

## EDUCATION IN THE BRIGHTON AREA PRE 1900

Completion of the Erie Canal in the mid 1820s provided a cheap and safe water route to Michigan Territory for the eager settlers from the East. By the early 1830s this emigration became a steady stream.

Upon arrival in this area, after their arduous land passage west from Detroit, it is likely a tent on dry ground or a temporary lean-to in the roots of a fallen tree served as shelter until trees were felled for a log cabin. With no handy local lumber yard or hardware store, a blanket served as a door and oiled paper or greased buckskin was put into window openings. A stick chimney lined with wet mud served as the fireplace. Furniture consisted of chests brought on the wagon, rope or strings of raw hide supported a mattress tick stuffed with leaves, split logs served as seats and tables. The childrens' sleeping quarters were in the loft. It was not uncommon to find snow on the quilts and water frozen in the bucket by morning until the fireplace was revived. It can be cold getting dressed under those conditions in the winter.

Settlers in the several townships in this area were painfully aware of the fact that besides leaving friends, adequate lodging and food in their move they had also left any means of formal education for their children. After 'sticking it out' to provide shelter and sustenance for their families, these pioneers turned their attention to the children's instruction. A large portion of these pioneers were from New York and the New England states. They had strong opinions on the need and value of an education.

Altho' a half mile and more separated these families, several would get together and hold a 'bee' and by the end of the day a log school was standing on land donated by one of the neighbors. Clay, marl, sand and water was mixed to chink the spaces between the logs and to construct a field stone fireplace at one end of the building; two outhouses were placed at the back of the lot. Families sending children to school took turns supplying fire wood. Water, brought by one of the children, in a tin bucket with a long handled dipper, served as the drinking water supply. In the very early schools the teacher might have a small bell at her desk. Later construction included a bell in the belfrey. With 3-12 children in a family of an age to attend school it didn't take too many families to fill the log structure. A teacher was hired and provisions made for crude benches (split logs with pegs pounded into bored holes), desks, chalk and slates to take the place of unobtainable paper, and perhaps, a black board or some means for the teacher to display the lessons. Books, usually brought from home or donated by neighbors constituted the library. Maps on a rack on the wall rolled up and down like window shades. Much later an occasional piano or organ found its way into the school. Children and grandchildren of these early pupils often attended the same country school. (Compiled and edited by Marieanna Bair. To be continued.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 481  
Brighton, MI 48116