

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116-0481

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #303
Brighton, MI

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Brighton Area Settlers Valued Education — Part 2

Both Isaac Crary, Michigan’s first Congressman, and John D. Pierce, Michigan’s first Superintendent of Public Instruction (the first such position in the nation) had studied Victor Cousin’s Report on the Prussian System of Education and were convinced of the validity and soundness of the three degrees promulgated. It consisted of the primary, secondary (high school), and instruction received in a university. To assure the establishment of a university, the Michigan Constitution provided for funds for the support of such an institution of high learning. Pierce, proposed to the Legislature the formation of the University of Michigan. This resulted in the March 18, 1837 founding of the University of Michigan.

As the first state in the nation, along with Kentucky, to appoint a State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Michigan’s new Constitution, 1835, mandated this independent department of education be under the State Superintendent. The Constitution also included provisions for forfeiture of state financial aid in the event a school district neglected to provide education for the required three months. This forced communities to provide school facilities.

Constitutions of states formed later than Michigan included a similar stipulation. Michigan can also take credit as the first state to include a clause in the Constitution to provide for state libraries.

The townships formed were to be responsible for the expense of education from the sale of each township’s Section 16, the ‘school’ section, at \$1.25 an acre. This income, and the occasional fraudulent dealings on the part of officials, proved insufficient. The expense of their children’s education fell to the parents to pay the teacher. Therefore, many settlers could not afford to educate their children. In 1837, the State of Michigan

became responsible for education instead of the townships. Individual school districts could also authorize school taxes. However, wealthy landowners could, and often did, vote down school taxes.

When Primary rural school districts (1-8 grades) were organized the boundaries were often irregular. The distance to be walked from home determined which district a student attended. Residents of a district banded together and built log school houses. Often a farmer would donate an acre on which it would be built, for as long as the site was used as a school. Farmers brought logs cut to size and shape. A stone foundation supported the walls which were erected within a day or two. Openings were prepared, which could be covered with scraped deer hide to let in some light until glass could arrive from Detroit or Ann Arbor. A door made from lumber sawed at a nearby mill (Maltby, Woodruff, etc.) could be attached with leather straps until hinges were made by a local blacksmith.

To be continued...

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: Bill Pless writings; “Michigan — A History of the Wolverine State” by Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)