

## EDUCATION IN THE BRIGHTON AREA PRE 1900 (cont.)

In the southwest corner of Brighton Township (now Brighton City) the number of children of school age, 5-20 years, increased from 46 in 1837 to 267 in 1879. A Mr. Jerald and Miss Sophie Olney taught the first school in 1838, in a building on the east corner of E. Grand River and Hope Street. (Varying accounts put the date of construction even earlier, in 1835 by Maynard Maltby.) This building was used until 1847, when it was sold and moved to a lot owned by John Becker, on Fitch (Main) Street west of Grand River. There it was used as a blacksmith shop until 1878, when it was moved to the end of the lot and used as a barn or carriage house until it burned about 40 years ago.

After the first building was sold, a house on E. Main was rented and used for a school until 1850 when a new school of frame construction was built on the northeast corner of Spencer and East Street. As enrollment continued to increase it became necessary to rent vacant stores in the downtown area to accommodate grades 1-4. These rented schoolrooms had been previously occupied by various ventures, including saloons, wool storage, grocery stores, etc., and were in sad states of repair. Naturally, parents of children attending were dissatisfied with such facilities, but those were difficult times and everyone felt it was beyond their means to do much about the situation.

This condition continued through the Civil War Years until the "Union" school was occupied in December, 1868. (Perhaps it received this name in commemoration of the saving of the Union.) This third school building, constructed on Rickett Road (then Ann Arbor Road), was build of brick at the cost of \$10,000 not including the price of the lot which was \$487.50. There were not many furnaces in those days, but this school had one; there was a large register that was usually the "big hole in the floor". The first four grades were in the basement, the next four on the main floor, and the 9th, 10th and 11th grades upstairs. There were six teachers for the school, from which two people graduated in 1887; Mable Wiley and Fanny Holdridge.

To continue education beyond the 8th grade, the parents of children in outlying districts paid a tuition fee for students attending the high school in town. This usually meant that 8 grades would be the limit of a child's education because it was not financially affordable for all. Transportation was by horse and/or buggy. To avoid traveling 5-10 miles twice a day, good weather and bad, required that room and board be found for these children during the week. This was often with a relative and girls often helped pay for their keep by baby sitting and helping with housework. Because of the need for them to help with chores boys usually returned home each night. Following a blizzard farms could be isolated for days until the farmers got together with teams and bob sleighs to 'break' the roads. No county snow plow in those days. (Compiled and Edited by Marieanna Bair. To be continued.)

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