

II. THE ERA OF THE FRAME SCHOOLHOUSE

The Building Committee for the new schoolhouse, informed the schoolboard on February 14, 1855, that they had given out the notice for bids on Nov. 10, 1854, and that "George W. Nichols being the lowest bidder they had led Said Job to him for (400) four hundred dollars." A contract had been drawn up, and that day Nichols had given Bond for the satisfactory performance of the job. The board ordered that Nichols be paid the initial \$150 on the contract. Six men on Feb. 5th had called for a notice of a "Special Meeting..for the purpose of altering the plans and Construction of a School House to be built." This meeting of the district voters occurred on Feb. 16, but the plans of the mal-contents suddenly fizzled out. The record of the meeting was simply this: "No business being Presented Meeting Adjourned."

The building project progressed through the spring and summer. By Sept. 17, 1855, the Building Committee could report to the school board that the "School house was Completed and Accepted of by them Sept. 1st excepting Painting which is to be done on or before the first day of October 1855." The board proceeded to draw "Orders in favour of George W. Nichols for (250) Two Hundred and fifty dollars to pay for Said House Payable Feb. 1st 1856." They also drew orders to pay Irving Guilford \$2.23, John Strange \$1.00 and Samuel Preston 50¢ for the school record book, thus finally paying the small bills which had been voted the year before.

The old log schoolhouse was put up at auction on Sept. 22, 1855. It sold for only \$1.02, which was the highest bid received! The old building must have been in terrible shape, justifying the movement to build the new school!

The first annual meeting "of the qualified voters of School District No. 3" held at the new schoolhouse, was on Sept. 24, 1855. The voters elected Thomas Brunger Director. He was a native of England, had lived in New York state briefly, and in Canada West (Ontario) for 25 years where he had cleared two farms, and only in May had he come here, purchasing the Huckens farm. Perhaps his education seemed superior, or his knowledge of life in other places. Anyway he was accepted by his new neighbors, and quickly elected Director. Fayette Johnson was elected Moderator; and Ephraim Stockwell Assessor.

The contract for the schoolhouse was read. The motion was made and seconded that \$250 be raised to complete the payment for the schoolhouse. The motion passed by the slimmest of margins, 10 to 9. Those voting in favor were Thomas Brunger, John Strange, Charles Strange, Jasper Preston, Benjamin White, Fayette Johnson, Samuel Preston, Ephraim Stockwell, and Emanuell DeGraff. Among those voting against paying the debt were Edward McMullen, who had been against the new school in the beginning, and surprisingly, Henry Verplank, who had sold the land for the school. Perhaps now he did not like

the schoolhouse lot out of his farm; perhaps he was now tax conscious. Only the week before the school board had drawn an order for builder George Nichols for \$250 to be paid Feb. 1, 1856. The district narrowly missed defaulting on its obligation.

Thomas Brunger recorded that on Oct. 24, 1855, two stoves belonging to the district were sold at "Publick Auction" for \$1.69. Evidently they were not too good. On Nov. 3, the director was preparing for the winter term by buying some small items--one pail, one broom, one chair. Also that day he purchased for the new school a "box Stove" costing \$12.50, 33½ lbs. of pipe valued at \$4.09, and 3 elbows which cost \$1.13, a total of \$17.72 for the heating plant.

The winter school teacher in 1855-56 was again Theodore Thomas; his salary was now \$73. The following summer a three months summer term was taught by Sarah Anne Nichols for \$24 salary. The district received \$ 36.92 from the township, and from Ephraim Stockwell their assessor, \$56 "collected by Rate Bill for School purposes." One day the director paid 25¢ for a broom, and 18¢ for turkey down for a chair. The total cost of maintaining the school that year was \$115.40; the income had fallen short.

The annual meeting in 1856 voted to pay Thomas Brunger \$2 for procuring the stove, Samuel Preston 50 cents for stove pipe, a bill that was nearly one year old then. They "Voted that there be one Dollar to a schollar be raised to support school"; evidently parents were to pay a dollar for each child, to help balance the budget. In these figures we can sense the poverty of the people, the low wages and prices of the times.

South Oneida was still in a frontier condition. There was no road north of our school. Irving Guilford as he cleared his land a mile north of here in 1851-52, found that the hungry deer ate the leaves off the trees felled the day before, by the next morning. Some of the log cabins of the area were very crude. We are told that the Strange log house, like those of the near neighbors, was of better caste. "The Elm logs were of uniform size and all were peeled of bark and the ends squared so house corners were even as those of a brick house. The logs were hewed flat upon the inner side and papered.. The fireplace was of brick...Upstairs were beds for several...All of the furniture was "homemade". "They had no carpets on their floors, nor any cooking stoves." A stoop on the back sheltered the grindstone, shaving horse, work bench, etc., and there were hung the scythes, rakes, and garden tools.¹

In 1856 the Stranges built a large barn. From the roof the boy Daniel saw his last wild deer in the area. Wild turkeys had been common. Perhaps about 1861 Dan Strange, home from college, saw his last wild turkeys across the road where Ed McMullen's house was later

¹ Daniel Strange, Autobiography.

built. In 1857, the Stranges built their large frame house, part of which is still standing. The Thomas Brungers lived in an old log house until about 1864, when they built a fine frame house. William Brunger, a young man of 20, entered the employ of his Uncle Thomas in 1855, and helped clear part of his farm. He bought the first tread power threshing machine owned in the township, which was operated by horse-power. Thus we see that around 1860, the people in Oneida were struggling to move away from the conditions of the pioneers.

Let us note that in Grand Ledge, the first school had opened in the spring of 1851, with 9 pupils. The settlers tired of using boats to cross the river, and in 1853 managed to build a wooden bridge. By 1860 Grand Ledge had a population of 225, with 6 stores, 2 wagon shops, a school, one gristmill, one sawmill, 3 blacksmith shops, 2 stoneware factories (where churns and the like were made), one cooper shop, one cabinet shop, and two asheries (soap and ash products). By 1860, the farmers of South Oneida did not have to go far to get their wheat ground into flour.

The South Oneida annual school meeting in 1857 elected Theodore J. Thomas, the teacher during the two previous winters, as Director. He served less than a year. The Moderator and Assessor elected, neglected to file their acceptance of their office. The township School Inspectors had to appoint these board members. The annual meeting also had voted to supply a Webster Dictionary for the school, and that families should supply $\frac{1}{4}$ cord of "good hard wood" for each "schollar" within 10 days after the commencement of school.

The winter term of school in those years usually commenced in mid-November. Salaries remained quite level. F.H. Wells received \$60 for 3 months in the winter of 1856-57; J. V. Jones received \$60 for 4 months the next winter, and \$63 for $3\frac{1}{2}$ months beginning Nov. 15, 1858. Harriet Brooks received \$35 for a 4 month term in the summer of 1857; Lang Monyer received \$30.25 for a term of 13 weeks in the summer of 1858; the next summer Lucy Murgan received only \$28 for a 14 week term. The 1859 annual meeting called for $1\frac{1}{2}$ cords of hard wood to be furnished for each pupil; if not brought in, parents must pay the amount in taxes, by "the rate bill". The voters authorized \$2 for glass and other "repairs about the schoolhouse"; \$2.81 to the Director for his services and one pail purchased; 30 cents to John Strange for "one Cup and Broom." The 1858 annual meeting elected Thomas Brunger Director, Ephraim Stockwell, Moderator; and John Strange Assessor. This board evidently gave satisfaction and served for three years together.

In the winter of 1861-62 a lady teacher was hired; we surmise that with the outbreak of the Civil War there was a shortage of available men teachers. Miss E.D. Bills received \$48 salary; the next summer Miss Eszilla Teman received only \$16.25 for 3 months of summer

school. It was not until November 1864, that a man teacher was hired again. The expenses in 1865 at the close of the war, reveal that the prices of some things had edged upward. A pail cost 46 cents, a broom 45 cents. New Director John Earl paid 10 cents for a key, 5 cents for a stamp for the teacher's contract (this was being done in a legal manner now) and 10 cents for an Assessors Bond. The Director paid \$1.00 for 10 "pains" of glass, 45 cents for a second broom, 15 cents for a dipper.

In the fall of 1863 it was voted that privies should be built for the school. The raising of \$20 was authorized for this purpose. The Director, now Samuel Preston, was to draw a plan for them "and let the job of building them to the lowest bidder, after having posted notices of said letting at least ten days previous." A second notable advance came two years later, when it was voted to raise \$35 (a large sum at that time) for a "Kit of Books bought of Adams Blackman & Co." Apparently the school would now have a small library for the first time.

Our second school record book, a large one, was brought out by Adams & Blackmer in 1864, and purchased here in 1865. The book was a practical and helpful one. It contains the proper form for the notice of the Annual School Meeting, along with a form for the record of the Annual Meetings, the Register of District School Officers and their acceptance. The book lists the following 12 duties of the School (or District) Board:

1. Employment of Teachers
2. Adoption of Text Books
3. Auditing Director's Account of Expenses Incurred
4. Acceptance of Assessor's Bond
5. Making Contracts for Building and Repairing
6. Selecting Books for District Library from the list contracted for by the State Board of Education, and ordering same from Contractor.
7. Appointing Officers to fill Vacancy
8. Appointing Librarian for the year
9. Adopting Rules for Library and providing suitable Case and Fixtures for the same.
10. Adopting Rules and Regulations for the Government of the school
11. Exempting indigent persons from payment of Rate Bills, and providing Text Books for such pupils.
12. Admitting non-residents to school, and determining Rates of Tuition for the same.

It appears that now the state had become more active in regulating local education and elevating the standards for district schools. Now each school was expected to have a library in a suitable bookcase, and a librarian, and books were to be purchased from a state list. This would mean much in the education of future generations of pupils.

In the fall of 1865 the Board contracted for wood for winter school at \$1 per cord; and hired John Strange to teach the winter term at \$24 a month. The wood bill was \$15. The following year it was \$15 for 17 cords, and \$40 was voted to repair the schoolhouse. In 1867 the annual meeting voted to pay \$10 for wood, the job to be let to the bidder furnishing the most cords for that amount. Henry Verplank agreed "to furnish twelve and one half ($12\frac{1}{2}$) cords, Maple & Beach sound body wood, on the school house yard, nicely piled, on or before the first day of January 1868."

Let us look at district finances in this period. The Board started the year 1867-68 with no money. They received from the 2-mill tax \$37.70, from the Primary School Fund \$27.72, from Rate-bills \$49.58, other district taxes \$38.00, and other sources 14 cents, for a total of \$153.14. The winter salary that year soared to a high of \$100, and Mary Strange who taught the next summer received \$39. The district must have just squeaked by financially. The next year they were in the red. In 1870 when the income jumped to \$258.85, the district became solvent. That year the district began receiving a small amount of dog tax.

In December 1866 considerable repair work was done on the school-house, now 11 years old. The following expenses were recorded: for mason work \$7.50; for glass, nails, putty, broom, etc. \$3; for carpenter work, a team and material, \$25.38; work done by John Earl \$6.62; work done by Edward Earl \$2.50; Elzy Edwards team and work \$8.15; Henry Verplank $62\frac{1}{2}\phi$; mason work \$6; for lime, hair, nails, putty, and tacks, \$10.90. It is not made clear what the repairs or renovation was at that time.

The first school census recorded in our record book, was made by John Earl, Director, in 1867. The school census included all the children and youth from the age of 5 through the age of 19. The District School had to take youth in their upper teens if they appeared. The school census, or potential for winter school, was large with 45 potential pupils! They were as follows: Eugene Edwards Age 16, Elzey Edwards 14, Louise Edwards 12, Charles Edwards 5, George Wright 13, William Wright 10, Frederick Wright 8, Amelia Trumbull 14, Hattie Trumbull 10, Cass Trumbull 7, Benj McMullen 14, Edward McMullen 10, Teresa McMullen 8, Louisa McMullen 12, George V. Plank 15, Martha V. Plank 13, Hiram Cummins 15, Arvilla Cummins 13, Margarette Cummings 7, Kate McMullen 9, Joseph McMullen 15, Dwight Backus 11, Volney Backus 10, Ada Backus 8, Burton Backus 6, Chas Donaldson 13, Alice Donaldson 19, Permenius DeGraff 18, Inez Farewell 11, Dalston Strange 16, John Strange 18, Anna Brunger 18, Eliza Brunger 16, Thomas Brunger 14, John Brunger 11, Frederick Brunger 8, Alice Brunger 5, Frank Brunger 15, Richard Glendenny 12, Chas Clendening 14, Frederick Mitchel 6. Let me make two observations regarding this census. First, the ages stated are not very accurate. Second, the large census reflects a large population in the countryside, and large families obviously. Farms or tilled lands were small then; the standard of living was much lower. The present Brunger farm with two families today supported five families around 1890, and probably that many in 1865. We can readily imagine that the teacher of the winter school had his hands full.

The 1869 annual meeting, with only a "few legal voters" present, was evidently a difficult one. Mr. Otto was elected Assessor, but refused the honor; William McMullen was then elected. The voters allotted only "two dollars" for wood, and found one willing to furnish 11 cords of beech or maple wood. "A motion was made to put a wall under the school house, also to paint and repair it." But the motion lost by a vote of 3 to 4. Lacking a wall to make the schoolhouse warmer, they then decided to bank the schoolhouse with sawdust, to improve its warmth for the coming winter. The voters then faced their financial situation, and voted to increase their taxes to the sum of \$233.85. The next year the issue of fencing the school yard came up. The clerk recorded that "it was thought best to leave the fencing of school house yard until a new school house was built and then build a good one." Evidently there was some thought that the schoolhouse, only 15 years old, would not be serviceable too much longer, and that a new schoolhouse was imminent. The first generation settlers believed in progress; they had already built two schoolhouses.

In the summer of 1869, the school term closed earlier than expected, on July 24, "on account of school being so small--5 scholars." The term had started with 18 pupils, 9 boys and 9 girls, of whom 13 withdrew during the term. The explanation was recorded thus: "Many of the scholars left school on account of the measles. Others to pick berries & a few to work through harvest."

In the winter of 1869-70, William R. Davies taught school here for 12 weeks of $5\frac{1}{2}$ days each! He received \$105 salary, and it was recorded thereafter, "Taught full time and gave full satisfaction." The next winter Thomas Henry received a salary of \$150 for 16 weeks; it would be 12 years before this figure would be equalled. In the winter of 1871-72, the board hired a woman teacher, Mary Parsons. She had taught here in the summer of 1870, and must have been regarded as a good teacher. She received \$84 salary for 14 weeks beginning Nov. 6, plus board at Stranges, "and fires built." The next winter the board hired another woman teacher, Asenath DeGraff, for \$35 a month. The following winter Maria DeGraff received a salary of \$122.50. After that they returned to the earlier pattern of men teachers in the wintertime for some years.

The summer women teachers in this period received from \$2.50 to \$4.00 per week. Mary Parsons received \$42 for 14 weeks in the summer of 1870; Gertie Thompson \$35 for 14 weeks in the summer of 1871; Mary Parsons received \$60 for 15 weeks in the summer of 1872.

The 1871 annual meeting voted to pay for charts ordered by the board. These cost \$35.60, a large amount. Were they for the teaching of physiology? The next year the people voted to sell the old stove, apparently too small, and "buy new one 2 sizes larger." This new stove cost \$14. The wood contract went to John Earl in 1870, to William McMullen in 1871, to Mr. Otto in 1872, to Herman Backus in 1873 at 8 shillings a cord. In 1874 after a motion to build a brick school had lost, a motion was made to reconsider the fence vote and "build a plain hard wood board fence, Oak posts to be capped." This motion carried unanimously. The public is indeed unpredictable.

The 1875 contract for "the Cutting & delivery of the wood was Taken by Thomas Brunger Sr at 84 Cts per cord." This was a time of depression, the price of wood was low. Note that this wood was "to be sound beech & Maple wood, said wood to be Delivered and split fine and piled on a School House ground." This was a lot of work.

The 1870's were a time of depression, but the teachers' salaries here did not decline appreciably. After the high mark of \$150 for the winter teacher in 1870-71, we see such salaries for the winter teachers as \$84 (plus board, and fires built), \$122.50, and in 1877-78, \$130. The summer term tended to become longer in the '70's, from 16 to 20 weeks. Summer salaries sometimes were quite high. Mary Strange in the summer of 1875 received \$95, plus board half time, for a 20 week term. Two summer teachers in 1874 received \$140 apparently. On the other hand, the teachers in the summers of 1878 and 1879, taught 16 weeks, and received only \$48. In March 1879, Burt Backus a lad of 14, was paid \$5 for building the fires through the winter term.

The school expenses in the last century seem ridiculously low to us today. In 1876 the board paid \$2.50 for banking and repairing the schoolhouse, \$1.25 for repairing the seats, and \$2.50 for cleaning the schoolhouse. One expenditure for glass, putty, and nails, was one dollar. An iron kettle for ashes cost \$1, a stove shovel 35¢, a broom 35¢, a box of crayons 30¢, a wash dish 40¢, and a tin cup 10¢. In 1870-71, the total expense of operating our school was \$242.32. In 1878-79, the expenditures were only \$199.30.

Evidently in November 1877, part of the schoolhouse was replastered. The board paid \$2 for plastering, \$1 for one barrel of lyme, \$1 for one load of sand, 50 cents for one bushel of hair, and \$2 for mixing and tending the mortar. The board purchased a teacher's bell, for \$1.00. We note that the school census remained high throughout the 1870's. In 1870 the census stood at 34, in 1871, 39; succeeding figures were 41, 43, 41, 37, 41.

Apparently some of the leaders in South Oneida, had been thinking for several years, that District No. 3 ought to build a good brick schoolhouse! When the issue of fencing the school yard came up in 1870, it was defeated. The clerk noted that "it was thought best to leave the fencing of school house yard until a new school house was built." At the annual meeting Sept. 1, 1873, a motion was made to build a "brick school house in said District during summer of 1874." The motion lost by a vote of 4 yeas and 9 nays. A motion was made to start putting money into a sinking fund for this purpose, but it also lost. At the 1879 annual meeting on Sept. 1, it was voted to raise \$75 to repair the school house, and that the Board could use its discretion as to whether more money needed to be spent.

Some of the leaders felt strongly that it was unwise to spend so much money on the old frame schoolhouse, now 24 years old. Six legal voters, Thomas Brunger, William McMullen, Edwin Raldall, F.R. Sherman, William DeCoo, and James M. Clark, petitioned for a special meeting which was held on Sept. 11, 1879. John S. Strange made the motion that a school house be built within one year. It passed barely; 14 votes affirmative and 12 votes negative. The voters were out in force. T. Trumble made the motion that "we build a brick school house this fall." Evidently the pro forces were organized. This passed by a vote of 15 to 9. Herman Backus, William DeCoo and Alford Mitchell were elected the Building Committee. John S. Strange moved that \$500 be raised toward the cost; the motion passed 13-0. John McMullen then moved that the new schoolhouse should not cost more than one thousand dollars; the motion passed 18-0. A new brick schoolhouse was to be built.

But after this crucial meeting, some of the people remembered that they had forgotten to rescind the action of the annual meeting to repair the old schoolhouse. So it was necessary to call a special meeting the next week on Sept. 18. We read in the record: "A Special meeting called by the Board to take in consideration the rescinding the vote of annual meeting of raising \$75 for repairing of house also to authorize the Board to hire money also to in-large school house site." The citizens voted to rescind their vote to repair the old schoolhouse, to rescind the vote passed for a four months school, to authorize the Board to give bonds "and hire \$500..to apply on new house." Nothing was done about enlarging the school site; this proposal would wait for 40 years. A motion was made and carried that "we sell old house tonight to the highest bidder and to be moved off the ground within ten days." The old schoolhouse was sold to Elzy Edwards for the sum of \$3.50!

The last teacher in the old frame schoolhouse, was Florence Goodrich, who taught a 16 weeks summer term, beginning May 18, 1879, for the salary of \$48. It was recorded of her that she was "A good teacher, No. 1."