

III. THE BRICK SCHOOL IN ITS FIRST CENTURY

The school officials moved with dispatch and things happened that fall of 1879. The old schoolhouse was quickly removed from its corner. The Building Committee contracted with George Campbell to build the new brick school at once. The Board sold bonds to raise \$500, and levied \$660 in taxes. The new school took shape rapidly and was completed by late December, so that a winter school term could be held. It was a neat looking building; with its two-tone brick exterior it had class. On Dec. 23, the District paid George Campbell \$992.94 "for building the schoolhouse." On Dec. 17, the District had paid the Racine Co. \$148.25 for the new schoolseats. Joseph Otto, Director, was paid \$4 for repairing the old privy, banking the new school, and picking up the yard. He was also paid \$5 for four trips to Potterville with horse and wagon, to freight the seats, and for cleaning the school after the builders were through. The Board paid Campbell \$1.50 for varnishing on Dec. 31, and the new building was finished and ready. Further supplies purchased for the new school were a water pail costing 60¢, a broom 25¢, a dipper 20¢, and a box of crayons 25¢.

The first term in the new brick schoolhouse began Dec. 29, 1879 and ran until March 20, 1880. G.D. Blasier was the first teacher. Mattie Kaufman taught that summer for four months beginning May 10, and received only \$40. At the 1880 annual meeting it was decided to build two "Brick Privies this fall." They were built, the old ones destroyed, and the school ground had a more attractive appearance. The privies were paid for in July 1881, and their cost was \$150.54. The debt on the new school was retired by January 1882. The 1882 annual meeting voted to raise \$30 for grading the school grounds. In 1883 it was decided to purchase "A bell for the school house." Much progress had been made in a short time.

The Board switched again to a woman teacher, Ella Farnsworth for the winter of 1880-81, and she was the next summer's teacher. She received \$104 for 4 months of teaching in the winter, and \$56 for 4 months in the summer. Evidently the summer school attendance was still markedly less, and the job was regarded as easier. The next three winters men teachers were employed; the following two winters women teachers presided over the school. M.A. Jones received a high salary of \$152 for the winter of 1882-83. For the winter of 1887-88, the Board turned to a man teacher again, Howard Hall. He taught 4 months beginning Nov. 7, and received \$120 salary. He was the last man teacher to be employed for many years. The frontier conditions had passed away. No longer did older teen-agers throng into the school in the wintertime, to make things difficult for the teacher. School teaching was becoming regarded as primarily a woman's job.

At the 1884 annual meeting, the people had a difficult time electing an Assessor, evidently the least popular of the three offices on the Board. On the second ballot J.C. Beekman was elected, but he declined to serve. On the third ballot A. Quantrel was elected; he declined the office. On the fourth ballot J.M. Clark, a former director, was elected. The people voted "to open the schoolhouse for political campaign speeches." In earlier times schoolhouses had been extensively used for religious services, political meetings, and social and community events generally.

At the 1885 annual meeting, a wood contract for 5 cords of beech or maple wood, "20 inches long, split fine and piled in ranks on the school ground", was awarded to Thomas R. Brunger for \$1.25 per cord. Evidently there was a need of wood delivered soon during the busy season, and a higher price had to be paid. A second contract for 15 cords of wood, with the same specifications, was let to Charles Brunger at 99¢ per cord; this wood did not have to be delivered and nicely piled until Jan. 15. The voters agreed further to buy a new Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.

In the middle 1880's, our school district suddenly swung toward the modern school year, with school held in the fall, winter, and spring months, and recess in the summertime! The frontier custom of a winter and summer term was still in vogue here in 1884. E.P. Tanner taught in the winter of 1883-84 for \$140 salary. A summer teacher in 1884 received \$40 on June 28; perhaps the summer term was ending early on that date. The frontier pattern of subsistence farming was now long past. As the farmers harvested larger crops of grain in mid-summer or late summer, they probably began to feel that this was the time of year they most needed help from their children. Mary F. Moore evidently taught a fall term in 1884; she received \$45 on Oct. 30, and \$15 more on Nov. 15. Then she proceeded to teach a long winter term, running to the end of March. Grace C. Dow taught a fall term in 1885, receiving \$45 salary; a winter term in 1885-86, with a salary of \$80, and a spring term with a salary of \$56.25. Suddenly a transition had been made, in the school year.

For several years the school recognized a fall term, a winter term, and a spring term. Usually there was a two-weeks break, or more between terms. The fall term in 1886 began Sept. 10 and ended Nov. 9; the winter term began Nov. 22, 1886 and ended Mar. 11, 1887; the spring term began April 4 and ended June 10, 1887. In 1891-92 terms were no longer set up. The first regular school year as we know it came that year; school began Sept. 7 and concluded on June 12. It was not until 1896 that Michigan Agricultural College turned to a modern school year, and eliminated their traditional winter recess that had enabled college students to go forth and teach winter terms in district schools.¹

1 Madison Kuhn, Michigan State The First Hundred Years (The Michigan State University Press, 1955), p. 254

The school census for 1888 listed only 26 potential scholars for District No. 3, 10 of whom were 16 to 19 years of age. The following names appeared on the list: James Backus 19, Clyde Backus 14, Ella Strange 16, Mary Strange 12, John Strange 8, Mattie Brunger 7, Keith Otto 17, May Otto 19, May Brunger 14, Myrtie Clark 17, Nellie Mitchel 19, George Trumbell 16, Jay Edwards 17, Z. Edwards 16, Clara Ball 19, Mina Root, 14, Eddie Beekman 10, Rozettie Robinson 11, Archie Robinson 15, Harry Brunger 7, Cliff Brunger 5, Altha Hickock 11, Montie Strange 5, Louise Strange 7, George McMullen 5, Ray Leaparrell 5. A notable school picture was taken that year by a Grand Ledge photographer, and was preserved by Cliff Brunger. By 1893 the census went up to 38, and the school must have been fairly large again.

The voters in 1886 decided to exchange the National Readers which had been in use in the school, for the new Barnes Readers! The 1891 school meeting decided that the Board should repair the blackboards and "all other necessary repairs including the out houses & painting the Cupola of the school house." The 1894 annual meeting instructed the Board to pay an assessment of the Ionia, Eaton & Barry Insurance Co. of \$160. The assessment was high, but the people wanted to keep the schoolhouse protected with insurance. They also voted to pay half the expense of building a fence between the school "site" and the A.B. Quantrell farm. The 1898 meeting rejected a motion to have free text books, an idea promoted by the state.

Between 1886 and 1899, our school evidently had a series of able teachers; most of them were complimented in the School Register. Florence Ames in the fall of 1886 and Mattie Campbell in the spring and fall of 1887, "Gave Good Satisfaction." Of Howard Hall (winter of 1887-88) it was recorded, "Have heard no complaint." Of Jessie Hancock in the winter of 1889 and the fall and winter of 1889-90, it was recorded, "Taught a good school." Myrtie Clark taught 4 terms in 1890-91; it was recorded that she "Taught a good School" or "Gave excelant (sic) satisfaction." The author remembers that she was a favorite teacher of his father's. Myrtie Clark taught a 10 weeks fall term in 1890 from Sept. 1 through Nov. 7; a 4 months winter term from Nov. 24 to March 20; and a 10 weeks spring term from April 5 to June 12. She received \$20 a month for the fall and spring terms, and \$25 a month for the winter term; a total of \$200. In 1891-92, for the first time, a 9 months school was taught, and no differential allowed for winter teaching.

Perhaps it was a bit hard for the teachers just at first, to adjust to the idea of teaching a long nine months' stretch. In that epochal year, 1891-92, Myrtie Clark taught 6 months, Ada Parsons 3 months. The next year Ada taught $6\frac{1}{2}$ months, Helen Wheaton $2\frac{1}{2}$ months. The following year Myrtie Clark returned to teach 9 months for the sum of \$260, and "Gave excelant (sic) satisfaction." Mary (or Mamie) Palmiter taught next for two years and "Gave good satisfaction."

Clifford Brunger remembered her well 70 years later, kept a picture of her, and stated that she lived 3 miles south. Did she drive to school with horse and buggy in the fall and winter months, and keep her horse in the church sheds across the road, as some later teachers did? We wonder. She also "Gave good satisfaction."

For the year 1896-97, Mamie Strange was the teacher. Her salary was \$222. Her young cousin Helen Strange, wrote of her in complimentary terms. "She was by far the best teacher we ever had. She gave us much that was outside the textbook. How I loved the books she read aloud to us; and the quotations which she wrote on the board and we memorized each week, and remained with me."¹ Helen also wrote of the discipline problem caused by her big brother Montey, now a lad of 14 or more. The other boys Montey's age had graduated the spring before, but Montey had not passed. "Montey, the one big boy of the school, was somewhat unruly. When Mamie felt she could take no more, she kept him after school to talk things over. She gave him his choice of three things, she would give him a whipping, or she would talk to his father about his behavior, or he could decide to behave. He chose the last."¹

The next teacher was Alice B. Van Auken of Potterville, an attractive and intelligent young woman, likewise remembered 70 years later by Clifford Brunger who kept her picture. She was 18 when she came here, had attended the State Normal School (probably one summer) and had passed the examinations in Charlotte on Aug. 19-20, 1897, with generally high marks, such as 90 in U.S. History, 95 in Grammar, 90 in School Law, and 85 in Orthography.²

A later teacher in our school had not fared so well in the examinations for prospective teachers in the summer of 1898. She received 41 in arithmetic, 40 in civil government, 20 in school law, along with higher marks of 92 in reading and 81 in penmanship. No certificate was issued for her then. She must have persevered and done better in a later exam.

The county records reveal that two visits were made to our school in the year 1891-92. On an October day Myrtie Clark was rated "good" in her ability to govern, to instruct, and to gain and hold attention. The seating capacity of the school was given as 36. The desks were 'suitable'. The school had a dictionary but lacked maps, globes, and charts. There was no well. The condition of the outbuildings was poor, of the grounds fair. The School had the adopted course of study, and taught the effects of narcotics and communicable diseases. Miss Clark had had 3 years of teaching experience.

1 Recollections of Helen Strange Allured, passed on to the author in a letter from Mary McMullen LaBatt, April 1979.

2 "Register of Examinations Held at Charlotte", in the archives of the Eaton County Intermediate Office.

At the annual meeting Sept. 5, 1898, the people supported a motion "to Build Wood house 12 x 16." No longer would the wood have to be piled carefully against the schoolhouse to keep it somewhat out of the rain and snow; it could be thrown into a large woodshed where it would keep dry. If the wood had to be split, this could be done away from rain or snow. A woodshed was simple to build. Oliver Doan received only \$7, for the building of it. Bills were presented, from the Hall Lumber Co. for \$20.09, from Clark Hardware Co. \$1.54, for moving wood \$1.00. A man was paid \$1.50 for hauling material for the woodshed. Two gallons of paint cost \$2.60, and a man received \$1.50 for painting the new building. It appears that the new wood house cost the magnificent sum of \$35.23. A bill for a "Flag rope" amounting to one dollar, was also paid at this time. Evidently the school had a flagpole. Progress was being made.

The annual meetings in this period often did little more than elect the needed officers. No longer did they worry about procuring a proper supply of wood; they left this up to the school board. The people of the community had mellowed; they were more agreeable and tolerant. It is notable that officers now often served much more than a three-year term. Tom R. Brunger served 12 years as Assessor from 1890 to 1902. A.B. Quantrell served 12 years as Moderator, from 1895 to 1907. The McMullen family monopolized the office of Director during this time; Joe serving from 1894 to 1900; Edward (his brother) from 1900 to 1906, and George in 1906-1907. A little earlier Joseph Otto served as Director 6 years, 1876 to 1882, and John S. Strange as Moderator for 9 years, 1883 to 1892. The active and permanent families were generally tapped for public service, sooner or later.

We have records of occasional school board meetings. The Board on Sept. 13, 1889, held an important meeting at the residence of Joseph Otto, then the Assessor. The Board voted "to adopt the following textbooks to be used in our school viz. Harpers new series of Readers--Harpers Geography's--Swinton's Grammar & language lessons--Pattersons Speller--Robinsons new complete Arithmetic...--Webster Wells Algebra--Barnes History--Steel's Physiology--Young's Civil Government--Chittendens elements of English Composition." The Board voted "that the Teacher be instructed not to allow any other text books to be used in the school after Monday Sept. 23, 1889."

It is interesting to note that the school board, once at least, met in a barn. On Dec. 5, 1891 the board met in the barn of Dalton Strange; there were two members present, T.R. Brunger and J.S. Strange. Strange, the Moderator, recorded, "The Director, S.C. Trumble, having removed from the district, the Board appointed J.M. McMullen to fill the vacancy." This Board on Feb. 17 met at the McMullen home and voted to "purchase a Teachers Anatomical Aid."

A special meeting of the district tax payers was held at the schoolhouse on Feb. 10, 1896. The voters decided to establish a district library. The district had had a library years before, apparently it had been allowed to lapse. The 1865 annual meeting

had voted to raise \$35 (a large sum at that time) for a "Kit of Books." In 1896 I suspect that the people were helped to this noble decision, by small allotments of library money. In 1900-01, the district received \$6 library money. Since 1896 the School has always had a library.

The finances of the period around the turn of the century may be illustrated by the year 1900-01. Director Ed McMullen on Sept. 2, 1901 gave this report of the year's receipts: Balance on hand at the beginning of the year \$55.42; November Primary \$42.90; May Primary \$12.00; Mill Tax \$130.15; Voted Tax \$140.00; Dog Fund \$3.90; Library money \$6.00, for a total of \$390.34. The district had paid a salary of \$234 for 9 months, \$75.55 for seats, \$5 for labor, \$8.40 for wood, 37¢ for repairs, \$1 for repairs on the stove; \$1 for a school register, \$2 to the Eaton Barry Co., \$2.26 to the Ionia Co.; 25¢ freight on the seats, \$1 for flagpole repairs, 30¢ for a broom, \$2.45 for cleaning the schoolhouse, and 35¢ for chalk, a total of \$334.23 in expenditures. A nice balance of \$56.14 was on hand, approximately the same as the year before. Inflation was not raging; costs remained quite stationary.

The time of the Annual School Meeting was changed in 1905 to early July. Always before it had been in September. The 1904 annual meeting was held at "Eight PM Sept. 5th." But in 1905 the annual meeting was held on July 10; in 1906 on July 9.

We have in our school record book, the Contracts between the District Board and the Teacher for many years, beginning with the contract that John Earl Director, made with Helen R. Teman for the summer term in 1865. A loose leaf penciled contract dated 1906, follows the form of 1865! This contract was made between "Geo S McMullen of District No. Three (3) in the Township of Oneida..And Miss G. Faith Otto, a legally qualified Teacher in said Township."

The contract stated that "the said G. Faith Otto shall teach the Primary School of said District for the term of Nine months, commencing on the Fourth day of September, A.D. 1906, and the said G. Faith Otto agrees faithfully to keep the List and Record required by law, and to observe and enforce the Rules and Regulations established by the District Board.

"The said Geo S McMullen, in behalf of said District, agrees to keep the School House in Good repair, and to provide the necessary Fuel, and to pay said G. Faith Otto for the said services as teacher, to be faithfully and truly rendered and performed, the sum of Two Hundred and Eighty Eight Dollars (\$288.00) .. to be paid on or before the Tenth Day of June, 1907.

"Provided that in case Faith Otto shall be dismissed from School, by the said District Board for gross immorality or violation of this contract, or shall have her Certificate annulled by the School Inspectors or Examiners, she shall not be entitled to any compensation from and after such annulment or dismissal.