About ten miles northeast of Kirksville, a white-washed wood building sits off by itself. This building holds many memories, because some years back, children from ages six to fourteen used to gather there in the yard every morning. These children spent the whole day in that building and its name was Elliott Schoolhouse. It was named after the man who donated a tract of land on which the school was built between 1860 and 1865.

Mr. Russell Murfin attended Elliott Schoolhouse from first grade up through eighth grade. He remembers his school days vividly. In 1912, Murfin began first grade. His mother bought the “first reader” for him to start school. A first reader was a text for the first grade. This book was supposed to help teach children how to read. It failed with Murfin, however, for he was an ill child through most of his first year in school. His mother kept him home most of the time and read the first reader to him. Eventually, Murfin memorized the first grade text. “So when I started second grade and went into the second reader I couldn’t even read a word. I was standing in the corner, it seemed to me, half the time because I wasn’t getting my assignments! The teacher didn’t know I didn’t know how to read!”

A regular school day started at nine o’clock in the morning and dismissed at four in the afternoon. Classes started with first grade and went on up because the younger kids got restless as the day went on. While the lower grades were in classes, the higher grades studied.

Mr. Murfin tells of his experiences in studying, “We studied while the others were doing their reciting, which was a decided advantage in many ways. However, you had to learn to concentrate on your own material, which was a good thing too. Sometimes we got interested in what was going on in the other groups. It was an advantage in one way and that was, for instance, you would listen in a lot on the grades ahead of you, so by the time that you got to those grades, you knew a lot about the material, which helped a lot.”

There were at most twelve students attending Elliott Schoolhouse at one time. Since there were eight grades for one teacher to teach, the ideal plan was to alternate the fifth and seventh grades and the sixth and eighth grades. Mr. Murfin states, “I recall quite vividly that I advanced from the fifth grade to the eighth grade because I didn’t hit it right. You see, if you got promoted from fourth grade and that was the year they were teaching fifth and seventh you were alright, but I happened to be in the alternate group in which I took the sixth grade, then the fifth grade, then the seventh grade and then the seventh grade.”

Elliott Schoolhouse was heated by a wood stove located in a corner. Mr. Murfin recalls, “If you were close to it, you were very comfortable, but if you were off in the corner somewhere, you nearly froze!”

The washpan sat on a stand off to the side and the drinking pail and dipper were located in a back corner. There was a well about fifty yards from the school. Each day, a boy was assigned to fetch a pail of water from the well during the first recess. Then, when the students were thirsty, they drank out of the dipper in the pail.

There was no form of music except the singing of some patriotic song every morning, depending on the teacher. The year after Murfin graduated from Elliott the little school acquired a piano.

The front of the school had a platform called the rostrum. There were rows of benches upon it and it was a foot higher than the main room. This was where the students recited. When a certain grade was having class, they spent most of their time on the rostrum. The classes did their math problems on the blackboard which was in front of the room behind the rostrum benches.

**ELLIOTT SCHOOL #40**
1913-1914

Front Row, left to right—Susan Maltby, Garret Eversole, Myron “Mike” Waddill, and Russell Murfin. Second Row—Letha Waddill, Mae Mason, Leta Waddill, Gladys Eversole, Glen Pevehouse, and Lauren Maltby. Third Row—Lola Karner, teacher; Nellie Pevehouse; Lilah Maltby; Alta Mason; and Goldie Pevehouse.

**Story by Karla Tade**
and Darla Casady
There was only one way for the children to get to school and that was by their own two feet. Some children walked as many as two miles to school.

Mr. Murfin says, "At recess time, all of us were terrifically hungry since most of us walked all the way from a half mile to two miles. So maybe we'd have our lunch during the recess time and then at noon we would finish it up or maybe save an apple for the last recess.

We didn't have many subjects. The old saying, Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, those were the basics. Then we had spelling and grammar and that was about all we had.

"Then Friday afternoon after the last recess we would have what we called ciphering matches, or spelling matches or geography matches. We would choose up sides and each one would go to the board, in a ciphering match for instance, and the one who got to choose what to do would choose addition, subtraction or what have you, and the one who would win would get a point for his side and whatever team got the most points would win the ciphering match.

"If it was a geography match, we would have to take out our geographies and the teacher would write a city on the board and we would have to find what country that city was in, which was very educating, of course."

When the students learned to spell, they began by spelling each word orally by syllables. When questioned on the spelling of a word, they would say the first syllable and spell it, the second syllable, and spell it, and so on. Mr. Murfin believes that this method was not a good method to go by. When the students began writing their spelling words down, they would go through the spelling of each syllable in their minds while trying to write, which made it increasingly difficult to write with any speed at all.

On discipline and punishment Mr. Murfin comments, "I don't remember anyone ever being whipped in our school during the years I was there. Usually you had to stay in from recess for a period of time. They wouldn't hold you after school because you had to walk so far and it would be dark by the time you got home. But you might have to stay in at noon and not be able to participate in any games or anything for maybe a week, which was pretty rough punishment for kids since they loved the games outside."

One particular incident stands out in Mr. Murfin's mind. "One little boy had been to church the day before—this was a Monday morning—and the poor kid was not overflowing with intelligence, and he had heard the minister talk about Jesus walking on the water. Well, that made a terrific impression on him. So he began telling about how Jesus walked on the water. Of course, wheels began to turn in the bigger boys' minds. One older boy said, 'Uh, Jim, anybody can walk on the water!' 'Oh, no,' Jim says. 'Yes they can; we'll go up to the pond and show ya.'

"Well, there were two hills that came down toward the pond. The older boy said, 'Now if you'll get up there on top of that hill and run just as hard as you can right out on the water, you can just sail right across."

"Well, you know what happened. Before he got the brakes on he was clear up to his neck in water. Then he began to yell about it and the older boy said, 'Now look, it could have happened; you just didn't have enough faith.'"

Mr. Murfin tells of another prank: "We didn't have fountain pens, we dipped our pens in an inkwell, and a lot of the girls wore braids. Sometimes it was quite a temptation for some boy who sat behind a girl to dip the end of her braid in the inkwell. You do that very quietly!"

All in all, Elliott Schoolhouse was nothing more than a typical one room schoolhouse in its own time. The little pranks that the kids played on each other broke the normal routine and kept each day from becoming a repeat of the day before. "Kids were just as onery and mischievous then as they are today," Mr. Murfin says. Elliott Schoolhouse is a place in which many memories came about and are now reminisced over and over again.

Mr. Russell Murfin