

West Bloomfield, the township of lakes and gentle hills, is one of transformation from wilderness beginnings and the domain of the Indian for some 12,000 years to agricultural prominence, to vacation dreams and summer resorts, to now established suburban living. The natural beauty and resources of its residents have played a key role in its growth.

Since its earliest settlement, these residents have been deeply committed to education as the key to passing on their heritage and preparing their children to shape the future of our township. *Peal of The Bell* chronicles the community's history to carry that mission into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This report includes a virtual exhibit of photos and documents of the history of the schools serving children living in West Bloomfield, Michigan. Like other more traditional museum exhibits it combines original artifacts and primary documents with text, captions, and analysis to help the reader understand the importance and significance of these items.

This presentation allows you to enlarge images for closer inspection or readability because we believe that a picture is worth a thousand words. You might want to focus on people's faces to see if you recognize them or to examine their expression. Perhaps you want to study clothing styles, penmanship, or advertisements of the day. These images also help you to visualize the environment of the scene and place yourself within it. Many of the pictures in this exhibit are actual original documents and artifacts produced by the people who made the history of West Bloomfield Schools. Examining them will bring you one step closer to the events that shaped our current school system.

# Part 1: Peal of the Bell: 1800s to Early 1900s



## You are reading Section 1: History of the School System

Be sure to read the entire Part 1 report covering these early years:

### Section 1. History of the School System

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## History of the School System Early Commitment to Education

Early settlers coming to this area were mostly from England, Scotland, and Western New York. Along with immigrant families coming through the Port of New York, they brought with them a tradition of literacy and public education that they believed supported their system of local democratic government. This mission was emphatically stated in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

*“Michigan was a part of the vast lands east of the Mississippi River which America acquired after defeating Great Britain in the American War for Independence. The lands were a part of an area known as the Northwest Territory. The ordinance of 1787 stated that “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” A Congressional Act of 1804 reserved from the sale of public lands Section 16 in each township for the support of schools. Michigan was organized as a territory in 1805.”*

*Source: The Making of a US Automobile Capitol 1818 – 1950, Esmo Woods, 1992*

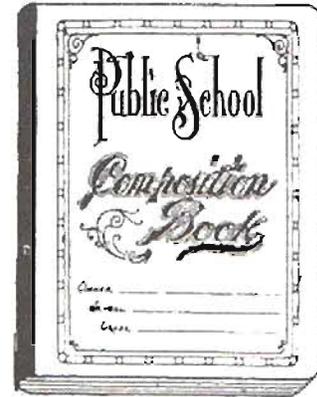
In 1809 Michigan's Territorial Council passed a law that required each family to pay \$2 to \$4 per child to support public education. The end of the War of 1812 and the opening of the Erie Canal encouraged further migrations to the Midwest after 1820. In 1827 the new territorial legislature followed the lead of Massachusetts requiring each township of fifty residents or more to hire a teacher and offer instruction in “reading, writing, arithmetic, English, French, and decent behavior.”

And so, a great effort and an inspiring tradition began even before Michigan became a state in 1837.

*“The Michigan Territorial Legislature enacted a law that citizens of a township with fifty households were obligated to provide themselves with a schoolmaster of good morals to teach children to read and write, and a township with two-hundred households was obligated to have a schoolmaster who could teach Latin, French, and English. Neglect of this law made a township*

*liable to a fine of from \$50 to \$150.”*

*Source: 1817-1877 History of Oakland County*



## Territorial Commission of 1805

Judge Augustus Woodward, appointed first Chief Justice of the Michigan Territory in 1805, oversaw the territorial survey that established the citing of Woodward Avenue and the location of Eight Mile Road as the Baseline for local surveys. Potential settlers now knew that they could purchase and register secure title to land, mostly large farm-sized tracts.



*Caricature of Judge Augustus Woodward*

After the War of 1812, a treaty with the Native Americans made more Federal land available and started a land rush that began to populate Oakland County. A survey was conducted from 1813 to 1817. The new settlers bought large plats of land and settled down to farm as early as the 1820s in West Bloomfield.

Initially the area we now know as Oakland County was divided into two parts: the top 3/5 was named Oakland and the bottom 2/5 was named Bloomfield. Becoming official in 1833, West Bloomfield was the last township to be carved out of Bloomfield – one of 25 equal-sized 36 square mile townships.

After clearing their fields and building their homes and barns, settlers worked together to build schools. Prior to that, parents taught their children at home. These crude one-room log cabin or planked buildings were also used as churches and meeting places. Area families gave teachers room and board. Students walked to schools in all sorts of weather, sometimes for miles.



This picture represents a typical building of the 1800s that may have been used as a schoolhouse. While called a “log cabin” this one-room building was really constructed of logs hand-hewn and cut flat on both sides, so as to not catch the rain hitting the sides. Floors were plank wood or dirt and a wood-burning stove was used to provide warmth. Above is the log cabin schoolhouse now located on the Chippewa Nature Center in Midland, Michigan. It was thought to be built around 1870. Michigan became known as the “One-Room Schoolhouse State” since there were so many in the area.



School terms were summer and winter for kindergarten through eighth grade multi-age classroom.

## School Districts

The construction of the one-room schoolhouse reflected the importance of reading and writing to the early settlers. The tradition of the Town Hall meeting and local democracy was part of the culture they brought with them from New York and was a model for the way local schools came to be managed.

As West Bloomfield prospered and new migrants peopled the communities, the schools changed with them. Some expanded and some disappeared. School districts were formed, with towns and school boards carving out land areas within the Township claiming the student population. These school districts within West Bloomfield were termed “Fractional School Districts” and are seen on early maps.

The word “fractional” is a surveying term. When surveyors measure land or water, they use the term “fractional” to describe a “portion of a total that is not connected to the whole.” For example, the Daniel Whitfield School was established in 1852 in included in Fractional School #6. Children from Pontiac and the Townships of Waterford, Bloomfield and West Bloomfield could also attend Daniel Whitfield School.

## Laws Establish Schools

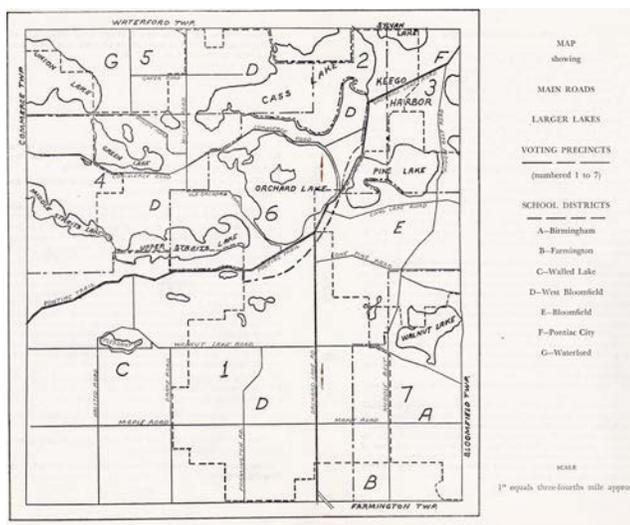
Michigan's first public school law was passed on April 12, 1827, by the Legislative Council of the Michigan Territory. Passage of this law was a recognition that education was a public responsibility rather than an individual responsibility. This act began a practice of organizing school districts within a township, with township officials responsible for drawing district boundaries, and requiring any township with 50 or more families to provide a schoolmaster.

*“A more comprehensive act was passed in 1829 known as “An Act to Provide and Regulate Common Schools.” The electors of each township were required to elect five persons to serve for three years as commissioners of common schools. They were responsible for laying out the boundaries of individual school districts within the township, and adjusting boundaries as necessary. Thus, school districts emerged as a unit of local government. After the districts were established, each district held a public meeting to elect three members to serve as directors of the school district for one-year terms. The directors became the forerunners of the modern school board.*

*The 1829 act also authorized fractional school districts. A fractional district contained land from two or more townships when a homogeneous community crossed township lines. At the present time, several primary fractional school districts continue to exist.*

*After statehood, the Legislature passed a Primary School Law in 1837. Each district elected a three-member board: they were moderator, assessor, and director. The moderator presided at all meetings, the assessor was responsible for tax collections, and the director had general management responsibilities.*

*Source: SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION IN MICHIGAN, Citizens Research Council of Michigan , NOVEMBER 1990*



*1952 School boundaries map. See GWBHS website – zoomable maps for earlier school boundary maps.*

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

*Source: History of Oakland County, Michigan, pub. 1877*

## **Education 1820 – Early 1900's**

Children living in what later became West Bloomfield Township were educated at home or had to travel long distances to attend established schools in nearby settlements. The communities of Birmingham, Bloomfield, Walled Lake, Pontiac, Waterford, and Farmington were experiencing fast mercantile and industrial growth in the early 1820s, but West Bloomfield drew mostly farming families. A one room schoolhouse in Bloomfield was already erected in 1822, then another on the Sly property in 1824. There were schools in Waterford as early as 1821.

In the “History of Oakland County, 1817-1877” it speaks about education at that time. West Bloomfield School District and fractional school districts within the township boundaries had been designated at the time of this writing.

*“There were no school districts laid off nor general system of public education inaugurated in West Bloomfield until after the organization of the township, but schools had been 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 the stone structure known as the Harger school-house, in District No. 4.*

*“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 long-house schools.*

*“ The terms taught are of 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.*

*“By 1877, there would be seven public schools in the township, none graded with “school-house accommodations . . . sufficient and in every way very creditable.”*

At the time of this writing (1877) Frances Orr was township superintendent and Douglas Harger was elected public school inspector, but declined to qualify for the office.

The report refers to a Pine Lake School, then located on what was Zachariah Seeley's property. There are unconfirmed reports of an earlier school built on the Huff/Duff/Durkee property, located on the northwest side of Middlebelt Road, called West Bloomfield Road. See the Pine Lake School history for more information.

## Rules for Teachers, 1827

- 1) *Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys*
- 2) *Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.*
- 3) *Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.*
- 4) *Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.*
- 5) *After ten hours in school, teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.*
- 6) *Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.*
- 7) *Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.*
- 8) *Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool and public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity, and honesty.*
- 9) *The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves.*