

School Lunch Box Succumb

By DOROTHY NIX

The battered lunch box with its cold sandwiches is becoming as much a part of the past as the little one-room schoolhouse.

Today a hot lunch for the school child is the combined concern of the United States Department of Agriculture, state nutrition experts, and trained lunchroom managers. It is largely taken for granted by everyone else except for National School Lunch Week, when the spotlight of public attention plays briefly on some of the people who make it possible.

One such person is Mrs. Margaret Little, cafeteria manager at Medlock School since shortly after it opened 16 years ago. The first graders who first passed down her lunchroom line are now college juniors.

THEY COME back to school to vote on election days and to see Mrs. Little. Judging by their warm regard for her, Mrs. Little has ladled out a lot of love and affection through the years, along with her excellent mashed potatoes and green beans.

A grandmother of nine, seven of them students in DeKalb County schools, Mrs. Little knows what children like. Their favorite food is hamburgers and they might enjoy having them every day in the lunchroom week, with fried chicken running a close second.

But lunchtime is part of the learning process as well as classroom instruction, believes Mrs. Little along with other dietitians. Her menus, which meet state and federal standards, aim at educating a



Staff Photo—Charles Bennett

MRS. MARGARET LITTLE SERVES LUNCH TO STUDENT

Melissa Watson, 9, Gets Hot Lunch at School

child's taste in foods, as well as satisfying his hunger.

THIS DOES not always meet with the child's approval. One little first grader, trying manfully to acclimate himself to the strange new world of school, went home and demanded of his mother, "Doesn't Mrs. Little know I don't like slaw?" But a few days later he reported hap-

pily, "I am beginning to like Mrs. Little's cooking."

Mrs. Little brings a professional know-how to her job. She is a past president of the Georgia School Food Service Association and has headed the DeKalb-Decatur and 5th District units as well, and led group discussions at national conventions.

The principal of the school, Mike Jones, believes school

needs are served best with everyone working together, so Mrs. Little attends all faculty meetings. She says the teachers make her job easier.

THIS WEEK posters in all the rooms will proclaim School Lunch Week. And when some of the classes start studying the basic seven foods and nutritional needs, Mrs. Little will drop by to help them.

Classroom lunchroom participation percentages are charted on the sparkling white tile walls of the kitchen. Last week 92 per cent of the 708 Medlock children ate the school's hot lunch.

Mrs. Little credits her staff for the smooth running kitchen. Three of the five full-time workers have been with her for 12 years. "An awfully lot of food goes through this production line," she says. It takes a crate and a half or 35 heads of lettuce when tossed salad is on the menu. About 120 pounds of meat and 350 pounds of potatoes are required to serve a group of this size.

PARENTS OF first graders are invited to eat in the lunchroom sometime during their child's first year at school. So are the parents of children who have just moved into the school district.

Mrs. Little and her staff add special touches to highlight seasonal events. At Halloween time there will be orange icing on the cakes and just before the holidays there will be turkey and all the trimmings.

This spring a group of seventh graders decided to turn the tables. After cautious investigation they determined that March 12 was Mrs. Little's birthday anniversary so they presented her with a cake and a bottle of perfume.

"I was surprised," recalls Mrs. Little, "since Oct. 12 is my birthday. I told them it was fine though."

The generation before this one may look back fondly on the sandwiches mother used to make, but the children of today may remember as fondly a school lunchroom and Mrs. Little.