

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Brighton Area Settlers Valued Education — Part 3

In the Michigan Constitution Convention, 1835, it is not difficult to recognize the conviction of the earliest settlers of the value of a valid education. A number of educational provisions are included. Already in the surveyors’ compass one finds this planning. Counties are surveyed with townships immediately responsible for the education of its residents’ children. When this proved financially inadequate, the State of Michigan picked up the ball and school taxes were levied.

As surveyed, most townships had seven to eight rural school districts. Some, with a village, had a school in town which later evolved to a K-10, then K-12 school system.

Until a well was dug, parents sent water to the school by their children. The first (1835+) rural school’s sanitary facilities were outhouses. Hand washing was with water from the pump in the school yard. The State Superintendent of Education, by early 1900s provided plans for sanitary privies. Chemical interior toilets were often in use c. 1917. Later the state encouraged the use of a crockery container with a spigot instead of the communal dipper in the pail of water.

The early log schools were heated, with parent-provided fuel, by a fireplace. No wood? Too cold? Too much snow? No school. As soon as possible the log school was replaced by a frame building with a belfry. The bell was a source of pride. It served to note the beginning of the school day, was rung for emergencies, and celebrated holidays.

Usually a round stove, perhaps a furnace later, was at one end of the room with a long stove pipe to the chimney in the opposite corner. Residual heat was obtained from the smoke through the stove pipe. The school board would contract with a local farmer for the supply of wood. Before students arrived

in the morning, the teacher (it was part of the job) made sure the school room was warm. Occasionally the teacher hired a sturdy, dependable seventh or eighth grader for this. Perhaps that student might also carry out ashes and sweep the floor?

Teachers often were local daughters, 16 years old, or had passed the eighth grade. They often boarded with local families. Subjects taught could include grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, reading, writing, spelling and penmanship (of which there were two methods: the Palmer and the Spencerian). During the 1930-40s, the Detroit News donated a dictionary to winners of ‘spell-downs’; of which this writer has one.

Students brought lunch to school. There was often a small shelf on the stove on which a potato or an apple retrieved from the lunch box could be cooked.

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.)

The Brighton Area Historical Society extends its sympathy to the families of:
Sam Ochodnický
and
Clotildus “Cleo” Moran
Both were long-time members of the Society.