

Room and Board at Old Normal in the 1930s

Stories from Ruth (Blacker) Ryder, student 1936-1938, and her daughter, Dr. Mary Ryder

The Blacker sisters grew up on a farm in White Heath, IL (near Monticello) and during their times at ISNU, all three rented a room in the house of Reverend and Mrs. McColley at 601 N. Normal, Ave. While Ruth was attending 1936-1938 to get her 2 year certificate in rural education, her eldest sister, who was already teaching, came back to school to get her degree. The two girls roomed together and shared a bed in the McColley house for \$8.00/ per month and they had cooking privileges in the basement—which housed a stove, sink and storage room but no refrigerator. Whenever they went home they brought food stuffs with them including: home-canned fruit, vegetables, meat, lard, jellies and jams, pickles. Sometimes they had grape juice and eggs as well as home-grown potatoes, apples, and other fresh produce. They shopped at a little neighborhood grocery store, the Cubby Hole, but bought only milk, bread, flour, sugar and other baking supplies. When they did not bring baked goods from home, they made their own.

The Ryders have more information from Ruth's sister, Guyneth Blacker, who attended ISNU on her own in 1934-36. Boxes of food were sent frequently, if not weekly, from the farm to the lone daughter attending school. The accompanying letters, from Guyneth's mother, Irene, provide commentary on the many foods sent to Guyneth through the mail:

Mother Irene wrote on October 22, 1935,

“Was going to send some butter to do over the weekend for fear you might have company...but I am afraid you might have to buy some for a few weeks. We don't get much ...I may send some cookies or something any way without the butter....You might like bacon with your eggs for breakfast. As soon as it gets colder we will butcher a pig.”

Big rolls of butter were sent and mentioned in letters throughout the cool months in 1935 and 36. A letter dated, May 1, 1936, read: “...I know the butter will be mush.... I am mailing a box this eve. If you get this letter and not the box, call for it at the post office or the butter may run away...”

Guyneth kept a diary in which she recorded the foodstuffs she received from the family farm. In addition to candy, these included: fried chicken, butter, fresh meat, sausage, bacon, and boiled ham; baked goods, including hickory-nut cake, fresh bread, raisin-filled and other cookies, crème puffs, cinnamon rolls, and raspberry pie; fruits, specifically bananas (obviously not from the farm), strawberries, and apples; and other produce including celery, lettuce, radishes and asparagus. Guyneth, like most students who came from farms, did not eat poorly, even during the Depression years.