

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Brighton Area Settlers Valued Education — Part 4

To bring order and conformity to rural school construction, the State Board of Education prescribed construction design standards. Including lighting, heating, eating accommodations, the rectangular shape, entrances, the gable roof line, clapboard siding, etc. The front entrance was to be on the north or south, with windows on the east and west sides. Students sat at desks not on benches. Good ventilation, built-in bookcases, cloak rooms, etc., were promoted by the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. Electricity was being extended to rural areas. Unable to conform to these new standards, most new construction of rural schools ended in the late 1920s.

By hearing older students reciting, the younger students were exposed to the same lessons several times over the years. Upon successful completion of eight grades, and the receipt of a diploma from the County Superintendent of Instruction at the local county seat, students looked to a nearby district with a high school. A majority of Brighton Township rural students expected to attend the high school in District 5. Most of the time, those who were able to attend the local high school, were well able to keep up with the curricula offered. Tuition and transportation were the parents' responsibility. Students often lived in town with a relative.

Rural districts' boards took pride in their teachers, the condition of the building and the 'community' which formed around school activities: pot lucks, end of school picnic, Christmas play, elections, etc. However, it was soon realized none of this mattered when rural graduates had no high school in their district, nor was there always a nearby district high school which had room for them. Resident taxpayers of a high school district

did not expect to cover the cost of out of district students, including the new structures necessary.

In 1837, in District 5, a one-room school was built in Brighton Village on Grand River at the northeast corner of Hope Street, which served for ten years. The next three years temporary buildings, including houses were used. Finally, at the northeast corner of East Street and Spencer Road, a new school was built for \$350 and occupied in the fall of 1850, which served until 1868. By 1863, the board of Brighton Village District 5 had started planning for a school to be built on "...land west of the Ann Arbor Road"; which later can be identified as on the west side of Rickett Road north of the railroad tracks. A rough rectangular structure with a lower level and two floors above, was constructed at a cost of \$140,000 and opened the first Monday in December 1868, known as Union School. By 1904, an elementary school was built just north of the Union School. (Later known as Rickett School.) These served well for K-10 and later K-12 students until 1928. (The Union School was sold to St. Patrick Parish in 1947, where it served as a parochial school for a number of years.)

By 1927, the board of District 5 realized the Union School was not able to meet the needs of the growing enrollment in all grades.

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.)