

Kid's KOrner

Every student is a star in one-room school

TYLERTON, Md. — The listing of fourth-grade activities in "Tylerton Times," the mimeographed monthly newsletter of the Tylerton School, sounds familiar to anyone who has ever been around an elementary school: "4th grade is doing column addition with four-digit numbers, is subtracting 3-digit numbers, has a reading test Tues."

There is a difference, though: At Tylerton School, the fourth grade consists only of 10-year-old Melissa Tull. That's all.

Welcome to Tylerton School, a modern one-room school on Smith Island in Chesapeake Bay, where this year's student body has 10 pupils and the faculty consists of a teacher/principal and a teacher's aide.

Country Stalwart

One-room, one-teacher schools once were the backbone of education in rural America. In the second decade of this century, half of the nation's schoolchildren were enrolled in about 212,000 one-room schools, and as recently as the 1947-48 school year, just over 75,000 one-teacher schools remained.

But increased urbanization and suburbanization, the widespread belief that large consolidated schools could do a better job, and improved transportation combined to decimate one-teacher schools. By the 1982-83 school year, only 798 remained, leading the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement to conclude: "The one-teacher school is disappearing from America."

Since then, however, the numbers have begun to turn around, if only slightly. As of the fall of 1984, a study for Brigham Young University's Center for the Study of Rural Education found 837 one-teacher public schools. Like many

other institutions whose demise has been prematurely mourned, the one-room school refuses to die.

In part, this is a matter of geography. Most surviving one-room schools are in places like Tylerton, sparsely populated and isolated from other schools.

Most such schools are in the wide-open spaces of the West, like Cherry County, Neb., with 6,700 residents, 800 grade schoolers, and 20 one-room schools. In 1982-83, only six states had 30 or more one-teacher schools, and those six contained 81 percent of the national total: Nebraska, by far the leader with 354; Montana, South Dakota, California, Alaska, and Wyoming. By comparison, only eight states east of the Mississippi River had any remaining one-teacher schools, 51 in all.

In mythology and in reality, Americans venerated the little one-room schoolhouse, which usually was not red. Andrew Gulliford, who directed a major study of American country schools, writes that the schoolhouse "was the social center of the community, especially in remote areas. All groups met there."

"Rural people knew, however instinctively, that to lose their school meant to lose the focus of their community," Gulliford notes.

Not Necessarily Nice

Not that the one-room school was necessarily such a wonderful place. Fred E.H. Schroeder, a professor at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, wrote a few years ago of the Sunny Crest School in Wisconsin, where he began his teaching career in 1952:

"Ill-lighted by three widely separated windows on each side, the crowded room reeked of

kerosene, oil-mopped floors, chalk dust, perspiration, damp wool, and chlorine bleach that was poured into the pit of the attached privy at the rate of a gallon a day."

Still, a one-room schoolhouse has qualities that many Americans are turning to today. Schroeder cites "curricular integration, the personal attention to each pupil, the responsiveness to community values." Ralph Smith, dean of Brigham Young University's school of education, says that these remain in today's one-room schools.

"Many of these schools now have all the modern characteristics an urban school would have: computers, television, field trips, speakers, and the like," Smith says. "Plus they have peer tutoring, the upper grades teaching the lower, individualized instruction, and so on. I think they're better now than they ever have been."

Some of the best qualities of one-room schools can be seen here in Tylerton, a community of about 150 residents separated from the other 350 residents of Smith Island by a two-mile channel, and from the Maryland mainland by Tangier Sound.

Smith Islanders make their living by harvesting oysters and crabs from the fertile waters that surround them. They are a hardy, independent lot, mostly named Evans, Tyler, Marshall, and Bradshaw, and they care about their schools; the current Tylerton School was built in 1974, replacing an older one-room facility dating to 1919.

Posters And Projectors

The school is 50 feet long, 22 feet wide. Light streams through the windows, and the walls are



The entire student body and faculty of Tylerton School — 10 pupils, a teacher/principal, and a teacher's aide — gather in the playground behind the school. One-room schools continue to serve youngsters in isolated communities such as Tylerton, Md., located on Smith Island in the Chesapeake Bay.

covered with drawings, photographs, posters, inspirational mottoes, and the work of pupils. There are motion-picture and slide projectors, a large television set, a photocopier, a mimeograph machine. A partition divides the area used mostly by upper-grade children from that used by primary-grade pupils.

Presiding over the school is Alice Evans, "Miss Alice," a main-island native who arrives each morning on the school boat that takes Smith Island high schoolers

to the mainland. Her school runs from kindergarten through sixth grade; seventh- and eighth-graders go to junior high in Ewell, across the channel.

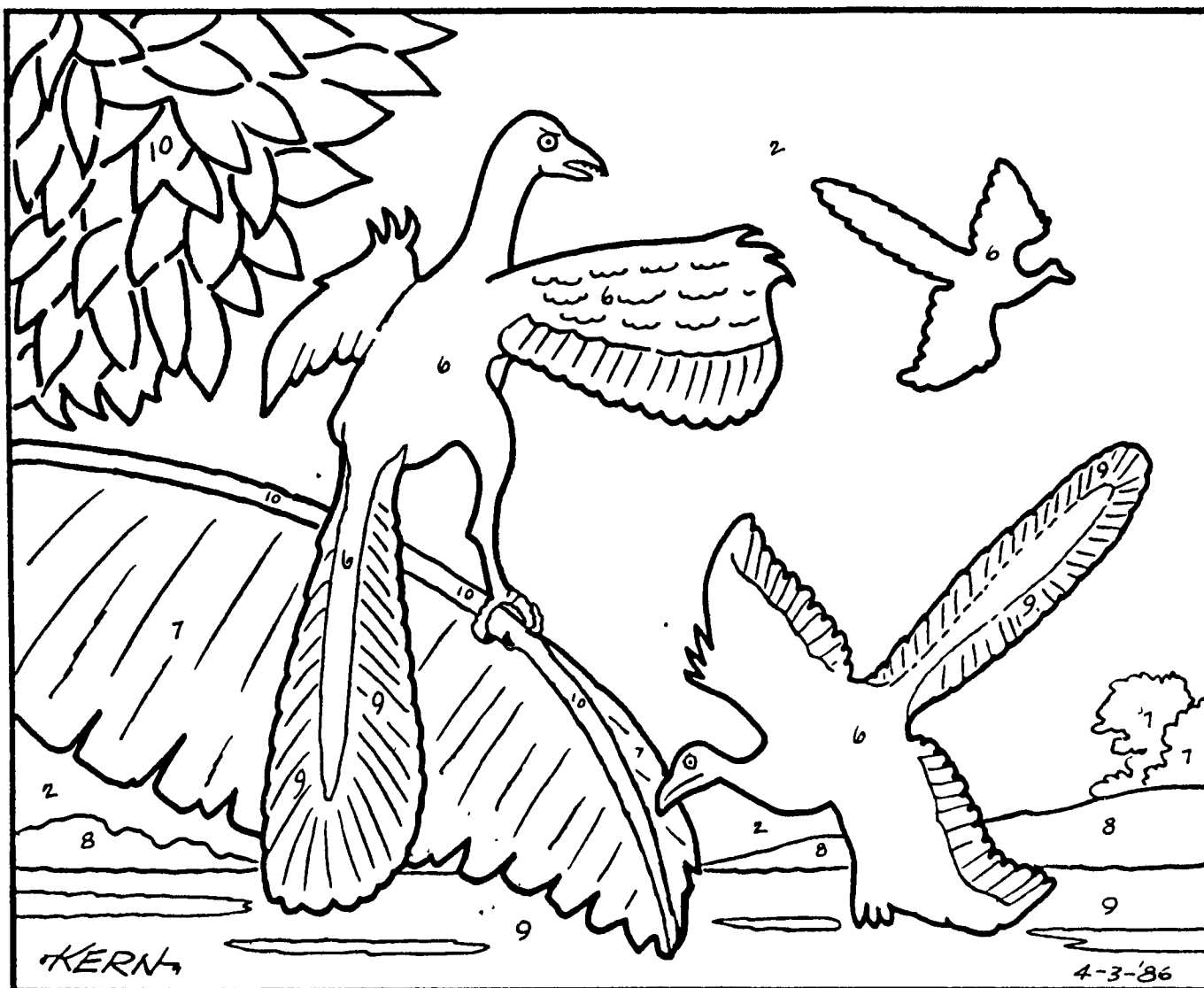
There are no kindergartners this year, but there are two first-graders and two second-graders, mostly taught by the aide, "Miss Evelyn" Tyler; one fourth-grader; three fifth-graders; and two sixth-graders. Many activities, such as reports on visits to elderly or ailing

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|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. LT. GREY |
| 2. PEACH | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

BIRD OF THE PAST: MANY KINDS OF BIRDS THAT ONCE LIVED ON THE EARTH HAVE DISAPPEARED. THE ARCHAEOPTERYX IS THE OLDEST BIRD SCIENTISTS KNOW ABOUT. IT LIVED IN THE DAYS OF THE DINOSAURS. THERE HAVE BEEN NO BIRDS OF THIS KIND FOR 100 MILLION YEARS. THEY ARE KNOWN AS ANCIENT WINGS.



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