

Only the Trees

Long years after, even the school had died.
Its desks and blackboards and the brass bell
and *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia*
and the teacher's special things
had all been auctioned off.

The honey locust, the shagbark hickory,
and that summer apple tree remained.
But the windows were boarded up
and sheep grazed the yard.

The wooden fence that kept in the ponies of the boys
who raced each other along the top board
fell apart.
And the pump and furnace rusted into nothingness.

Someone made it a house, with garage and driveway,
during years when yellow school buses sped past
with windows full of children
staring toward the old school,
seeing nothing.

Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia rested a while on a farmer's shelf,
its colored pictures still explaining how to keep turtles in a terrarium.

The spout from the outdoor hand pump held a row of books
on a shelf constructed by hands joined to a memory
of being cupped beneath the spout,
catching the bright cold water.

Another old student caressed the brass bell,
clanging it softly
now and then.

For a while these few witnessed,
Then only the trees.