

# The Slate

Vol. XXXI Issue I

Spring 2023

## **Wooden School District No. 6 Cambridge Lenawee County**

*By Joy Luck*

Built in 1850 under the direction of Rev. Robert Wooden, the Wooden School is made from field stones gathered from neighboring farmers' land. Classes were held here from 1850-1952. In 1948 it became part of the Onsted school system.

It had fallen into disrepair, was condemned in 1979 and was saved by becoming a historical site. In 1983 the Wooden Old Stone School Association was formed and began extensive stone repairs: re-tucking of all the mortar and fixing the roof, and adding inside furnishings.

In 2018 with another surge of volunteer energy, a new community group tackled roofing once again and added wooden shutters as a security measure.

I think what makes this schoolhouse special is the age of it, 172 years old! It sits in rural farm country on some of the highest hills in the county, Prospect Hill area, with breath-taking views especially in the Fall coming or going to the schoolhouse.

There was a simplicity of early rural life, of neighbors helping neighbors here. As a child, your world was within that 2 miles of the schoolhouse .



## **Wooden School, 11992 Stephenson Road, Onsted , Lenawee County**

The hard working people making life better for themselves and others, wanting to be part of a growing, prosperous state, were all here.

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## **Join us here for MORSA's 2023 Fall Conference, September 30th!**

Other places in the Cambridge Junction Historic area that will be included: the Walker Tavern built in 1832 where early travelers on what would become US 12, linking Detroit and Chicago, could eat or stay the night . Now operated by the Michigan History Center as a historic site, it includes three historic buildings.

Other one-room schoolhouses in the area are being contacted to be included also.

**Check our website [miorsa.org](http://miorsa.org) for details as they are finalized.**

## Jane Ann (Collins) Nally 1934-2022

By Clare E. Adkins Jr.

Miss Jane Ann Collins attended and graduated from Ganges Union Elementary a K-8 one-room rural school in western Allegan County. From there she went on to South Haven High School because as she said, "I wanted to play in the orchestra and South Haven had an orchestra." As much as Jane Ann excelled during high school, her dream of playing in the orchestra never materialized.

Immediately following high school graduation, Jane Ann enrolled in Allegan County Normal. Upon completion of the one-year Normal course of study, she was awarded a temporary teaching certificate that qualified her to teach in county rural schools. Miss Jane Ann Collins began her teaching career in September of 1952 at Iddles, District #3, Casco Township, Allegan County. Miss Collins was only 18 years old and still living at home.

Ronnie Stevens, my classmate for seven years, and I were both nine years old and in the fourth grade. Miss Collins was our first teacher other than my Aunt June Overhiser. The month before Miss Collins arrived, the Iddles school board had decided to send its eighth graders on to area city schools. Therefore, Miss Collins only had to teach thirty-four students representing eight grade levels all by herself.

Miss Collins entered Iddles on a mission and never let up all year. Ronnie and I were given homework and were actually expected to do it. We talked about our teacher a lot. Ronnie thought she drove her car too fast. I thought the geography assignments were too hard. We both complained to our mothers who agreed that we were in the fourth grade and more was expected. From time to time we were kept after school to sweep the floor, wash the black boards, and pick up and take out the trash. Ronnie and I complained to each other and although we never said so out loud, we both loved our teacher.

The Christmas program was a huge

success, as it was every year. Miss Collins, with the help of a circuit music teacher, made sure each student played a part. The program included short pieces, skits, Christmas songs, and two solo instrumental numbers, one violin and one accordion, played by fledgling musicians. The program concluded with a special, and very loud, rendition of "We Wish You A Merry Christmas."

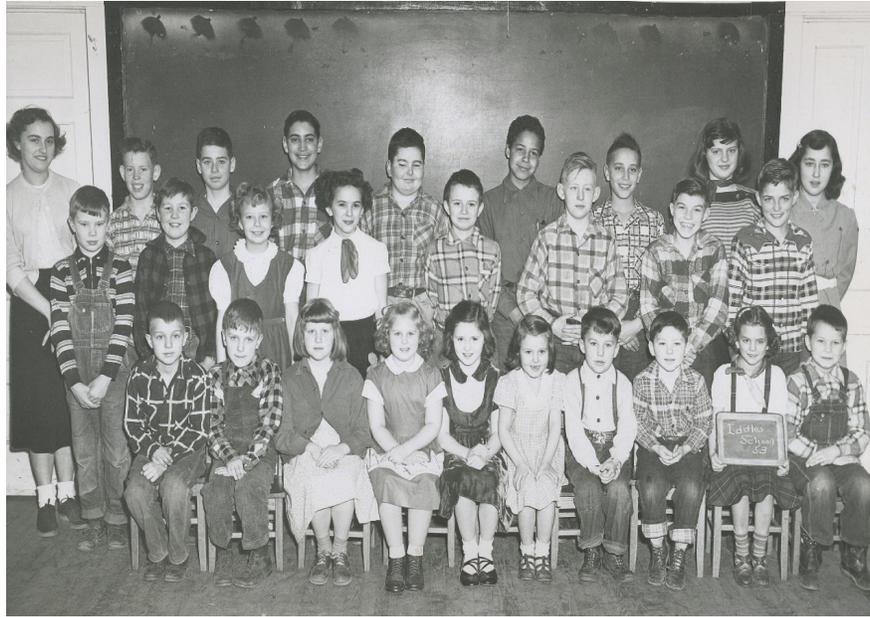
The day following the Christmas program Miss Collins informed us we'd have a teacher by a different name next year. Ronnie and I were confused but older students told us next year was only two weeks away. We were still confused but never admitted so. We didn't want to lose Miss Collins.

When school reconvened in January, we were greeted by the same ol' Miss Collins. However, following roll call we were informed we would be required to address her as Mrs. Nally. Unbeknown to Ronnie and me, Miss Collins had gotten married over the Christmas break. Mrs. Nally proceeded to tell us about where she and her husband traveled on their honeymoon. I've never forgotten the part about giving a ride to two hitchhiking soldiers who were freezing cold and requested the car heater be turned up.

The remainder of the year was a whirlwind of memorable activities including our first ever St. Patrick's Day spring musical. Students were to wear a costume of their choice as long as it included green. The musical concluded with all students marching around the classroom singing McNamara's Band.

We had a paper drive to raise money for I don't remember what. I do remember riding on top of bundles of old newspapers in the back of Mrs. Nally's Studebaker pickup. Another memory was the shared Greyhound bus ride with the students from Glenn Elementary for a day at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. We were assigned to groups of three and told not to get lost.

Most of all I remember piling in the back of our teacher's pickup, our *team bus*, after school and traveling to nearby schools to play softball games. We all thought we were important—what fun. Before school let out for



*Iddles School 1952-1953*

*Miss Collins is on the left end of the back row. Ronnie Stevens is in the center of the middle row and I am on the right end. Four students had moved and four were absent.*

the summer, Fennville High School invited surrounding rural one-room schools to come to Fennville for a field day, a day filled with games and grade level competitions organized and administered by high school students. Mrs. Nally was always nearby encouraging her Iddles students. In 1962 Iddles annexed.

On September 15, 2012, I visited the Jewett School in the historic village on the campus of the Allegan County Fairgrounds. I was doing research on the history of county one-room schools. I found Mrs. Nally serving as a volunteer docent at the Jewett School and in the midst of informing fair visitors of what life was like in small country schools. She hadn't settled down since she began her teaching career at Iddles sixty years earlier—still sparking with pep and passion.

I took the opportunity to interrupt Mrs. Nally's address. "I can tell you she never kept a student after school on a Friday." One of the visitors turned to Mrs. Nally, "Why was that?"

Mrs. Nally never missed a beat, "Well, I had a boyfriend. We got married over Christmas break."

"Really?" the visitor inquired.

"It was the Korean War. My fiancé was in the Army!"

The school year of 1952-1953 will forever be a most cherished memory. I rarely if ever saw Mrs. Nally again until our serendipitous encounter at the Jewett School. After starting her teaching career at Iddles, Mrs. Nally taught twenty-nine more years, mostly in Fennville Public Schools. During those years she continued her education receiving both Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Western Michigan University, often times with a child or two in tow. In addition to teaching she served several years as a 4-H leader and a founding member of the Fennville Library Board. She managed all this with the steadfast help of her husband Gene while they raised four children who all remember their mother affectionately as demanding with a big heart.

Jane Ann Nally made the most of the charge given to aspiring teachers at Allegan County Normal: "Any school moment may last a lifetime for one of your students. Make sure it's a good memory—for both of you." We thank you Miss Collins!

Clare and Ronnie

**Thanks to Dr. Tom Johnson,  
President of MORSA 2010-2022  
As He Steps Down**

Letter to the President:

Dear Tom-You have guided us through turbulent times; a vacancy in leadership, covid disruption and an uncertain time for organizations. Your determination and dogged persistence have made our organization stronger.

Your willingness to embrace change has seen us through the transition from artifact collection to a strong presence in the internet age.

The MORSA website has connected us to hundreds of people, with knowledge of a vast survey of one-room schools in Michigan. Our annual conferences have been timely; well-attended and inspirational. The one-room school venues have been welcoming and educational.

You have been generous with your time and space. The outbuildings at your home are filled with the evidence of your desire to collect: everything from vintage autos to dozens of boxes of one-room school records and photos. The Michigan One-room School archives at Eastern Michigan University are richer for collections donated. Researchers will have access to this treasure trove of material.

We have been prodded and pushed to keep MORSA relevant and resuscitated. Without your leadership and that of your wife, Jane, MORSA would have faced an uncertain future.

Thank You, Tom.

Rochelle Balkam  
Acting President



*Tom and Jane Johnson at Jewett School  
Allegan Historical Society*

Tribute to Tom:

Thank you, Tom, for your years of leadership in the Michigan One-Room School Association. You and your wife, Jane, have been a guiding force of continuity in the organization particularly helping to carry out the annual conferences. Your quiet leadership, thoughtfulness, positivity, and enthusiasm have encouraged us.

Your keen interest in one-room schools in Michigan has been evident. And, the one-room school near Williamston which you restored is a fine example of preservation. Jane's work as treasurer and website coordinator for MORSA has also been integral.

Several times, I have been welcomed into your lovely country home when attending a board meeting and enjoyed the hospitality and conversation. And your contributions to the newsletter as MORSA President have been informative and interesting. Hopefully, both you and Jane will continue to be involved in MORSA to help promote preservation and knowledge about the one-room school era.

Myrna Grove

Hi Tom,

Though you were not seeking the chairmanship of MORSA in 2010, I'm very glad that I nominated you!

Under your leadership MORSA has held successful annual conferences, expanded our website, doggedly tracked down missing records, and attracted new and dynamic members.

You and Jane have served MORSA without fanfare or credit—only the satisfaction of maintaining and advancing our vital and unique organization.

MORSA has endured and thrived under your leadership skills—wise, fair and positive. So ,to my friend Tom—best wishes for further adventures.

With kindest regards,

Judy Shehigian

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My first MORSA Board meeting was at the Library in Marshall Michigan. Dr. Tom Johnson was the Chair. It was comforting to have his hand on the rudder of the group as he had been guiding the Michigan One - Room Schoolhouse Association for quite some time and here I was, a brand-new Board Member. Tom, along with his wife, Jane Johnson had the organization well in hand.

It is understandable but sad that he has chosen to step back from leadership. Our esteemed Vice-chair, Rochelle Balkam has fortunately stepped forward and we will continue to be in good hands as the association moves forward.

Thank you, Tom for your innumerable contributions to MORSA.

Marie Charnley

Tribute to Dr. Tom Johnson

A leader, a coach, a team player: Tom is all of these. Add gracious and generous too.

Tom has long been involved in restoration, whether it be a farmhouse, a Studebaker, or a one-room schoolhouse. He's curious and appreciative of school desks from the Midwest, McGuffey curriculum boxes, current Amish one-room schools and antique cars.

Tom's writings are a joy to read. From his remembrances of his own one-room school days at Chapman School near Novi, to his ongoing involvement with the Branch School by his home in Williamston, his writing takes the reader there. To the Christmas pageant at Chapman School in the 1940's, lit by kerosene lanterns lining the walls and hanging from the ceiling, the Christmas tree decorated with popcorn and cranberry ropes, and cut-out construction paper ornaments, it was standing room only, with all the community gathered together.

Of Christmas 2022 at the Branch School, Tom writes " It was wonderful with the string quartet from Okemos High School and the tree decorated with ornaments made by a Girl Scout troop." Which highlights another of his many strengths: involving and engaging communities in the MORSA mission: to encourage appreciation and preservation of one-room schoolhouses.

Thank you, Tom. A job well done!

Jill Marcusse

*Tom at Branch School with McGuffey Curriculum Boxes.*



**MORSA MEMORIES**  
**Allegan, Michigan 2022 Conference**  
*Dave and Bette Thompson*

On October 1, 2022 the Allegan County Historical Society was honored to host the MORSA Conference held at the Congregational Church in our small town of Allegan. We were delighted to share our precious Jewett School and also to have attendees tour the Old Allegan County Jail.

David and I have history with one-room schools in that we both attended the Diamond one-room school in Allegan. We met as children in 1956 – I was 7 and David was 11. Fast forward 67 years later (married for 54 of those years), we now are pleased to co-manage the Jewett School. It was important to us to celebrate all 185 one-room schools that once existed in Allegan County.

We were thrilled to accept the **Michigan One-room School of the Year** award. The award truly honors many volunteers who work diligently throughout the year to prepare the **Jewett School** in the John Paul Historic Village for the Allegan County Fair.



*Jewett School*  
*Allegan County Historical Society*



*Bette & David Thompson receive Schoolhouse of the Year award from Rochelle Balkam*



*Bette Thompson gave a warm and informative Tour of the Jewett School. Thousands of School children go through the school yearly!*

We were happy to work with a group of incredibly kind MORSA officials including President Rochelle Balkam, Jane and Tom Johnson and Jill Marcusse. We thank them all for bringing such wonderful memories to Allegan and to our precious Jewett School.



*Susan Webb, known as the Traveling Schoolmarm presented a great program.*

The highlight of the 2022 conference was to listen and learn from our keynote speaker and Historian, Susan Webb, Traveling Schoolmarm. She presented the history of the partnership of Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington who brought educational opportunity to the American South starting in 1913. Together they created over 4,978 one-room schools in Southern America to educate Black children.



*Russell School the only Rosenwald School left in the Durham, South Carolina area, built in 1926 and used until 1945. Maintained as a historic Site. by the Cain's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.*

*Picture by Claire E. Adkins Jr. Thank you!*

### **National Conference of the Country School Association of America**

*By Myrna Grove*

Speakers from across the country, from members of academia, teachers past and present, historians, and a Curator from the National Museum of American History will gather at the National Conference of the Country School Association of America (CSAA) at Millersville University, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, June 11-14.

Myrna Grove, MORSA and CSAA Board member will give a presentation on her ancestral home, there in Pennsylvania, the 1719 Hans Herr House. An example of medieval Germanic architecture, the stone house is the oldest Mennonite meetinghouse in America. Myrna's book, *The Path to America: From Switzerland to Lancaster County* (Masthof Press, 2009) recounts this history.

After two days of conference presentations, a one-day field trip will include the Hans Herr House, Amish schools, the home of Thaddeus Stevens, the Cotton Mill Museum School and several other one-room schools.

Registration will soon be available on the CSAA website. This is an opportunity to interact with other country school enthusiasts on a national level.

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### **14 Rescued School Slate Blackboards**

Dimensions are 44" by 55" and 52". **MORSA will donate** one or more to anyone who needs them for a schoolhouse. Please contact Tom M Johnson at (517) 242-8249 or [tjjj@wowway.com](mailto:tjjj@wowway.com).

NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION

<p><b>Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association</b> <u>2023 Officers:</u> Rochelle Balkam, Acting President &amp; Membership Treasurer: Jane S. Johnson <u>Board Members:</u> Kathy Brundige Marie Charnley Dr. Lyn Farquhar Tamara Gady Myrna Grove Dr. Thomas Gwaltney Lauren Harris Jill Marcusse Judy Shehigian Claudia Throop, Consultant Suzanne Daniel, Emeritus <u>The Slate Newsletter:</u> Jill Marcusse, Editor <u>Membership Dues:</u> \$20 Senior (62+) or Student \$25 Member \$25 Organizations Website: <a href="http://www.miorsa.org">http://www.miorsa.org</a> <b>FB: michiganoneroomschoolhouseassociation</b></p>	<p><i>Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association c/o Jane Johnson 4815 Barton Rd. Williamston, MI 48895</i></p>
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**Membership Application/  
Renewal Form for 2023 Dues**

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Member
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Senior or Student
- \_\_\_\_\_ Donation (Thank you)
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

**Name:**

**Street Address:**

**City, State, Zip:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

Please make check payable to  
MORSA and mail to:

Jane S. Johnson, 4815 Barton  
Road, Williamston, MI 48895

**Thank you Tom! Tributes and Thank yous for  
Retiring President Tom Johnson. Here's one:**

Tom Johnson, M.D. became President of the Michigan One Room Schoolhouse Association in October of 2010, succeeding Bill Wengler. He has remained as President and leader of the group through 2022. During that time, he, and a small group of dedicated friends, totally restored the One Room Branch School in Williamston. The school is now used for a variety of events, including school visits, musical and holiday celebrations.

During his tenure, Tom replaced the old list of one room schools with a modern relational data base by Wix. MIORSA.org has sub-divisions for Research, Schoolhouses, Membership and The Slate. It is queried several times per week and is the strongest link the Board has with our membership.

We owe Tom a huge debt of gratitude for his service and leadership.

Lyn Farquhar