

The Slate

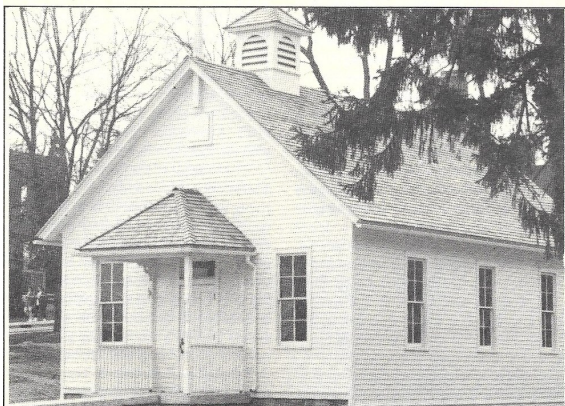
Vol. XXXII Issue 2

Fall 2023

The President's Column Rochelle Balkam

2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the Michigan One-room Schoolhouse Association. When we met at Eastern Michigan University in May of 1993, we had no idea how significant an organization it would become. At its founding it was the only organization of its kind in the U.S.

It was the creative genius of the president of the Historical Society of Michigan, Tom Jones, that an organization celebrating the role of the one-room school in our history should be recognized.



Town Hall School in 1989, after being moved to the Eastern Michigan University campus

EMU was the appropriate venue in that it was said to be the first teaching training institute west of the Alleghenies. A specific program was introduced by Dr. Marvin Pittman, in the 1920s, to train teachers to teach in a one-room school.

The logo of MORSA is the Geddes Townhall School, moved to the EMU campus in 1988. The family of Hannah Geddes Wright, late secretary for MORSA and editor of The Slate, made the move possible. Down the Myrtle Path, tells the unique story of the school which Hannah, her siblings, and ancestors attended until its closure in the 1950s.

There are few of us remaining, who were at that initial meeting. The organization has been through difficult times, but it has endured. There has always been a core that kept it strong. Much of the success must be attributed to Suzanne Daniel. The archive of the organization, *(President's Column continued next page)*

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now housed at EMU, has thousands of photos and documentation that she has collected. In recent years the vision of leaders: the late Larry Schlack, Tom and Jane Johnson, and our current board have helped to strengthen MORSA.

Our user friendly website enables those interested in one-room schools to submit information, edit incorrect information, to network with others, and to keep our membership informed.

We treasure our heritage and we look forward to meeting future challenges.

Membership Application/Renewal Form for 2023 Dues Per calendar year.

_____ \$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



He spoke in a rural voice

Lenawee County's Will Carleton

postcard showing Carleton and the farm he grew up on in Hudson and his one-room schoolhouse.

Born October 21, 1845, Carleton's first audience was the cows

and sheep on their farm. At sixteen he started at Hillsdale College. He put himself through school teaching in a one-room schoolhouse and writing for several small newspapers. Two years after graduating he had his first poem published, "Betsey and I Are Out" followed by "**Over the Hill to the Poor House**" about a widowed mother who is passed around by her children before finally landing in the Poor House. Writing these ballads, (narratives in the vernacular) Carleton became a widely popular poet. Harper Brothers published six volumes of his poetry with total sales of \$600,000.

Throughout the late 1800's and early 1900's he toured the U.S., Canada, and Europe, delivering lectures and reciting his poetry. In 1919, seven years after his death, the Michigan legislature designated October 21st as Will Carleton Day to honor him and to encourage schools to read him.



Desks available! James Wilson has generously offered to give these beautiful desks a new home. Wilson is an artist who has been an admirer of one-room schoolhouses for years and a collector of items such as these desks of "vanishing America". He has placed numerous desks at the George Washington Carver National Monument in Missouri. He lives in Ferndale, Michigan.

Jim Wilson's email is: jimwilson323@gmail.com.

Wooden Old Stone Schoolhouse
By Jackie Freeman

On behalf of the ‘Wooden’ Old Stone Schoolhouse Association, I want to welcome everyone to Onsted, MI, as we host the 2023 Michigan One-room Schoolhouse Association conference.

The Saturday, September 30th conference will be held in the Onsted Elementary School, 10109 S Lee Road, Onsted, Mi 49265.

It is very fitting to hold this year’s conference at this site since Onsted Community School District exists **because** of the 30 one-room schoolhouses that now comprise it. The ‘Wooden’ Old Stone Schoolhouse sits on the original site of the first log schoolhouse built there in 1837, the year Michigan became a state. That original structure burned, and the current building, built in 1850, was made of field stones gathered from neighboring farmers’ land. This year the Third-Grade students had their ‘lessons’ in this one-room schoolhouse. They were given a map of these thirty one-room schoolhouses



to prepare them for their visit and asked to identify which one would be closest to their current home. Many of these sites have been torn down or are residential homes or houses of worship. One is now a winery! Perhaps during your visit to our community, you would like a map and check them out for yourself.

A highlight at this year’s MORSA Conference will be the viewing of our oral history project, where individuals who attended one-room schools were interviewed. This is a most impressive twelve-minute DVD presentation. We plan to have some of these interviewees present at the conference.

* * * * *

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) 899-4898

tjjj@wowway.com.



**Keynote Presentation:
“Historic Michigan Highways:
Native Trails to U.S. 12”**

By Dr. John Geisler

I have been interested in roads and highways since I was 14 years old. I have also been very interested in maps. My oldest Michigan map is from 1924.

My remarks will be directed to the trails and roads in the southern part of Michigan.

My interest in highways was inspired by a feature in the older editions of the Saturday Evening Post. The feature was a collection of snippets of US and state highway maps in the US. The idea was to identify where the snippet was from with very little information provided by the Post. I would obsess with these puzzles for several days before I looked up the answer in the last pages of the magazine.

My presentation will consist of early trails made by mastodons and early native Americans, early Michigan roads. Then onto the history of one particular road – the Great Sauk Trail (US12).

Our speaker, Dr. John Geisler, is a Professor Emeritus at Western Michigan University. Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology 1979-2005, he earned his BA at Adrian College, and his MA and PHD at the University of Toledo. He has published extensively in professional journals, often writing on the teacher as counselor. Dr. Geisler has many professional awards. He has spoken to many Historical Societies on “The Sauk Trail-US 12”.

We are delighted to have him with us at our Fall Conference!

**Onsted Area Lodging and Places
to Visit in Lenawee County**

For those new to our area, there are various sites you may wish to visit while you are here.

**Historic Walker Tavern Site/
Cambridge State Park**, 3220 M-50, Brooklyn, MI.

**Lenawee County Historical
Museum**, 110 E. Church Street, Adrian, MI 49221.

Tecumseh Historical Museum, 302 E. Chicago Ave, Tecumseh, MI 49286
Hidden Lake Gardens, 6214 M-50, Tipton, MI 49287 *the 65-foot-high, Canopy-Walk in Michigan’s Irish Hills is now open to the public.

Overnight accommodation includes but is not limited to the following:
Greenleaf Mansion Bed & Breakfast, 247 S. Main St, Onsted, MI, 49265

Hideaway Cove Log Cabins & Resort, 11560 Breyman Hwy, Tipton, MI 49287

Heart Wood Place Bed & Breakfast & Day Spa, 3723 Wisner Hwy, Adrian, MI 49221

Super 8 by Wyndham Brooklyn, 419 S. Main St. M-50, Brooklyn, MI 49230

Comfort Inn & Suites Adrian, 425 Industrial Dr, Adrian, MI 49221

Hampton Inn & Suites Adrian, 1335 S. Main St, Adrian, MI 49221

[Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association](#)

Fall Conference

Saturday, September 30th, 9:00A.M. - 2:30 P.M.

Onsted, Michigan

The conference will be held at the Onsted Elementary School, 10109 Slee Road, just down the road from the Wooden Old Stone Schoolhouse, (11992 Stephenson Road), whose Association is our host. They have a short film on an oral history project they made, interviewing people who attended one-room schools, which will be shown.

The keynote speaker is Dr. John Geisler whose presentation “Historic Michigan Highways: Native Trails to U.S. 12” will give us an informative and interesting look at the pathways and highways in southern Michigan. Geisler’s presentation will cover early trails made by mastodons and early native Americans, to early Michigan roads and the history of one particular road – the Great Sauk Trail U.S. 12.

Lunch will be served . 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.

The Wooden Old Stone School [will be open for a guided tour by Jackie Freeman and Joy Luck.](#)

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

**If You Seek A One-room
Schoolhouse, Look Around You**
By **Rochelle Balkam**

We have traveled throughout the state of Michigan this summer and located one-room schoolhouses everywhere. They take many forms: restored schools, museums, wineries, art studios, farm implement storage sheds, retail stores, offices, restaurants and some are simply abandoned structures. After many years of searching, one can always spot them, no matter the current form.

Surprisingly, as travels have taken us all over the southern U.S., it is rare that we have found any schools. It is true that the state of Michigan probably has more one-room schools than any other state. It is a both a blessing and a curse. It is an ongoing race against time to locate, protect and preserve each building. At this point, 7,000 schools in our state have been identified.

Two of the many schools stand out. The first is the Wooden School, confusing, because, it is a stone school, built in the 1840s by the Reverend Robert Wooden. It is in Lenawee County, near the town of Onsted. It will be the site of the MORSA conference in September. The other is the Brownsville School in Cass County. It is believed to be one of the oldest integrated one-room schools in Michigan. Ironically, the abandoned school was on the farm of a different Wooden family. The UGRR organization is in the process of stabilizing and using the school as a repository for artifacts from other schools in the area.

Each school that is documented adds one more chapter to the historical record. The inventory continues to expand and to be fleshed out, thanks to those who have made contributions to the knowledge base. The stories must be told, and recorded; those with direct knowledge will be gone, one day. We must protect that part of our heritage.

MORSA Fall Conference Schedule

Onsted Elementary School

9:00-9:30 Registration, Silent Auction

9:30-9:40 Welcome, President's Remarks

9:45- 10:15 Welcome to Wooden School,

Jackie Freeman and Joy Luck.

Introduction to film on Wooden School

Recognition of Wooden School Family

10:15-10:30 Break, silent auction

10:30-11:30 Keynote, Dr. John Geisler

"Historic Michigan Highways; Native Trails to U.S. 12"

11:30-12:10 A Time of Sharing, "What brings you here?"

12:15-1:00 Lunch, Brief business meeting, Silent Auction ends

1:30 Tour of Wooden Old Stone School
Jackie Freeman and Joy Luck hosts
11992 Stephenson Road

Exploration of schoolhouses and local sights on your own. Maps given out.



Brownsville School # 1

A Legacy of the Underground Railroad By Jennifer Ray

Brownsville #1 stands unassumingly at 20559 Osborne Street, Cassopolis, MI. Greek Revival in style and constructed of wood, Brownsville #1 is typical of thousands of America's mid-nineteenth century one-room schools. While researchers continue to seek Brownsville #1's exact date of construction, evidence exists to support c. 1840. The *Report of the Superintendent for Public Instruction* shows that District School #1 in Calvin Township reported attendance and financial statistics for the year 1841. And, 1850 census records show both Black and white students attending school there. By 1860, five public one-room schools existed in Calvin Township. Many citations in the literature attest to these schools being integrated. Though unremarkable physically, Brownsville #1 has a meaningful story to tell. The first of the five to open, Brownsville #1 is certainly one of the earliest and longest integrated public one-room schools in Michigan—perhaps the country.

A legacy of the Underground Railroad operating in Cass County in the 1830s – 1850s, Brownsville #1 embodies the story of Cass County's Calvin, Penn, and Porter Townships (Young's Prairie). Over 1,500 freedom seekers were assisted by Quaker stationmasters and conductors here. Many freedom seekers journeyed on into Canada due to the Fugitive Slave Act. However, some settled on Young's Prairie and seized opportunities to work, participate in community, and educate their children. Word spread of this safe haven in southwest Michigan. In the mid 1840s – 1850s, Free Black families began moving north and settling in Calvin Township. Cass County's 1860 plat map shows over one hundred Black owned properties. As landowners, Free Blacks established thriving farms, became respected members of the community, formed anti-slavery societies, assisted freedom seekers, fought for freedom, and sent their children to school.



This assemblage of Quakers, freedom seekers, and Free Blacks became neighbors who cooperated with, assisted, and respected each other. Integration of Brownsville #1 and several other public one-room schools of Young's Prairie happened quite naturally, a direct consequence of the Underground Railroad's presence. To honor and celebrate this legacy, the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County (URSCC) purchased Brownsville School and two acres surrounding the building from Richard and Dennis Wooden in November of 2022. The school had been part of the Wooden family farm since the 1960s and for a short time was used to store grain.



Brownsville School #1

The band around the building shored it up against the weight of the grain. Odd looking indeed, the band has helped keep the building intact over the many years it has sat empty. Long time residents of the area, Wooden family members were both students and teachers at Brownsville #1. The family is grateful that this humble building's new owners appreciate its rich and meaningful history.

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NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION

**Michigan One-Room
Schoolhouse Association**

2023 Officers:

Rochelle Balkam, President
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Myrna Grove
Lauren Harris
Dr. Tom M. Johnson
Judy Shehigian
Claudia Throop, Consultant
Suzanne Daniel, Emeritus

The Slate Newsletter:

Jill Marcusse, Editor

Yearly Membership Dues:

\$20 Senior (62+) or Student
\$25 Member,
\$25 Organizations

Website:<http://www.miorsa.org>

Facebook:[michiganoneroomschoolhouseassociation.com](https://www.facebook.com/michiganoneroomschoolhouseassociation.com)

*Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association
c/o Jane Johnson
4815 Barton Rd.
Williamston, MI 48895*

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To enable Brownsville #1 to stand proudly and continue to impart wisdom, Underground Railroad Society of Cass County plans to repair and preserve the many remaining original elements of the building. Initial preservation efforts will focus on the foundation, roof, floors, and windows. And, yes—the band will be removed. URSCC hopes to complete these preservation projects by mid 2024. At that time, Brownsville #1 will open to the public! Under strong and sturdy hand-hewn beams, Brownsville #1’s new “students” will view photos of Brownsville #1 and other integrated public one-room schools of Cass County. Documents chronicling Brownsville’s history will be available to read. Currently URSCC is in the process of making a documentary about the Underground Railroad and its legacy in Cass County. This film will include interviews with former Brownsville students and former students of the other integrated schools of Young’s Prairie. It will debut at Brownsville #1 during Underground Railroad Days, July 2024. Before leaving the building, visitors may linger and listen to students’ recitations, gaze out of the original windows to see children play, or take a seat at a desk and ponder Brownsville #1’s still relevant history and humanities lessons.



If you would like to receive preservation updates via e-mail, become a Friend of Brownsville School (FBS), a committee of URSCC, at [Brownsvilleschool.org](https://www.brownsvilleschool.org). FBS is dedicated to assisting URSCC with research and preservation. Membership is free and the occasional communications will not overwhelm your mailbox.