

“One Room School House - 1865”

My inspiration for this roombox was inspired by images that I see combined with my memorable life experiences.

Many years ago I had the opportunity to visit the HF Bar Ranch in Saddlestring, Wyoming, with my wife and children. While there, we frequently rode past an old abandoned, now gone, one-room school house. The image of that building has stayed with me ever since.

I believe that these one-room schools are one of America's most iconic symbols. The “little red schoolhouse” has become a symbol of early American rural education, democracy, and community values. They became a patriotic symbol representing the foundation of American education based on the “three R's” (reading, writing, arithmetic) and the enduring spirit of local involvement and self-reliance.

These small simple, single-room buildings were constructed from inexpensive local materials, often painted red simply because red paint was the cheapest option available. Red lead paint was used by railways and frequently used for barns and schoolhouses. The buildings themselves were designed to serve multiple grade levels and taught by a single, generally woman, teacher. They commonly featured simple, often shared, desks, lots of windows to furnish as much natural light as possible, a wood burning stove for heat, a small blackboard and one or more outhouses. These buildings also frequently served as community meeting places and even chapels. They simply were an important part of America and our history.

Because the one-room school house was such an iconic symbol, references to it can be found in many artistic endeavors. Laura Ingalls Wilder made reference to it in her “Little House” series, Orson Wells used the image with great effect in his movie “Citizen Kane,” and Winslow Homer frequently made it the subject of many of his paintings and illustrations. I was particularly influenced by his works “Snap the Whip” and “The Noon

Recess.” Both of these Harpers Weekly illustrations have been part of my personal print collection for many years and served as inspirations for this box.

In addition to the Homer illustrations, I used photographs of the interior and furnishings of the Boardman School which was constructed in 1840 in Griswold, CT. The school was relocated to the Mystic Seaport Museum in 1949 where I photographed and viewed it.

As you may know, I incorporate various elements into my boxes to act as trigger points to invoke a memory/reaction by the viewer. In this box you might note the presence of apples, a lazy old dog with its ball, the HF Bar brand written on the blackboard and the scale model of a Triceratops. After all, what old or young kid isn't fascinated and impressed by something that lived 68 million years ago?