

A Brief Study of the Five Mile Creek School

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The Five Mile Creek Schoolhouse in Emmet County, Michigan is situated on M-119 approximately five miles north of Harbor Springs. Through the use of District REcords, attendance books, lesson plans, financial records, and personal interviews, information concerning the Five Mile Creek Schoolhouse has been preserved for 117 years. Most of the information in this paper was taken from actual minutes of annual school board meetings and minutes of special meetings collected and preserved by Mrs. Estella Ramey of Harbor Springs, Michigan.

The first official record relating to the Five Mile Creek Schoolhouse seems to be a Michigan District Record that is dated January 13, 1880, recorded by the first school director, W.F. Compton. This record begins with the search for an appropriate site to build the original schoolhouse in District Five of Friendship Township. According to the District's record book, the following items of business were to be among the duties of the District Board:

1. Employment of Teachers
2. Adoption of Text Books
3. Auditing Director's Account of Expenses Incurred
4. Acceptance of Assessor's Bond
5. Making Contracts for Building and Repairing
6. Selecting Books for District Library from the List contracted for by the State Board of Education, and ordering same from contractor
7. Appointing Officers to Fill Vacancy
8. Appointing Librarian for the Year
9. Adopting Rules for Library and providing suitable Case and Fixtures for the same
10. Adopting Rules and Regulations for the Government of the School
11. Admitting non-residents to school, and determining Rates of Tuition for same

Corresponding to the Rural School Sanitation guidelines set forth by the State of Michigan, a minimum of one acre was recommended for the school grounds. "Complete fencing is desirable to keep children from running into the road and also to prevent cattle from straying through the school grounds." Barbed wire fencing, however, was not considered suitable for school grounds. Landscaping was suggested not to interfere with play outside and lighting inside the building.

A cloakroom and closed vestibule were recommended, in addition to an "adjoining room" which could be used as a library or workshop. "The size of the room should be no wider than twice the height of the windows." A minimum of 15 square feet per student was desirable. Classroom floors were to be swept frequently and scrubbed at least once a month.

The best recommended light was from windows facing northeast or northwest. The windows were supposed to have a glass area equal to 25% of the floor area. Sills were supposed to be four feet from the floor, as the best light is provided from the top $\frac{1}{3}$ of the

window. Windows were supposed to be placed at least four feet from the front wall in order to avoid glare. Turning seats at a slight angle was suggested to aid in solving this problem. Artificial lighting (electric lighting) was desirable if possible.

The air temperature was supposed to be between 68 and 70 degrees, with suitable humidity. This was often achieved by placing a large water container on the furnace. Windows were the best means of ventilation. "The clothing of the children in the schoolroom is always a factor in the ventilation problem."

The well in the school was to be pumped out thoroughly before using. Whenever possible, the water supply was to be approved by an official from the Health Department. If a school had no running water, it was suggested that water should be kept covered in a water cooler. Children used individual cups kept free from flies and dust, and had the opportunity to drink three to four times a day.

The septic privy was usually the best system available, and was recommended by the state. This system was not possible, so a pit privy was the other option. This was to be located so as not to endanger the drinking water, and had to have a deep, fly-proof pit. A vent was to extend beyond the height of the roof. All students were to be given a chance to wash their hands. "A mirror is a help in stimulating cleanliness." This pamphlet is undated. However, it is evident that some of these suggestions were taken into consideration by the board when making decisions. The issue of fencing the school grounds appears to be most prominent, as it is mentioned regularly at annual meetings.

The first official meeting of the school board of District Number Five was held on January 13, 1880. The meeting was called to locate a schoolhouse site and appoint a building committee. No action was taken. On September 6, 1880, the board voted to raise \$200 to build a schoolhouse. The job was let to J.O. Burt and D. Culver for \$186.25. Arvilla Song was hired to teach for two months beginning October 4, 1880. She was paid \$32.

At the annual school meeting in September 1881, a motion carried to have two months of school in the fall if convenient. Anna Watson taught for three months and was paid \$42.

In 1882, there were ten students who attended school in the log building, which had a capacity to seat 30 students. Twenty-three people between the ages of five and 20 lived in the district. There were two teachers. Belle Scott taught for two months and was paid \$28. Fanny Learn taught for three months and was paid \$60. Subjects taught included spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar. The district took in and spent \$365.74, leaving no debts. Repairs to the schoolhouse included stopping all the cracks in the walls and placing glass in the windows. The board also put a lock on the door. Fifteen cord of wood was cut on the school grounds, and the grounds were cleared three rods (16 ½ feet = 1 rod) each way from the schoolhouse for a charge of \$6.00.

Five legal voters in the school district wrote a request to the school board to consider moving the schoolhouse in 1883. The original log building was built in 1880 for \$186.25. This building was sold to board member A.J. Wheeler for \$10, and a new plank building was built for \$300. Anna Watson taught three months of school in the old building for \$20 per month beginning September 1. The board agreed to purchase one acre of land as the schoolhouse site, and the building was to be built "so as not to vary more than 2 feet either way from 16' x 30' x 12' high." The board changed the site of the new building three times before a site was agreed upon. In a cost-cutting measure, the board voted not to provide seating in the privies.

Franc Hitchings taught three months of summer school in 1884 and was paid \$84. At the annual meeting of the Board, there were six votes by ballot in an attempt to elect a director. No one was elected until a special meeting two days later. Three special meetings were called to discuss a billing dispute. The clerk was finally asked to list all bills and receipts on the blackboard, and he was found to be correct. Six months later the clerk, H.A.W. Blackburn, was removed and replaced by board member Andrew Ward.

In the year 1885, 22 of the 25 eligible students attended three months of school. By this time the schoolhouse had been rebuilt and the location changed. The building was a frame building which could seat up to 30 students. Blanche Digby taught school for \$66. She taught spelling, reading, writing, mental arithmetic, arithmetic, geography, and grammar. The district took in \$305.32 and spent the same amount, although books indicate a debt of \$3 at the end of the school year. The board agreed to purchase glass windows for the schoolhouse.

Eligible students numbered 25 in 1886, and 21 of them attended school. School was taught by Phillip Kribs for 2 ½ months and Una Hathaway for 2 ½ months. The male teacher earned \$75, while the female teacher only earned \$57.50 for teaching the same amount of time. Subjects taught included spelling, reading, writing, mental arithmetic, arithmetic, geography, and grammar. The district took in and spent \$186.19. The board paid \$1 for repairs to the windows.

All 19 of the children in the district attended school in 1887, which lasted 5 ½ months total. Ethel Manchester taught 2 ½ months and Minnie Bucher taught three months. Two subjects were added to the curriculum this year, Civil Government and Physiology. The district took in \$167.06 and spent \$179.65, leaving a debt of \$12.59.

In 1888 there were 15 students in school, and they were taught by Una Hathaway. They only had three months of school, and the teacher earned \$75. The same subjects were taught, but Civil Government was dropped. The Harper's Series of textbooks was adopted and purchased by the board. The financial books indicate the district took in \$163.23 and spent \$163.13, which would leave a surplus of ten cents. However, the debt is listed at \$333.25.

There is no mention of the number of students who attended school in 1889, but they were taught again by Una Hathaway. She earned \$125 for teaching five months of school. She taught the same subjects as the previous year. The district took in and spent \$263.50, leaving a debt of \$8.66 according to the financial records. The board agreed to purchase a blackboard for \$1.50.

C.J. Foreman taught school for six months in 1890, but again there is no record of the number of students attending school. Subjects taught included spelling, reading, writing, mental arithmetic, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and physiology. The form for total teacher's wages lists Mr. Foreman as having received \$150. However, the financial record claims he was only paid half that amount. Based on that \$75 teacher's wage, the district took in and spent \$165.42, and was owed \$199.10 by the township. At the annual meeting September 1, 1890, the board voted to clear, break, and fence the school grounds with a slat and wire fence. This vote was rescinded at a special meeting October 7, 1890. The board then decided to build a post and wire fence, with seven foot posts placed eight feet apart, the size of the wire being left to the discretion of the board. A motion to have five months of school lost in a vote, and the board voted to have seven months of school.

The report for 1891 stated only that Henry S. Babcock taught seven months of school and was paid \$187. The financial report states that the district's total debt was \$166.50. The

board voted to spend \$20 to put a wall under the schoolhouse, \$5 to repaint the privies, and \$15 to buy a stove.

A motion to have seven months of school again in 1892 lost in a vote. There were six months of school, 3 ½ taught by Clarence Foreman and 2 ½ taught by Winnie Coleman. Mr. Foreman was paid \$91 and Miss Coleman was paid \$62.50. Subjects taught included spelling, writing, reading, mental arithmetic, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and natural philosophy. The district's total debt was \$170, and the district was owed \$274.85 by the township. A motion was carried to vote on uniting the district with Fractional District Number Five of West Traverse Township. The vote was three for uniting, 13 against.

Winnie Coleman taught six months of school in 1893 and was paid \$153.50. The district's total debt was \$100, and \$215.16 was owed by the township.

Eleven students attended six months of school in 1894, taught by Herbert Swift and Anna Hyatt. Each teacher taught for three months, but the male teacher was paid \$90 and the female was paid \$75. The school was graded that year, and the county superintendent made three visits. Subjects taught included spelling, reading, writing, mental arithmetic, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and physiology. The district's debt remained \$100.

The student population was 16 during the seven months of school taught in 1895. Teachers were Bertha Shaffer and Anna Hyatt. Miss Shaffer was paid \$100 for four months of teaching, and Miss Hyatt was paid \$75 for three months. The school was not graded. Six volumes were added to the school library; these were the only six volumes in the library. Students were taught from Harper's book series. The district's debt increased to \$115. A motion made and supported for buying five cords of wood lost. A motion made for building a woodhouse on the school grounds lost for lack of support.

Anna Angell taught five months of school in 1896 and was paid \$125. There is no record of the number of students, but the schoolhouse capacity is listed as 20. This is interesting, because when the schoolhouse was built in 1884, the capacity was listed as 30 students. The school was visited once by the district superintendent and once by the school director. Students were again taught from the Harper's series, and the school debt remained \$115. At the annual meeting in September, a motion carried to completely overhaul the privy for \$5.75. Another motion carried to fence the school grounds, although plans had originally been made to do so in 1890.

No school as held in 1897. This vote came after a lengthy succession of votes for moderator, director, and assessor. The board also voted to raise \$75 to pay the district's debts.

On September 5, 1898, at the annual meeting, a motion to have no school again this year did not pass. The board decided to hold two months of fall school and three months of spring school. John Woodruff was paid 95 cents to clean the schoolhouse. The board voted against uniform textbooks. A motion carried to allow the Grange to use the schoolhouse one night each month. B.F. Terpening was given the job of building a woodhouse for the school for \$12.

At the annual meeting in 1899, it was determined that there would be two months of fall school and three months of spring school. A motion was carried to have the teacher board around in the district. A motion was also carried to reshingle the schoolhouse.

It was decided that there would be two months of fall school and three months of summer school in 1900. A motion to re-side, paint, and reshingle the schoolhouse lost. Andrew

Ward was hired to clean the schoolhouse, including washing windows, desks, and wainscoting, and blacking the stove, for \$1.45.

At the annual meeting in September 1901, it was decided that there would be 3 ½ months of school in the fall and in the spring. A motion carried to fence the school grounds. This motion was first carried in 1890. It is not clear whether a fence was ever erected on the school grounds. Motions were carried to place a belfry on top of the school with a bell in it.

In 1902, it was decided to have four months of school in the fall and three in the spring. A motion carried to raise \$40 to repair the schoolhouse.

A motion carried at the annual meeting in 1903 to have four months of school in the fall and four months in the spring. It was decided that the siding of the woodshed would be left to the discretion of the school board.

At the annual meeting in September 1904, a motion carried to have five months of school in the fall, weather permitting, and three months of school in the spring. A motion was made and supported to change the annual meeting to the second Monday in July. This was due to a change in state law. A motion was made and supported to establish a district library. The vote was unanimous in favor of the library.

At the annual meeting held July 10, 1905, a motion carried to have five months of school in the fall commencing on the first Monday in September, and three months of school in the spring commencing on the first Monday in April. At a special meeting held October 24, 1905, it was moved to draw an order payable to W.J. Clark for \$60 for 90 days. The purpose of this is unclear. At a special meeting December 26, 1905, it was decided that school would be held December 27, and then there would be a vacation until January 2, 1906. The board determined that tuition would be fixed at 50 cents per month payable in advance monthly.

It was decided that there would be four months of winter school beginning the first Tuesday in September, 1906 and three months of spring school beginning whenever the weather permitted near the middle of March. A motion carried to build a coiled wire fence with posts furnished by the district. It was determined that the fence should be erected no later than September 1, 1906. A motion carried to have parents furnish paper and pencil for their children.

There seem to be no records available from 1907 to 1914. At the annual meeting in July 1915, the district decided to merge with District Number Five of West Traverse Township, Emmet County.

In District Number Five, teachers were responsible for noting a student's absence and the reason for that absence. Reasons included "sores on face," "rain," and "church." Teachers sent a monthly report to the district moderator detailing the attendance percentage for school that month.

In a letter to her successor in 1905, teacher Miss Mabelle Whittaker stated that all classes were poor in arithmetic. In language, the fifth grade studied "The Frost," "Psalm of Life," and other poems. The fourth grade studied "Snow Bound," "The Rainy Day," "The Old Broken Bucket," and others. The eighth grade studied "Rip Van Winkle" and other works by Washington Irving. Some students took garden work and nature study with their reading. Teachers were required by the district to write such letters, even when they anticipated returning to teach again for another term. There was a high rate of change for teachers. The longest any one teacher taught at the Five Mile Creek School was three terms.

On July 5, 1997, three former students of the Five Mile Creek School reminisced about the time they spent there in the 1920s. These students were Elizabeth Garver, Estella Ramey, and Neva Lauer. When asked about the typical school day, Mrs. Ramey stated, "Every morning, two students were chosen to go out and raise the flag." Mrs. Lauer added that students would say The Pledge of Allegiance and sing "Good Morning Dear Teacher" before lessons commenced. When classes started, the teacher would usually read a chapter or two out of a book. Mrs. Garver said she always looked forward to that, and that the books were very interesting. She also remembered that there were three or four students in her grade, but usually only two attended regularly. Each grade would sit on a bench at the front of the classroom and receive its lessons, while other students worked independently on their assignments. Students were allowed to work together if they had questions during this time. Mrs. Lauer sat in the corner with her friend Leonard Williams. When asked what they were up to she said, "No good, probably!" Mrs. Lauer said that she was never afraid of her teachers and her teachers were always fair. In terms of classroom management or discipline, the ladies remember a pull on the ear or standing in the corner to be the typical punishments. "We didn't have any mean teachers. They were super," said Mrs. Garver.

Recess, at ten o'clock each morning, consisted of playing softball or tag on the playground. Mrs. Ramey remembered how they would stand under the pine trees in the winter and shake the branches so the snow would fall on people.

The students carried their lunches to school in syrup buckets. They sometimes carried a cup of prunes to eat with the soup. Students would sometimes help make the soup using a cook stove in the basement. The school provided hot lunches which consisted of meals such as salmon soup or corn soup. Mrs. Lauer remembered the recipe for corn soup as, "a cup of corn and two gallons of milk."

One of their fondest memories was of the box socials held during Halloween. They would decorate a box and fill it with things like fried chicken, sandwiches, cakes and pie. Members of the community would buy the boxes, and the students would share the contents of the box with the purchaser. The money was used to buy Christmas presents, which consisted of pencils or tablets. At Christmas the students would participate in plays and recite Christmas poems. Mrs. Lauer commented that their Christmas candy was "a lot better than it is today." Candies included ribbon candy, peanuts, and chocolates. Mrs. Garver remembered Christmas fondly. "It was always a happy time for us," she said.

Students did their share of chores while at school. Mrs. Ramey remembers going out to the pump to get pails of water to treat the septic toilet tanks in the basement. Students also filled the "drinking fountain" on a daily basis. Mrs. Lauer said, "If we had to get a pail of water, we were glad, so we could get out of school for a while."

The three ladies said they never paid for any books and were allowed to take textbooks home. They did have to provide their own pencils and paper. A special treat was wax crayons. "It was always nice to get a box of crayons before school started. They were soft wax crayons, and if you colored too long, they would melt," remembered Mrs. Lauer. Mrs. Ramey commented that they never had much homework because they had time in class. She said, "When we were done with our work, we would read, draw pictures, or get work done for the next day." Mrs. Garver said, "I wouldn't trade those days for anything."

The Five Mile Creek Schoolhouse is now used as a gathering place for the Five Mile Creek Community Association. This group holds community potluck suppers the first Saturday of every month. Photos of Five Mile Creek residents line the walls of the schoolhouse, as do some old maps used when the schoolhouse was still in operation. Residents of Five Mile Creek welcome visitors to all of their potluck suppers. Their motto is, "Be sure to fill your plates, and the regulars will fill you in on the rest."