

# The Slate

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Spring 2024

***Principal's Office***  
***(formerly President's Column)***  
**By Rochelle Balkam**

Important changes are taking place on the MORSA website. The new program makes it possible to reach many more interested parties. Networking has increased our numbers. We always encourage those who may be interested in joining the MORSA board, as well. We meet via zoom several times a year, thus making it possible for us to cast a wider net. We want to make sure that we are reaching out to members with whom we have lost touch.

A complimentary copy of The Slate will be sent to those members with a reminder that dues for 2024 are due. Membership forms are included in the newsletter. If we don't get a timely response, names will be removed from the list. Currently, we have a membership of nearly 80, 25 of whom are LIFE Members. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing who still wishes to be a LIFE Member. It would be very helpful if those members would contact us. Many of us signed up years ago. We are always happy to accept donations from all members!

I have presented, "Primers, Chalk and Bells-Michigan's One Room Schools" to nearly a dozen audiences with two more scheduled for the coming year. Each event brings new members to the organization. I always learn so much from the audience. Please contact me if you would like to have this program presented in your community.  
(balkamhp@gmail.com)

We are looking forward to hosting an exciting conference in October. We will join forces with the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County to bring a new dimension to our members. The



Brownsville #1 One-room School will be highlighted. (see the Fall 2023 issue of The Slate.)

The 2023 Fall conference was highly successful. It was held at the Onsted Elementary School in Onsted, Michigan. **The Schoolhouse of the Year Award 2023** was given to the **Wooden Stone School** in Onsted. The fieldstone school was built by the Reverend Robert Wooden in 1850 ( see Fall 2023 issue) of The Slate. The culminating event was a tour of the school while enjoying homemade apple pie in the schoolyard. We send our thanks to the principal, the student-helpers, Jackie Freeman, and Joy Luck. We encourage you to send in applications for the Annual One-room Schoolhouse Award 2024. Information is on the MORSA website [miorsa.org](http://miorsa.org). Those who have applied unsuccessfully in the past are encouraged to re-apply. Applications must be received by August 1.

**North Pine Lake School  
(aka Brown School)  
Bernard Historical Museum**

**Overheard at the Schoolhouse**

**By Nancy Hibiske-Reed**

Memories are resurrected for many senior visitors at the North Pine Lake School (aka Brown School) one-room schoolhouse located at the Bernard Historical Museum, 7135 Delton Road, Delton, Michigan. Built in 1873 and originally located on the corner of North Pine Lake Road and Lindsey Road in Barry County, it was used for classes until the 1950s. In 1963 it was moved to the museum grounds.

Senior visitors light up when they enter the schoolhouse and one can see memories come flooding back.

A gentleman maneuvered his walker up the ramp and through the back door of the schoolhouse. His stooped shoulders straightened a bit as he pushed his cap back to look up at the lofty ceiling and down the faded green walls.

“I went to a school like this,” he said surveying the room. “Not this big, though.” He pointed a gnarled finger at a wooden desk next to the antique Round Oak stove in the front of the room. “That is the worst seat in the place. Those stoves got so hot!”

“I went to this very school,” a lady said during the Bernard Historical Museum Diamond Jubilee in September 2022. Her eyes were as bright as her floral shirt when she smiled. “I sat in a desk just like this.” She ran her hand over the smooth wood.

“Did you ever ring the school bell?”

“Oh no! I never got to do that.”

I ushered her to the front door and pointed to the heavy rope hanging through an opening in the ceiling. She grinned, grasped the rope like a lifeline, and pulled. The bell rang out loud and clear just as she remembered 72 years ago.



North Pine Lake School (aka Brown School)  
Delton, Barry County At the Bernard Museum

*As a docent at the Bernard Historical Museum in Delton, Michigan (Barry County), I love opening the one-room schoolhouse and watching visitors as they enter. Many look up at the 20-foot ceiling. Others turn their heads from side to side taking in the desks, books, maps, and old stove. Nancy Hibiske-Reed*

**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 Jane at (517) 8994898 [tjjj@wowway.com](mailto:tjjj@wowway.com).

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Susan Webb, November 21, 2023. A lifelong teacher, Susan took on the persona of ‘America’s Traveling Schoolmarm’. She spoke at MORSA’s 2022 Conference in Allegan, on the Rosenwald schools in the Southern states. She was born in Iowa and passed away in Birmingham, AL.



## REMINISCENCES OF A YOUNG TEACHER IN A ONE-ROOM

### RURAL SCHOOL *Written by Rena Bellinger*

*Recounting Her First Year Teaching Experience at Giddings*

*School - 1927 Garfield Township, Fife Lake, Michigan*

*From the book, "Early Days and Early Ways" by Lyle McCann*

The door creaked on its hinges and ushered in a new school year, a thrilling and new experience for the eighteen-year-old girl facing her first teaching assignment.

Another door creaked as she opened it to peer into the woodshed at the back, which was well-stocked with wood and unsplit kindling, plus a very dull axe.

The whole building smelled of soap and water; the east and west windows gleamed as the golden rays of the early morning sun streamed into the empty silent school room. The sunlight, the clean, freshly scrubbed floor and desks reflected the glow of youth from the face of the new, young teacher. Otherwise, the drabness of the room was strikingly depressing. The walls were painted gray, shadowed by many years of coal and wood smoke from the large floor furnace located in one corner at the front of the room. On a raised platform in the opposite corner stood the ancient desk and a slivery-seated chair, a throne for the teacher.

As she turned back to her "workshop" her first task was to wind and set the big eight-day clock. Next, it was necessary to fill the water pail from hand pump in the front yard. She never dreamed that there would be but one dipper from which all must drink, and that on Friday, she must take home the laundry: six cotton crash towels which must do for twenty-four pairs of hands to be dried five days a week.

A long rope in the entry hung from the belfry. Every child loved to ring the bell which called the children in from play. More often than not, the rope was pulled with such vigor that the bell was overturned which necessitated some boys climbing to the roof to right it.

What a heterogeneous group, children five to eighteen years of age! Boys were barefoot and continued unshod, until on frosty mornings their foot prints could be traced as they trudged down the country road five days a week.

Classes proved to be brief, as all subjects had to be taught every day, Kindergarten through Eighth Grade. However, this was the most "beautiful" big family that any teacher could inherit on her first September morning. There were as many personalities as children, each a challenge to a young teacher's ingenuity.

The first month passed quickly, and the first payday was due. Now, our young pedagogue had to take her pay order to two Board members to receive her coveted first paycheck for \$84 (\$80 for professional service and \$4 for cleaning the school and building fires each day).

One of her keenest memories was the loud ticking of the old wall clock after the last child had left for home at the close of the school day; her footsteps echoed as she went through her daily cleaning tasks in the empty schoolroom, and a haunting loneliness permeated the very atmosphere. The creaking door closed and locked, she began her mile-long walk to her boarding home. The road was dusty, and the slanting rays of the setting sun were hot. She forgot the discomfort as her ears and eyes became attuned to the sights and sounds of the countryside. Goldenrod and purple asters graced the landscape, and as the farmers' cows were driven up the lanes to be milked, the bells which hung from their necks produced a symphony of "country music." (cont. pg. 4)

NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION

It is said that many hands make light work. So it was in the rural one-room school. Boys happily pumped the water and carried the wood; girls swept the porches and the outdoor toilets. These were familiar home tasks and not burdensome to them. Each was flattered to be asked to "help the teacher." The bulletin board was small and became the responsibility of the teenage girls who decorated it in keeping with the season.

The children's eyes took on a special gleam as the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons approached. Having been fully indoctrinated in dramatic skill, they all felt confident in their ability to "put on" the best Christmas program ever.

After two weeks of "holiday business" the day arrived. The kerosene lamps were filled, wicks were trimmed and chimneys were polished. A beautiful tree reaching the high ceiling was decorated with handmade trimmings: strings of popcorn, cranberries and colored paper chains. A beautiful silver star shone from the top. What a joy to behold!

The creaky old pump organ was dusted and polished ready to offer its best, as the strains of "Silent Night" accompanied the sweet childish voices. All were eagerly awaiting the arrival of parents and friends who would come to pass judgement on the skills of the new teacher. If she could produce a good Christmas program, she had proven herself capable.

That November paycheck was already spent, for the teacher was expected to provide a gift for each student and a bag of candy and nuts for each child and adult guest.

As the December cold began to creep through every crack and crevice the children constantly fed the stove; the lamps were lighted, and as the stars came out, the sound of sleighbells from all quarters announced the approach of friends and families coming to celebrate the Holy Season. There was more Christ than Santa in their Christmas.

Following a week of holiday vacation, the little school was again warmed, but for the long, cold, winter months it was never very cozy. In early morning, the children gathered close to the stove for each class and at lunch time they ate while the young teacher read to them; or they played games together.

Seldom was a child absent because of storm or cold. They were warmly bundled up by their mothers and sent on their way. Hardships were stoically faced by young and old alike.

As the sun rose higher and days grew longer, the impatiently awaited springtime came. A clearing in the nearby wood lot became a ball diamond, and all rushed into the woods to eat their lunches together and get to the game. On the way back to classes, the girls picked violets, spring beauties, and adder tongues to grace the teacher's desk.

Then that closing day! A day to be remembered, another program, awarding of certificates of promotion and perfect attendance. The ladies brought such goodies that, gorge as one might, there was no end to the pies, cakes, cookies, fried chicken, sandwiches, and pickles.

Never will this young teacher again face the strange newness of her first year, its failures and successes. Experience that year was her master teacher.

Still sits the schoolhouse by the road,  
A ragged beggar sleeping,  
Around it still the sumac grow,  
And blackberry vines are creeping.

-John Greenleaf Whittier

Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association  
Fall Conference Saturday, October 5, 2024  
“Follow the Drinking Gourd”  
James E. Bonine House and Brownsville #1 School  
Vandalia and Cassopolis Cass County

We are presenting an unique collaboration at the MORSA Fall conference in Vandalia, Michigan. MORSA will be joining the members of the UGRSCC (Underground Railroad Society of Cass County.) The county was the nexus of two underground railroad routes used by Freedom Seekers during the pre-Civil War era.

Local members have been instrumental in the effort to preserve the stories and structures of the era. Four sites comprise the centerpiece: the James Bonine House, the James Bonine Carriage House, the Stephen Bogue House and the Brownsville School.

The school is believed to be one of the oldest integrated schools in the state; providing education for the children of those seeking freedom from its opening in the 1840s, until its closure in the 1950s.

The conference attendees will meet at the James Bonine House for the program. The keynote speaker will be Jim Cameron, President of the Michigan Oral History Association. Jim is a board member of the Historical Society of Michigan and a retired Saline High School history teacher. Guests will tour the UGRR sites, culminating with a visit to the Brownsville School.



James E. Bonine House in Vandalia will be the site of our conference, speakers, and lunch.



Brownsville #1 School in Cassopolis before repairs by the UGRRSS. The bands will be off!

Rochelle Balkam

## Stone Ledge School Revisited

by Jane Wheeler

I drove by the Stone Ledge Schoolhouse in Wexford county hoping for some inspiration, perhaps to find a forgotten piece of my childhood. There were things I remembered clearly: An older classmate, Mike Scholton, teaching me how to work the zipper of my new coat; the library bookmobile visiting every so often; washing out milk bottles (chocolate on Fridays!); and playing “Mother May I” and “Duck Duck Goose” in the basement. Others were not so clear. Was there really a bomb shelter? Bats?

Built in 1922, after the original structure burned, the building itself had been used and maintained despite the school’s closure in the spring of 1967. For a while, it was used as the Clam Lake Township Hall. Currently, it’s a private residence. On the day I drove by, my timing was perfect. The owners, Doug and Ruth, were outside visiting with a neighbor, so I pulled in the driveway and introduced myself. They were thrilled I stopped, happy to show me around. We walked the property, laughing at the still standing basketball hoop, the bane of Ruth’s garden. The lilacs where we students played hide and seek were just as tall as I remembered, as were the several old maples (one almost completely hollow) that had enticed many a child to climb. A few chickens pecked around the yard, where, I recalled, a neighboring family’s goats and a pony occasionally escaped their enclosure to visit during recess. The owners’ daughter, Laurie, who was a student at Stone Ledge, would round them up and walk them home.

Many memories came back as we walked. “Field trips” in those days consisted of simply venturing out the back door of the schoolhouse and through the swamp, to catch tadpoles in the spring or to watch beavers working on their lodge after recently completing a dam. The whole school would go together—twenty-eight of us, kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, all under the watchful eye of one teacher, Mrs. Thomas. There were no teacher’s aides and no parent chaperones. Mrs. Thomas enlisted the older students to help out with “the little ones.”

Even more memories returned when Doug and Ruth invited me inside, where I was delighted to find the character of the building had been retained. The classroom was still one large room, the original wooden floors bearing the marks of desks screwed into the boards and an old piece of chalk board was



Stone Ledge School, Clam Lake Twp.  
Wexford County

mounted by the kitchen. (“The only piece that survived,” Ruth told me.) The room was open and airy, the high ceilings and bank of windows allowing light everywhere. I could almost hear the echo of students reading about Dick and Jane.

The room off the main classroom where we played while Mrs. Thomas taught the older students was still intact, if smaller than I remembered. Yet the interior doors were original, varnish-darkened and cracked with the years. When I pointed out where Mrs. Thomas used to play the piano (and repeatedly remind me I didn’t need to “sing so loud,”) Ruth laughed. “It was almost impossible to get it out,” she said. The piano had still been there when they bought the building!

There were upgrades, of course. The basement where we students had played on rainy days was now divided into bedrooms streaming with light from egress windows. Ruth’s canned fruits and veggies gleamed on shelves in what was the furnace room/coal cellar. Yet I could see beneath the changes the school as I remembered it, the stories that have survived. As Doug and Ruth relayed their adventures in bringing the schoolhouse back to life—the doors they rehung and window trim reconstructed, the snakes relocated from under the front porch—I knew I had been correct about the bomb shelter and the bats. I couldn’t help but smile as I thanked them more than once for the tour. So many of the one room school houses have gone to ruin, but this one—MY little school house on Stone Ledge Lake—remains intact, for which I am grateful.

**National CSAA Conference will be  
June 9-12 at the University of Toledo  
by Myrna Grove**

The 2024 Country School Association of America Conference (CSAA) will be held June 9-12 in Toledo, Ohio at the nearby University of Toledo Center for the Performing Arts. Theme of the four-day conference is “Great Lakes, Great Schools”.

The proximity of the national conference is an opportunity for MORSA persons to join other one-room school enthusiasts from around the country. Registration will begin in April by visiting the website

[www.countryschoolassociation.org](http://www.countryschoolassociation.org). On campus housing will be available, and nearby hotels will also be suggested. Meals and activities are included with registration costs.

A full schedule of events will begin Sunday afternoon, June 9, with registration on campus and a visit to the nearby Oak Grove School at Toledo’s Wildwood Metro Park Preserve. In a nearby pavilion, the evening will include a dinner and a performance of songs relating to Northwest Ohio history by Russ Franzen.

Keynote speakers will be featured both Monday and Tuesday, followed by two full days of presentations by educators, scholars, preservationists, and practitioners. Among the topics will be early school themes, innovative practices, museum experiences, restoration, and research.

The last day of the conference is an all-day bus tour of six area one-room schools including three schools in Ohio and three in Michigan. One of them will be the Wooden Old Stone School near Onsted which was the site of MORSA’s 2023 conference. There will also be a lunch stop at the Olde Schoolhouse Restaurant in Lambertville, Michigan. At the time of registration, you must sign up separately for the bus tour, as space is limited.



**MORSA Membership  
Application/Renewal Form  
Calendar Year 2024  
Dues are due January 31st**

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

**Name of Member:**

**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

**Michigan One-Room  
Schoolhouse Association**

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choolhouseassociation.com

*Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association*

*c/o Jane Johnson*

*4815 Barton Rd.*

*Williamston, MI 48895*

**Schoolhouse of the Year 2023  
Wooden Stone School  
Onsted, Lenawee County**



Hosts and Volunteers extraordinaire:  
(left to right) Heather Wooden Connett,  
Joy Rutkofsky Luck, Ronald C. Ryan,  
Jackie Freeman, Sally Mason Friese.

Thank you!

Lovingly cared for,  
graciously shared with  
their community and  
visitors from all over,  
the Wooden Stone  
School is a gem.



From the yearly third-grade students who come to an immersive day's class, to the attendees of one-room schools who were interviewed for the recent oral history project and DVD recording, the Wooden Stone School is a vital part of the Onsted community. They engage the schools, teachers, and the community in helping to preserve and to appreciate the history of the one-room school.

**This is MORSA's mission also, to preserve our heritage.**