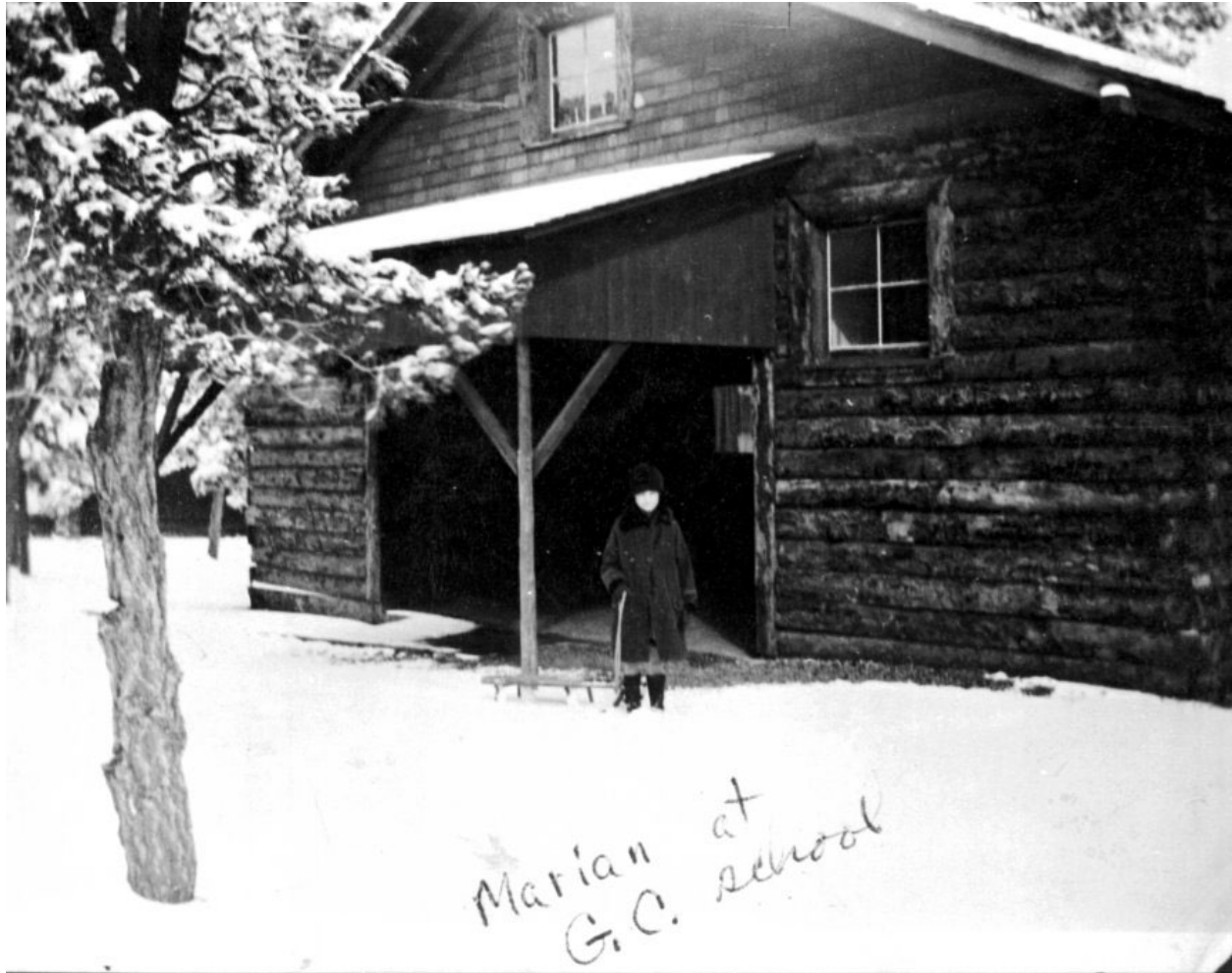
Back to school time

The kids at the Grand Canyon headed back to class during the first week of August. According to the school's website and an article by Hubert Lauzon- an early attendee- a school was started at Grand Canyon July 10, 1911, when "Ralph and Niles Cameron loaned the use of a building they owned south of the present head of Bright Angel Trail. Miss Grace Miller was the first teacher... Judge Layton, the county circuit judge acted as school superintendent."



#16534: Ralph Cameron building used as the first schoolhouse at Grand Canyon, 1911. Kolb photo.

Then "W.W. Bass provided funds for lumber and labor to erect another school building that had a classroom and quarters for the teacher. The building was completed July 27, 1913. Miss Minnie Webb from Payson, Arizona, who had taught several years in China was the first teacher. The 1914-15 school year opened with 29 pupils. In 1916, the county built the next school with county funds. This building still stands on the hill south of the Fred Harvey Garage [the building that currently houses the community library]. The school board chose this location because of the proximity to water and sewer lines."



#18116: Marian Tarleton in front of Grand Canyon schoolhouse, circa 1925-1930.

In a 1994 interview, former student 'Pinky' Moore Oesdean described this school building:

Oesdean: We went to school in that building that's up behind what used to be the old garage, that old log house, that's where we went to school... It had folding doors in the middle. It was two rooms. We had four classes on one side and four classes on the other side. Eight classes- you had all eight grades in that building... Four [grades] with one teacher and four with another teacher. And that's where we graduated from the eighth grade and then we went to high school. And we had to go away to high school.

An advantage to going to school at Grand Canyon:

From a 1994 interview with former student Ruth Stephens Baker:

Baker: ...we met people here [at the school] that people everywhere else would NEVER meet. The whole world came to us, we met kings and queens and presidents. I remember [the President of Mexico] coming out to our little school and saying hi to us. I mean that's something else!

A disadvantage to going to the Grand Canyon School:

From a 1978 interview with former student Jean Tillotson Anderson:

Anderson: At first, the bathrooms were pit toilets. The toilet paper was catalogs. We'd sneak out scissors to cut out dolls from the catalogs. Flush toilets came later.

With school in session, slow down watch for children in the crosswalks. In a time before crosswalks and school buses, however, snow seemed to play a major role in memories of walking to school... and it was uphill both ways...

From the Pinky Oesdean interview:

Oesdean: We lived at Rowe Well... And the winters got so bad- we had winters then that are different than the winters are now. And it was hard to get us back and forth to school because Daddy would leave home with us in the morning. And a lot of mornings he could just get so far in the car, and he'd walk the rest of the way into town. And with little youngsters it got kind of rough.

Interviewer: How far out were you on that road?

Oesdean: About four miles... I remember the first year that I started school. Daddy and I would start out, and my father was tall, very long-legged and very slender, and we'd go as far as we could go in the car and then Dad would put me on his shoulders and he'd walk and we'd get to town... he'd stop at the post office and then I would go on by myself up to the schoolhouse. Then the next year Ethel [a younger sister] started school. So, there was two of us and she was the youngest and when we got to where we couldn't make it with the car, Daddy would put her on his shoulders, and he'd break trail for me. And I'd follow along and that's how we got to school.

Interviewer: Do you remember going through snow all the time?

Oesdean: Yes! You got to school, and you were frozen, and you were drenched. And we had steam pipes that went along the wall. That was our heat source. And so, you'd get to school, off come your shoes and your socks and the teacher would move your desk right up next to the steam pipes. And you'd hang your things to get them to dry out. And then she'd get us about all dried out and then it'd be recess time and we dried out again till noon.

And when it was too far to walk...

From a 1978 interview with former student Loren 'Tiny' Lauzon:

Lauzon: In the wintertime... my dad [Bert Lauzon] and I... we'd have to ride horseback to work and to school. Well, it would be twenty, twenty-five below and you'd warm up your bridle and go down in the morning, saddle up your horse and ride to school. And one time I was riding that old bay horse to school and I thought I'd take a shortcut so I got to where that steel gate is, instead of going around it, around the road, I was going to cut across- late for school- and the snow had drifted and my horse fell in one of these big ditches... my head was about this much above the snow on top of him, so I had to get out and break trail so he could get out of the ditch. I almost froze to death before I got to school. Ed Cummings... would let me keep my horse in the Fred Harvey barn. Then we'd feed him, and I'd get out of school, and I'd wait for Dad to get off work and we'd ride home. And when there wasn't anything else to do, I'd throw snowballs at the cars coming by the [entrance] station.

The 2-room schoolhouse was eventually replaced by some of the current elementary and middle school buildings in 1940, and the high school was added in 1958.



#02428: First grade, Grand Canyon School, February 1953.