

The Slate

Vol. XXVIII, Issue I

Art and the Schoolhouse

Spring 2021

Closing Schools is Nothing New

By Rochelle Balkam

When MORSA decided to postpone the annual conference scheduled for May of 2020, we had no idea when it could be rescheduled. May of 2021 seemed a reasonable date. Somehow, here we are in February of 2021 and the corona virus is still with us. We've each had to cope in our own way; missing family events, wearing a mask when leaving the house, looking forward to home deliveries, enjoying a simple routine., zooming when necessary.

We are so much more fortunate than our ancestors were when they, too, faced a dread disease. We can communicate by phone or on the internet. School children still have virtual class, although for many it is limited. Children in school during the pandemic of 1918, were often out of schools for weeks at a time with no opportunity to learn. With current vaccines and more on the horizon, there is hope. (see the spring issue of *The Slate*, for 1918 pandemic teacher reminiscence.)

Being a retired educator, September for me marks a return to the classroom. Hopefully, next September, schools will once again be in session. It seems like the fall is an appropriate time for the members of MORSA to meet, as well. We have always found it difficult to schedule our May meeting date around other events in the spring.

Let's hope that the children are back at school in September, fall sports have resumed, we can meet at the Hicks School and we can breathe a collective sigh of relief.

Chair's Column

By Dr. Tom M. Johnson

Since the onset of the pandemic and considering my age, I have totally isolated myself. This has led to me having more free time than ever before, which I have filled with projects in my wood-working shop and working on the restoration of my 54 Kaiser automobile. It has also given me time to daily read the New York Times online and the Wall Street Journal and Lansing State Journal in print. It amazes me, no confounds me, how single issues can be presented so differently by the NYT & the WSJ. In fact, the news is depressing. I also read *The Leelanau Enterprise* which is the best weekly newspaper I have ever read. It is, at present running a series of articles on one room schoolhouses in Leelanau County.

Isolation also given me time to think about MORSA and like organizations. It appears to me, that without activity they run the risk of withering and dying. To that end, we recently held a board meeting via Zoom. WOW! From one room schoolhouses to meeting virtually on the Internet. In my opinion, it was a remarkably successful meeting. All but two of the board members were able to attend and everyone contributed.

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Country Schools As Art and Illustration

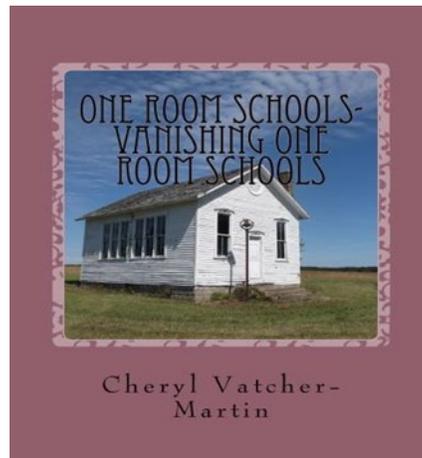
By Cheryl Vatcher Martin, M.A.

Through sketches, paintings and fine art photography, artists of the rural schoolhouse depict these historic buildings in ways that demonstrate the value of what was and still is a foundation of our American educational system.

As an author, educator, and fine art photographer, I look to compose photos of country schools in varying stages of life. I look inside and out for different aspects, different angles often during a specific season. Most of my work illustrates my published books and articles enhancing the written word, and at times showcasing a story on its own with the picture presented to reflect upon at first glance, and hopefully be returned to.

Two of my books feature a schoolhouse on the cover. *Haiku for You*, catalogued at Borders Books as Children's World Literature, illustrates the interior of Charlestown Rhode Island's Country School. This one room depicts a day in the life as it were circa the 1800's. It is as if one stepped back in time with the varying sized desks, many with carvings (as children took knives to school back then), primers and artifacts such as an original Charlestown, RI map on display.

A fine art photograph from an era depicts children in recess in period clothing of the day. This is the history I want to share and other photographic depictions, that to varying degrees, showcase similar schools in Michigan like District No. 1 Schoolhouse in Romulus, MI. This school is almost the mirror image of the one in Rhode Island and was built a year later in 1839. The photo chosen for this book had the historic fresh red paint on the clapboard frame.



Another school of note is Hart, in Frankenmuth, the white country school founded by the German settlers is a reminder of the Rhode Island School with its original charm. As an artist, some of my country school pieces have been mistaken for paintings! I have sold framed art in person as well as through fineartamerica.com.

The fine art photograph of Grass Lake School that graces the cover of my book, *One Room Schools – Vanishing One Room Schools*, was chosen to capture the essence of the rurality of the school today, and as it is in decline, I wanted to showcase it with a brilliant sky to perhaps encourage others to save this school, or at the very least, find a way to capture its beauty even as it becomes a part of the field's back drop.

Historic Notes From The Past's back cover pictures Dixboro's original swing set. It could hold a school room full of children enjoying the wind as if they would have sailed away on it during recess!

All my books are available for sale, feel free to send me an email at beau5522@yahoo.com.

The Art of the Schoolhouse

by Dawn Stafford

One of the most common questions I'm asked is; Where do you find inspiration? In truth, for an artist it all comes down to having a place to work, which is the primary reason why I purchased the Peachbelt Schoolhouse (ca 1867) in 2003.

The day I first visited the Peachbelt with its prominent bell tower and red brick exterior I felt welcomed. As I fitted the key into the lock I noticed children's graffiti etched into the red brick around the doorframe and as I stepped over the threshold of its double-hung front doors, just inside was the rope for the bell. Inside the schoolroom abundant natural light streamed through ten 84" tall windows and across the weathered maple floor. I certainly hadn't considered selling my own art, but maybe my paintings could pay for it? Maybe the rural location would work for retail? It seemed one of Life's 'forks in the road'. One I would always wonder about if I didn't go for it. So I placed my bid.

What I wasn't anticipating as I set about refurbishing my new "Peachbelt Studio" was how the schoolhouse's history and sense of place would eventually become embedded into my own identity as an artist. The name Peachbelt held much irony because I was, and continue to be, a painter of fruit still life - peaches a favorite. Over time the little building became much more than a place to create, it became a unique window on the world, and in this way, a source connectedness, relationship, and yes, inspiration.

Through the tall spacious windows I've spent countless hours observing migrating birds, the pattern of snow flakes falling, and the ever-changing colors of the of the rural windswept landscape. Through the back door; the cool evening air, cricket song, and the various flora and fauna I love to practice painting. And through the front doors I've entertained a wide array of visitors drawn by the charm and history of the one room school. They bring with them delight, curiosity, and often nostalgia. Not surprisingly the most frequent are educators, followed by architects who are attracted to the simplicity of the historic architecture. And yes, the sweetest of all are the former Peachbelt students who love the opportunity to step back in time and share memories from their school days.

The Peachbelt has proven a welcoming space to entertain guests, and of course, tinker, create, make a mess, and sometimes just sit and wonder. I feel grateful to have had so many productive years as its inhabitant and guardian. An artist's studio may be as humble as an armchair or outdoor potting shed, yet not unlike the historic one-room school it is devoted to the learning process. Most notably though, it always in some manner, reflects the maker therein and is forever associated with the creative spirit.

Art is made by taking in, and then filtering out what is not essential. Not only marks and images, but voices, memories, and sensations. This process takes time. Since working at the schoolhouse I have become a painter of shoes and boots, birds, vintage bikes, and clothespins. They all say something important about our path in life. How we work and travel, how we soar, and how we hold together. I'd like to credit the schoolhouse in part for bringing these subjects into the light and on to my canvas.

This year will mark 15 years of creating and selling art at the Peachbelt Studio. Open to visitors every weekend Friday-Sunday 11-5pm and/or by appointment, or chance, May through October. (To avoid a waiting, I recommend appointments for the duration of the pandemic, although walk-ins are also welcome) Phone: 269-561-5561 and Web-site: www.peachbeltstudio.com .



**P. Buckley Moss is Prolific as
“The People’s Artist”**

by Myrna Grove

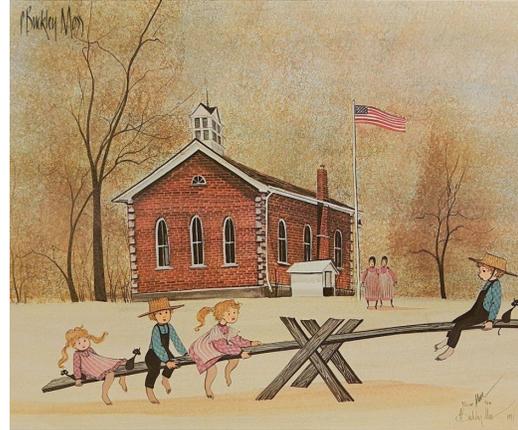
Patricia (Pat) Buckley Moss, known as P. Buckley Moss, has been called “The People’s Artist” because of her widespread appeal. Pat paints a variety of subject matter including one-room schools. In this article, I will share a bit about her background and style. My own interest in one-room schools took off when I began collecting limited edition lithographs of Pat’s one-room school paintings. She has painted a number of schools in the Midwest and in the East.

Pat has an unusual background. Born in 1933 on Staten Island in New York City, she attended primary school and a fine arts high school there. Eventually she received a scholarship to study art at the prestigious Cooper Union College.

As a child, Moss was perceived as a poor student, a circumstance now attributed to her dyslexia (not diagnosed until age 40). Pat has not forgotten the embarrassment and lack of understanding she experienced at the hands of Catholic nuns during her early school days. She sought refuge in her art, and one teacher in particular encouraged her talents.

Thousands of fans now respond to the serenity, beauty, and inspiration in her art. Her popular themes are family bonds, historical places/buildings and landscapes of natural beauty. Pat has tailored her work to encompass a variety of media, being equally creative at working with oils and watercolors as well as etchings, silk-screens, and mixed media.

The delicate images of her art are rooted in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia where Pat and her first husband moved in the 1970s. Pat became captivated by the lifestyle, values, and work ethic of the Amish and Mennonites. Though her works



encompass a wide variety of subjects, Pat is best known for her portrayal of this religious group which she also incorporates into her one-room school paintings.

I first noticed Pat’s art because my own family heritage is Swiss Mennonite. I discovered that Pat’s 1989 Moss Museum near Waynesboro, Virginia, stands on the very ground which belonged to my Grove ancestors for four generations. Thus, I was drawn to the land and people Pat was depicting and was later fortunate to befriend her.

To Pat, the Amish and Mennonites are living saints who celebrate the simple, honest pleasures of life. Pat paints many elements of the one-room school era such as the virtue of youth along with cooperation and working together for the good of the community. People are naturally drawn to the quaint wholesome content of her artwork which combines positive motifs, strong family relationships, and past history.

Approaching age 89, Pat continues to be a prolific artist. She no longer holds conventions for her collectors, but she still travels frequently for signings at numerous galleries which carry her work. Fans collect her lithographs and today, one of Pat’s originals could
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(continued from page 4, P. Buckley Moss)
sell for \$5000 to \$100,000, though the lithographs for collectors are much less expensive! She is represented by more than 500 galleries in America and abroad.

Pat is also known for her philanthropic work with special education groups and charities. Her work is carried out through the P. Buckley Moss Society Chapters (begun in 1987) and the Moss Foundation for Children's Education (established in 1994) whose theme is "For the Love of Children".

These organizations have provided scholarships and donated millions of dollars to benefit the health and welfare of children. My own Moss Society Chapter in Northwest Ohio, Trees of Life, has contributed more than \$300,000 to local recipients in need.

An online resource to find out more about P. Buckley Moss and her artwork is www.pbuckleymoss.com. At the site, you can access her biography, various articles, awards, and her weekly newsletter. There is also a list of authorized dealers, and you can search for a particular print. In addition, information about the Moss Society and the Moss Foundation is available. Pat is also on Facebook under P. Buckley Moss Artist.

P. Buckley Moss Images:

1. Holmes County 201 (1991) is a school near Millersburg, Ohio built in 1900 .
2. Little Stone School (1993) is the 1859 Wing Lake School in Bloomfield Township, Michigan.



Home with Father 1928

by Eloise Doster

On a cold winter night when there was about a foot of snow on the ground, we were sitting around the round oak stove having just taken off our shoes and socks to get ready for bed.

My father said, "I'll bet I can beat you in a race to the mail box and back." Now I didn't think he could so I said, "Ok." We lined up on the porch and when my brother said, "Go!" I took off like the wind.

When I reached the mailbox, I knew I was way ahead. I looked back at the porch and there was my brother and dad laughing.

"You won," my father said.
Did I? Or did they?

(Continued from Chair's Column, page 1)

There is a lot of activity in the state regarding historic schoolhouses. Jerry Tice from Muskegon, a recent member of MORSA, has established a Facebook group regarding old schools. It seems to be a large, active group, and I am going to ask Jerry to write an article regarding his group for the next issue of The Slate.

Dana Johnson, also a member of MORSA from Gowen, Michigan has a series of eight book regarding one room schools in eight different counties. They are featured in the Merchandise Section of the MORSA website, www.miorsa.org.

In my next Slate article, I am going to feature one of our original board members who is a real go getter for MORSA. Till then, from this elderly and long retired MD Pulmonologist please wear ONE, IF NOT TWO masks, keep your distances, wash your hands, get vaccinated and stay well.

Memories of Harper School
by Lyn Farquhar

I started school in the fall of 1948. My parents had gotten caught up in the “back to the land” movement and without any agricultural experience or equipment (both of them were from well-to-do E. Lansing families) bought 40 acres out in the country between Mason and Williamston. They also bought a trailer for us to live in. The first winter there was no water, no electricity and no heat. There were also no school buses. I don’t know how long a walk it was from the trailer to the school, but approximately three miles. No parent today would send a skinny little five year-old out to walk that far to school, and back, but they did. I remember feeling absolutely terrified. I have a vague memory of getting turned around and lost, but finally I found it. I had a tear-stained face, but I was there.



When I started Kindergarten the building was fairly new, but had no electricity, no plumbing or heat and water was obtained from a pump out in the school yard. There was only a single outhouse. None of that surprised me, I thought that was how all houses and buildings were. The educational emphasis was on the three “R’s”, Reading, Riting and Rithmetic.

We had only a single teacher who taught grades K – 12. Mrs. Cogswell was an absolutely brilliant woman and a highly creative teacher.

All twenty of us were placed in rows of desks. K-1st grade were in one row, 2nd, and 3rd in the second row etc. I was originally placed in the first row but when Mrs. Cogswell realized I could read, she created an individualized educational plan for me. I was allowed to move from row to row. I sat with the 8th graders for reading and with the 4th graders for writing. The old style penmanship was taught then and I remember making letter “O’s” until my arm ached. Another example of Mrs. Cogswell’s innovative efforts involved having a photographer come to the school to take our pictures. I must have taken an irrational dislike to the poor photographer because I had to sit in Mrs. Cogswell’s lap for my picture.



At Christmas the first year, we put on a Nativity play. The older children all had major parts and had to learn their lines and struggled to remember their (continued on page 7)

(continued from page 6, Harper School)

parts in rehearsal. Although I was only in the chorus, I quickly learned all the parts and like the little smart aleck that I was, I started correcting the older kids. I think they were about to strangle me when Mrs. Cogswell came to the rescue. She put up a little folded screen and made me a “prompter” who was only allowed to whisper from my hiding place. At the end of the play, we were to sing several Christmas carols. Talented Mrs. Cogswell played the piano to accompany us. I had a surprise worked out for my parents and when we all stood on stage and our teacher raised her hands to begin to play, “Joy to the World” I dashed down into the audience and led my little sister up on the stage. I had taught her all the songs and four year-old Susan belted them out with my mother turning red in embarrassment in the front row.

I remember organizing the kids to play “horses.” Organizing is a nice word for bossiness. There were two armies of horses that battled over a small patch of field. I “allowed” the biggest boy in the school to be in charge of the opposing horse army. I think he was about 15 when he fell madly in love with me. I was 7, but whenever I won the game, he would pick whatever flower was blooming in the nearby field and put it in my hair. One day in spring he picked a strand of lilacs and knelt down

to insert the branch into my braids. It is said of lilacs that their “scent is the mother of memory and that they never ever die”. I felt absolutely beautiful.

Over time the older grades were removed from Harper, and by the time I finished 5th grade, I was informed that in the fall I would be attending school in Mason.

By then there was a school bus for which I was everlastingly grateful. My first day in the 6th grade began with Mrs. Mills writing a sentence on the blackboard and saying crisply, “We will begin this morning with diagramming a sentence and naming the parts of speech.” Diagramming a sentence? Parts of speech? I had no idea what a noun, a pronoun or a verb was. Mrs. Cogswell had prepared me thoroughly in the basics and I was way ahead of the rest of the students in some subjects but I was distressingly unprepared in others. I spent every night that whole year after I was put to bed doing schoolwork by flashlight under the blankets.

Harper School closed in the middle of the 1964-65 school year. After 1965, only 7 rural school remained in the area. Official records state that Harper was razed in 1968 but driving around the area recently, I saw it. Someone had moved or recreated it in the backyard of a nearby house.

Thank you for being a part of MORSA!

NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION

The Peachbelt was named for the fact that it was surrounded by Michigan's most important peach orchards in the late 19th century as fruit growers discovered warmer winter temperatures near the Lake Michigan's lakeshore protected the trees from freezing. It is located on a rural cross-road in Ganges Township just 2 miles east of Lake Michigan. Peachbelt area peaches were regarded as Michigan's "gold nuggets" in the Chicago food markets of 100 years ago. The road (M89) on which the Peachbelt is located, connected fruit farms with two of the principal points of export, the ship docks in Douglas and the train terminus in Fennville. The original one-acre parcel upon which the schoolhouse was built was donated by the Paine family.



The Peachbelt Schoolhouse

Dawn Stafford, originally from New York, received her BFA from Swain School of Art and Design in MA before moving to West MI in 1992. She has been a full-time artist since 2000.

Read more about the Peachbelt Schoolhouse Studio on page 3 of this issue.

Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association

2021

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c/o Tom M. Johnson

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