

## ***West Bloomfield Township Schools***

Now that our children are back at the books, a little documented history on early schools in the township from several sources you may not have seen ...

“There were no school districts laid off nor general system of public education inaugurated in West Bloomfield until after the organization of the township in April 1833, but schools had been taught among the settlers as early as the year 1828. The first of the houses in which these were taught was a small log building, which stood in the southwesterly angle of the road, near the house of Zachariah L. Seeley, between Pine and Black Walnut lakes. This was, for a comparatively long time, the only one in the township. The next was a log school-house in the Scotch settlement, near the site of the present one in district No. 2. The third in date of erection was at Black Walnut lake, near Peter Richardson’s house; and the fourth was a stone structure known as the Harger school-house, in district No. 4.”



Fractional District No. 3 Schoolhouse on the southwest corner of Long Lake and Middlebelt roads

“The early schools were crude, and only elementary, after the universal pattern of schools in agricultural communities in those days; and yet there are many instances of thorough educations acquired, of which the foundations were laid in those same log-house schools.”

“At present (1877) there are seven public schools in the township, none graded. The school-house accommodations are sufficient, and in every way creditable. The terms taught are for four months each, summer and winter. The male teachers receive forty dollars per month, and the female teachers three dollars and a half per week, with board at the different houses in the district.”

- From “*The History of Oakland County, Michigan*”, pub. 1877.

At the first annual meeting of the voters of the township of West Bloomfield, held at the house Nelson Rosevelt on April 7, 1834, John Ellenwood, N. I. Daniels, and Haran Haskins were elected school commissioners. Roswell Ingram, Haran Haskins, and Isaac Hillard were elected school inspectors. The 1870 Census lists no teachers living in West Bloomfield, perhaps because it was taken in late July and early August.

“The early settlers in Oakland County were from New England and New York where they inherited the tradition of education in the home and in district schools, covering reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic. Within a few years after Charles’s settlement in the county a school district was formed which embraced the Greenes, Murrays, Stilsons, Phelps, Severances, and some others north and south, and called the Greene district. A log school house was soon erected built on the order of log houses. It had a front door on wooden hinges and the leather latch string, windows on the sides with panes fastened and held in place by wooden pegs. The desks were boards running the length of the room, laid on pegs driven into the logs about three feet from the floor. The seats were made by driving wooden legs into boards or slabs and by placing the seats

parallel to the desks. The pupils therefore sat facing the walls as there were no seats in the middle of the room. There was a large fireplace in the back end; the teacher's desk in the front end. The teacher rapped on the window to call the children in for school. There were no blackboards, no steel pens, no slates, no lead pencils. Pens were made from goose quills, turkey, and turkey buzzard quills. Lewis and Charles used unruled writing paper, but had a 'rule and plummet,' a piece of lead in the shape of a narrow and much elongated wedge for ruling the paper. They used Webster's Elementary Spelling Book, a curious and interesting old speller. The first pages contained an analysis of sounds, with a key, and the alphabet followed by words in columns to be spelled followed by sentences containing the words so pupils could get the meaning and pronunciation of words. Then followed words of two syllables, words of three syllables and so on. There were four fables and three stories with morals, - the dog, the stag, the squirrel. The book closed with a long list of sentences containing words pronounced alike but spelled differently, such as 'rain', 'rein', 'road', 'rode'. The English reader was Lindley Murray's. It contained a 'selection from the best writers designed to assist young persons to read with propriety and effect; to improve their language and sentiments and to inculcate some of the most important principles of piety and virtue'. The selections included such selections as 'Cataract of Niagara' by Goldsmith. 'Apostle Paul's Noble Defense Before Festus and Agrippa' - Bible - Acts. 'Nightingale and Glowworm' (poetry) by Cowper. 'On Pride' (poetry) by Pope. 'The Morning in Summer' (poetry) by Thomson."

"The English Reader was superseded by the McGuffey Readers which were used forty or fifty years. The other books were Olney's Geography and Doball's Arithmetic. The district schools made a specialty of spelling. The Hosner School, three miles north and east of the Greene School, confident that their spellers were superior to those spellers in the Greene School challenged them. The Greene School accepted the challenge and drilled every day for the event. The schools met at the Hosner School House on a frosty moonlight night in January. Both districts were well represented. It was an event similar in interest to our football games and was a real social event. On the Hosner side were the Forbushes, Andrewses, Bachelors, Hosners. On the Greene side the Murrays, Stilsons, Phelps, Severances. The line of spellers extended around two sides and one end of the room. The teacher of the Hosner School presided and pronounced the words. Easy words first then he launched into polysyllables, - separate, transmigrate, government, Presbyterian. Very soon only six on a side were left standing, then came subsidiary, unnecessary, heterogeneous and Charles (L. Severance) was standing alone having won for the Greene School. Among the Hosner girls who came forward to congratulate him was a striking black haired girl with bright sparkling eyes. She made a strong impression on Charles."

Note: Charles later married the girl.

(INSERT PICTURE HERE)

Fractional Schoolhouse on the northwest corner of Walnut Lake and Inkster roads, now Maria's restaurant

"'Boarding round' was a hardship on teachers but the custom obtained in the Greene District as late as 1888. The teacher had the fires to build and frequently the wood to furnish and cut, - all for \$12.00 to \$15.00 a month which was raised by the rate bill prior to 1850. Children were assessed pro rata on the number of days attendance at school. So many of the boys had to work in the fall and in the spring that school was kept only three months in a year."

- From "*Michigan Trailmakers*", by Henry Ormal Severance, published in 1930.