

Good old days

Kids spend day in 1850s school room

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

TWENTY-FIVE GIFTED Smart Junior High students found a lot to be thankful for earlier this month — living in the 20th century instead of "the good old days."

The Walled Lake School District youngsters traveled to Greenfield Village and spent the day in McGuffey School, recreating a day in the life of an 1850s school room.

For several hours they lived a life without Reeboks, computers, Twinkies, Trapper Keepers and Title IX.

To prepare for the field trip, they spent three weeks researching the times. Each student took on a new identity in keeping with the period. They invented their parents' occupations, some historical background and lifestyle. Clay Fenstermaker, for instance, became Matthias Fenstermaker. Kathryn Jelsch became Narelissa McFerry, whose father owned the general store.

DRESS WAS AS authentic as could be fashioned. Kallee Holtzclaw went in an apron and gingham dress sewn by her mother after Kallee's research.

Staff photos
by DAN DEAN

Adults, too, got into the spirit. The classroom was led by a stern and proper, black-clad spinster school teacher, better known to her eighth-grade youngsters as the more amiable Mrs. Paul Wilcox.

Room mother Pat Hanje asked for help from relatives living near Sauder's Museum in Ohio in creating her costume.

Room mother Sue Katz used cloth-

ing found by her mother in a blanket box bought at a household sale. She carried a luncheon tin with muffins and venison sausage. No plastic wrap was allowed and all items were wrapped in cloth napkins.

Students wrote on slates, read from McGuffey Readers and learned what was considered good classroom behavior in the 1850s. Be silent unless asked a question and wash face and hands when entering the class-

room and feet if barefoot.

SEXISM ON THE playground was discovered when girls were forbidden to play crack the whip and advised that ring around the rosy was more suitable. With the exception of budding feminist Jolene Sulinski, they complied. She refused to get into character, shed her gingham skirt to reveal a pair of jeans and joined in the roughhousing.



Gifted eighth-graders from Smart Junior High created their own time machine by stepping back 130 years as they enter McGuffey School at Greenfield Village.



The school marm — here Paul Wilcox — rang the bell to signal the start of an eight-hour day of serious learning.



In a classroom lit only by daylight and warmed by a log fire, students of the 1850s learned reading and writing with the aid of a McGuffey's Reader, slate and chalk stick. Here Kristie Malila, Sherla Yaklin, Angela Lasher and others try their hand at the bygone methods.



In a scene reminiscent of a Winslow Homer painting, the female students play ring around the rosy outside the log cabin school house, while their male counterparts play crack the whip.



Nicole Hess reads from a McGuffey's Reader, dressed in the gingham dress and hairstyle of the times.