

# The Slate

Vol. XXIX, Issue II

Fall 2021

## **Hannah Geddes Wright** January 24, 1947-July 19, 2021

She was never in the spotlight, nor did she seek it, but her actions and example paved the way for the creation of the Michigan One-room Schoolhouse Association. It was the decision by her family to enable Eastern Michigan University to move the Geddes Townhall School from its' original site on Morgan Rd. in Pittsfield Township to the campus. It was that impetus that led to the creation of the organization.

Hannah was a guest at the inaugural meeting at McKenny Union in May of



Hannah Geddes Wright and Dr. Thomas Gwaltney

1993. In attendance were over 100 people who recognized the necessity to form a committee to survey, document and preserve the more than 7,000 one-room schools in Michigan.

The Geddes family ancestors were among the earliest pioneers in Washtenaw County. According to land records, William Geddes donated the land upon which to build a school in 1852. Generations of family members attended the school. Hannah and her siblings attended until the 1957, when the school closed, and the children were integrated into the Ann Arbor schools. Hannah often spoke about what a traumatic experience it was to no longer be a student in a comfortable and familiar setting.

Her great joy was the dedication of the Geddes Townhall School in 1988, as part of the EMU Homecoming celebration. She was on the board of the Friends of the Town-

*(continued on page 2)*

(continued from page 1)

hall School for many years. Her insights and recollections enhanced the programs offered to the public.

The publication of her memories, Down the Myrtle Path, focuses on daily life of a child in a one-room school; the teachers, the rules, the celebrations, the strong ties to the community.

Future generations will be inspired by her story. As Hannah said in the introduction to her book, the one-room school for her and for countless others, “now will live on for our children and for our children’s children as a tribute to our humble, yet rich beginnings.”

Hannah served faithfully as secretary for MORSA for many years. She was the inspiration for the creation of a newsletter for the organization and thus *The Slate* was born. She served as the editor until last year. Her passing marks the end of an era.

We will miss you, Hannah.

By Rochelle Balkam, Vice Chair MORSA



Town Hall School before it was donated by the Geddes Family and moved to Eastern Michigan U.

**From “Down the Myrtle Path: The History and Memories of Town Hall School”**

By Hannah Geddes Wright

My own memories of Town Hall School are of walking down a myrtle strewn path along Morgan Road with my brothers and cousins on our way to school. Sometimes we were a little late and had to run. Once the school bell began tolling, we knew we had better hurry or we would be tardy. Mrs. Bone would come to the door after the other children had come in. She had counted her lambs and a couple were missing. Seeing us running up the path, lunchboxes banging wildly at our knees, she would hold the door and wait for us. I don’t remember ever being scolded.

I loved Mrs. Bone, our teacher, even when she had blue hair. Sometimes, attempting to whiten her hair, she would use a little too much “bluing”, and would have to come to school with an azure hue—much to her embarrassment and our amusement. There was nothing to do but wait for it to wash out. Sometimes I would stay inside at recess just to talk with her. She would file her nails and talk to me about her family like I was one of her own. And she would find out what was happening in my family.

It is hard for me to point to any one experience as my favorite. It is bits and pieces that make up a mosaic of experiences that come back into my mind when I think of Town Hall School.

It was the people. It was the place. It was the time.

\*\*\*\*\*

A complementary copy of Hannah’s book will be given to each attendee at this year’s Fall Conference.

## The Chair's Column

*Dr. Tom Johnson*

Having been an educator, I thought I would write about what it takes to be a teacher in a one room schoolhouse for this issue of The Slate. I equate those folks to being like a General Practitioner in medicine, in other words having to know a lot about a lot and being able to transmit it to the patient.

It's been frustrating writing. I thought about my experience when I attended the one-room Chapman School, second and third grades. I only remember that I liked the teacher Mrs. Tibbetts, but none of the details of her teaching. She was a favorite of my parents when my older brother had attended the school. After a pregnancy leave, when she returned, my parents took me out of the local public school after the first grade and sent me to the Chapman School. When Mrs. Tibbetts announced her departure and the teacher they hired to replace her was not to my parent's standards, I was again sent to another school.

The more I researched writing on this subject the more complex it became. I would love to hear from those of you who attended a one room school. What were your impressions of your teacher or teachers, both positive and negative? Send to [tjjj@wowway.com](mailto:tjjj@wowway.com). Thanks.

I was fortuitously saved from writing about teaching at a one room schoolhouse by a phone call offering MORSA slate blackboards that had been taken out of a school which was razed. Considering that I live in Williamston, my age and other physical problems and the fact they were in a defunct antique store north of Petosky, my problem was how to get them. My wife thought I should have been committed for offering to take them.

I wrestled with this for several months until my daughter and son-in-law from Northfield, Minnesota came to our cottage near Leland, Michigan. They offered to drive me up there in their pickup. These 16 slate blackboards now reside in my pole barn in Northport. They are all 42 inches in width and vary in length - 46, 48 and 52 inches. When the board determines their cost (minimal, if I have my way) at our next meeting in August we will post details on our website, [www.miorsa.org](http://www.miorsa.org).

## Hope to see you at our annual conference!

### Membership Application/Renewal Form for 2021 Dues

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

Name of Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to MORSA and mail to:

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

## French School

by Sandra Kinney Keelen

I can still remember the smell of the cloakroom from the coats and jackets recently worn for cleaning out the horse's stall or thrown on in haste to make a quick trip to the chicken coop. Metal lunchboxes or carefully reused "Pioneer Sugar" paper bags filled with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches lined the shelves. We brought with us the odors from farm and home, carelessly tossing our belongings into the shadows before taking our seats in the "big" room—the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade classroom—three grades, three years, one teacher.

French School is still standing at the southeast corner of the intersection of Pere Marquette Highway and Hawley Road, a landmark in Summit Township, Mason County, Michigan, since the early 1900's. When I was a student there back in the 1950's, it was the center of our rural neighborhood, red-bricked and topped by a handsome bell tower. Surrounded by apple and cherry orchards, the play yard had swings, a trapeze bar, teeter totters, and a well-used softball field shaded by old maples. On special spring afternoons, we were the home team playing against our "rivals," the kids from the Riverton Township school, a few miles away.

The Mason County Bookmobile made regular visits, and grade by grade we made our way to explore its contents—the joy of discovery, something new to read, a treasure to stash in our desk to open later, to get lost in. For music enrichment, Mrs. Vera Van Dyke stopped by often, playing the old upright while we sang and practiced on an assortment of small percussion instruments. And even though we were a public school, Reverend John Christiansen, from a Lutheran church in Ludington, taught us Bible lessons. We lived in a time and a place where no one questioned his friendly presence.

There were three rooms in French School, one teacher for each multi-grade classroom. Kindergarten, first, and second grade on the lower level. Two classrooms on the upper level—one for fourth and fifth, and the other for sixth, seventh, and eighth. Each grade averaged ten to fifteen children, numbers sometime larger in the fall and again in early spring when migrant families were harvesting in the apple, pear, and cherry orchards.

Education was basic. If you were in the early elementary room, consider how many times as a kindergartener you would hear the teacher talking with the first or second grade about addition or subtraction. Early reading came from the "Dick and Jane" stories, and I'm sure those books had been memorized by the end of second grade. Math lessons moved to multiplication and division in fourth and fifth grade. Reading became geography and searches on the globe.

By sixth grade, it was into the "big room," to join the seventh, and eighth grade, our version of middle school. A special book closet ran along the back by the eighth-grade seats. Inside were extra reading choices, textbooks, and a set of *The World Book Encyclopedia*. With these treasured resources, it was a three-year journey; sixth graders learned by hearing the seventh and eighth-grade lessons. We watched our older classmates do math at the blackboard, practice their cursive writing skills, or listened as they competed to be the best speller of the week..

At seven, ten, or thirteen years of age, I did not understand or appreciate the patience, the planning, and the long days of our dedicated teachers, who year after year ushered us forward to the next level. But, now I do.

Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association  
Spring Conference – “Works in Progress”  
Saturday, September 25, 2021  
8:30 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

The conference will be held at the Warner Homestead/Hicks school located at 4001 Pleasant Valley Road, Brighton Township. Tim Bennett, a historian and avocational archeologist, will welcome attendees to the Hicks school that was moved to his family homestead in 2016. The Warner Homestead, a sesquicentennial farm dating to 1841, was recently honored with the Governor’s Award for Historic Preservation. Attendees will have a unique opportunity to tour the 1855 NRHP listed Greek Revival home, as well as the 1849 school which is a “work in progress”. Tim will trace the history of the family and farm through archaeological, historical, and genealogical research as well as outline his plans for future projects with the school. For more information and photos about the homestead and school, go to <http://www.warnerhomestead.com>.

In addition, the Lyon school will be open for a guided tour by the president of the Brighton Area Historical Society, Jim Vichich. He will discuss the history of the school and its restoration. Jim will also provide an update on the progress of another of the Historical Society’s projects, the restoration and preservation of headstones in the Old Brighton Cemetery.

Lunch will be served in the Warner Homestead. The program will include time for members to share their stories and network. A Silent Auction will be held, providing attendees an opportunity to bid on school related items. Items for the auction are welcome. Thank you!

Registration Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee is \$35 and includes lunch.

Please make check payable to MORSA and mail to:  
Jane S. Johnson, 4815 Barton Road, Williamston, MI 48895

### *The Jug Corners Schoolhouse*

By Sue Ellen Haskell Nelson

Still standing on its original site, at the corner of 'D' Avenue and N. 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Cooper Township, Kalamazoo County, is the recently renovated and repurposed Jug Corners Schoolhouse, now called the Bellflower. Back around 1871, Jug Corners was so called because it was at the crossroads of one of the deepest veins of clay in a tri state area. The house on the opposite corner was built from this native clay, fired in the on-site brick factory of the original Quaker owner, who was himself a brick mason.

My mom, Ellen (Early) Haskell bought the building some forty years before her death in 2017. She attended the Jug Corners School from 1930-1938, 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She loved to talk about the days of walking or traveling by pony cart with her older siblings, Robert Early and Jeanne Early Dickerson. They lived on a farm on 'C' Ave, then known as Sweet Road. It was a mile and a half journey in all kinds of weather, and the steep hills created harrowing tales of survival! Their teachers were unmarried women who fearlessly taught those multi-age students the traditional "3-R's": 'Readin', 'Ritin', and 'Rithmetic'.

The teacher was tasked with all of the cleaning and basic maintenance around the schoolhouse, including building the fire every day in the big potbellied stove that warmed the high ceilinged room. She would prepare the daily lessons on the massive slate chalkboard for all of the different grade levels, then ring the bell from the pull rope that signaled the start of the school day. Recess consisted of playing on the swings out front, or serious games of Red Rover and Tag. In the wintertime when the ice froze over, they would all pop over the fence across the street {on the farm I later grew up on}, to ice skate on the pond. When the kids came back in from recess, they hung all of their soaking-wet wool mittens on the stove to dry. There is nothing quite like the smell of wet wool mittens on a wood stove!

There was a separate boys and girls cloak-room, as well as a separate outhouse for each gender. The family pony was tied up outside to graze. A hand pump out in front of the building provided water to fill the cup that each child brought to school. They also carried a tin pail with a homemade lunch, and any books tied up with rope or a leather strap. The memories that my mom recounted always waxed nostalgic, but they were formed during the height of the Great Depression when times were hard. There really was little income disparity, because all of the students were from local farm families in the Cooper area. The families were close-knit with common backgrounds and shared beliefs, if not ethnicity.

My mom remembered the school programs, Christmas especially, and the spelling bees. She was a star pupil and won many awards for her academic achievements. At the end of the school year, the mothers of the students planned a big picnic on the grounds, and then sometime later in the summer, they would all gather to thoroughly scrub the building down, oiling the wooden floors to be ready for the fall return.



When the Plainwell area school district consolidated around 1956, the old schoolhouses were used until newer grammar schools were built in Cooper and Plainwell. After that, the relic buildings were closed, to be sold or razed. Jug Corners School was sold to the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist Church, and was used as such until my parents bought it in 1978. One of my fondest memories as a teenager was when I rode my horse down to the corner of our farm across the street on a hot, summer Sunday afternoon. The church was having a gospel tent revival on the grounds. I slung my leg over my horse's neck, and listened to the old hymns carried on the wind! It was an amazing, defining moment!

## ***Going to School 1928***

By Eloise Doster

I was six years old when we moved to Chamberlin, Michigan. My brother and I had to walk about a mile to school with several other kids. There were about 20 children in our country school and one teacher. This covered classes from first to eighth grade. School always opened by singing the National Anthem and then we said the Pledge of Allegiance. We stood beside our seats with our hands over our hearts facing the flag. Our teacher would offer a prayer. We were taught the love of God and our country.

Children carried their lunches in peanut butter pails or lunch boxes. In cold weather we could bring soup or something else in a can to set in a pan of hot water on the school stove. This was so we could have a hot lunch at noon. As times were very hard, some children would have little or no lunch. Other children would share what they had. It was just the thing to do.

Some strange sandwiches came to school and sliced onion was a favorite. But these had to be set out in the hall until lunch since they had a strong smell. Often children brought any food that was left from the past evenings' meal—mashed potatoes, boiled or fried eggs, chicken, pork or goat meat, corn on the cob, tomatoes, cabbage, and carrots. One of the children's father raised peaches and always brought the children some whenever he could. That was a real treat.

Our teacher had ulcers. I don't know why. Our family had to bring her a pint of goats' milk every day to school. It was believed to help someone with ulcers since the milk is easy to digest. We got 10 cents a day for this. We gave her ulcers and we also brought her the cure.

We had in our neighborhood a grown man

about 26 years old who had the mind of a child. He loved to come to school when he could and play with the children. He never hurt anyone. Our teacher was afraid of him, so us kids would invite him into the schoolhouse. He would just take a seat and color or hold a book upside down. We all thought it was very funny. The teacher would have to send one of the students to find a member of the school board to come to school and take him to his home. We could easily waste a half day of school while this went on.

Christmastime was the highlight of the year. Each year, the school children put on the program in the church across the road from the school. What a thrill it was to be chosen for a part! There was King Herod, the Three Kings, Joseph, Mary, (the baby Jesus was a doll), shepherds on the hills, and the angel. Everyone without one of these parts was a sheep.

The year I was chosen as the angel (poor choice) I was so excited. We raced up and down the aisles of the church and I missed my step and landed headfirst into a pew. The result was a black eye and a bandage on my chin. This produced the toughest little angel you ever saw but the show must go on.

The Christmas tree was donated by some farmer and the decorations were made by us at school, construction paper chains and scissors snowflakes. There were no gifts exchanged to save embarrassment for those who could not give. The school board closed the evening by giving each child a small bag of hard candy and then the congregation and all the children sang Christmas songs.

What a wonderful life we had. This proves that money does not necessarily make happiness. It made wonderful memories for a little girl in 1928.



<p><b>Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association</b> <b>2021 Officers:</b> Dr. Tom M. Johnson, Chair Rochelle Balkam, Vice Chair &amp; Membership Treasurer: Jane S. Johnson <b>Board Members:</b> 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 <b>The Slate Newsletter:</b> Jill Marcusse, Editor <b>Membership Dues:</b> \$25 Senior (62+) or Student \$25 Member, \$25 Organizations Website: <a href="http://www.miorsa.org">http://www.miorsa.org</a></p>	<p><i>Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association c/o Tom M. Johnson 4815 Barton Rd. Williamston, MI 48895</i></p>
--	--

NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION  
**MORSA Fall Conference**

**Tim Bennett**, historian and avocational archaeologist, will welcome MORSA to the Hicks School which has been moved to his family homestead, honored with Centennial Farm Status, and updated to Sesquicentennial Farm status. We will have an unique opportunity to tour the home, as well as the school which is a “work in progress.”

In addition, the Lyon School nearby will be open for a guided tour by the president of the Brighton Historical Society, **Jim Vichich**. He will outline the history of the school, the restoration of it and also update the progress of another restoration and preservation project the Historical Society has been working on, the Old Brighton Cemetery.



Tim Bennett showing slides of tamarack rafters in Hicks School.

**The date is September 25, 2021.**  
Registration form and more information is inside.  
**Please join us!**