

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #20

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

Our Early Schools

When the first settlers arrived in the area that was to become the Town of Madison, they were faced with many urgent tasks. A shelter had to be constructed, trees cut down so that sunlight could penetrate the ground for the growing of crops, and sources of income found until those crops could be grown. The settlers learned that the making of charcoal and potash could be sold to markets "back east."

It did not take long before the thoughts of the adults were directed toward the education of their children. Our settlers came from the New England region – Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Education had been a very important element of their former life and they were determined to establish quality education for their children. Attendance at church and the reading of the Bible were values that these New Englanders brought with them.

Settlement in the township continued and in November of 1813, the Town of Madison was divided into 17 school districts. During the ensuing years 13 of the 17 districts were organized, each having at least three Trustees.

The function of the Trustees was to maintain the school house, hire a teacher, and oversee the progress of the students of that district school.

The first district to organize was the Madison Center School. This was in November of 1813, immediately following the division of the township into school districts. It was designated as District #7. The school organized in the Village of Madison was District # 1. Bouckville became District # 10, while the school established in Solsville was # 11. The remainder of the 13 schools were scattered about the more rural areas.

It is interesting to note that the State of New York established the first lottery for education in 1799. Madison did not receive any money from the early lotteries because we did not organize our schools until 1813. Our first appropriation from the State came in 1816. The Town of Madison received \$137.49 to be divided among the 13 school districts. 1816 was also the year the Village of Madison was incorporated.

A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL – The one-room school was a fixture in rural American life for decades. Inside the school you would see wooden student desks, teacher's desk, blackboard, map of the United States, and a wood stove. The school would look very sparse by today's standards.

In addition, there would be a container of water. The students shared a dipper to get a drink. A U.S. flag would have a prominent spot in the school. The teaching of citizenship was an important part of each school day. Outside the school there would be an outhouse, swing set and perhaps a teeter-totter. Trees planted around the school would give refreshing shade during the recess period. An outside wood shed, to supply the stove in the school, completed the school scene.

OUR SCHOOLS – TWO EXAMPLES –

We now look at two examples of schools in the township – the Madison Village School and the Bouckville School. The students in Madison initially attended school in a building on East St. in the village.

Prior to the Civil War, a building that had been used in Morrisville by the Madison County Agricultural Society for the purpose of holding County Fairs, was moved to Madison Village and used as an Armory. The location was on Hamilton Street, which is now South Street in Madison. It was known as Military Hall. The home of the Bush family is now on the site.

In 1871 the Armory building was purchased by District #1 for \$500 and renovated to house a school on the first floor and a town hall and community meeting place on the second. The renovated building and school later came to be known as the Madison Academy. On December 7, 1878 the Madison Union Free School and Academy was formed. From a booklet published in 1886, one could attend the Academic (High School) Department for \$6.00 per semester.

The Union Free School and Academy was replaced in 1902 by the new Union School, built on the same site after the previous school building had been torn down. This building served the educational needs of the village until the present Madison Central School building was opened in April of 1932.

The original school in Bouckville was a cobblestone structure, which was located on the corner of what are now U.S. Rt. 20 and Maple Street. Currently, the site is a portion of the lawn owned by Henry Uhlig. The school was well-known in the area for the quality of the education given and the dedication of the teachers. Members of the S.R. Mott family were often on the Board of Trustees.

A larger school was built in 1875 just to the south of the cobblestone school. The total cost of this school was \$2,500. Following consolidation with Madison to form the Madison Central Rural School, the building became the home of the R.E.A. (Rural Electrification Administration) and is currently the site of an automotive garage.

SCHOOL "BACK THEN" –

From an article written for the retirement of long-time teacher Miss Helen Snell and from information written by former teacher Elsie Carpenter Decker, we can get an idea of what it was like to teach in and attend a one-room school house.

- Hours for a school day were often 9:00-4:00.
- Grades 1-8 were taught in the same classroom by one teacher hired by the district. The older students assisted the younger ones with their lessons.
- It was not unusual for the total enrollment of a school to be a dozen.
- Discipline was very strict. Disorderly conduct was dealt with quickly.
- Subjects taught included Mathematics, Writing, Spelling, and Geography.
- Most students walked to school. Meals were brought by them in a lunch pail.
- A pail of water was brought by a neighbor to be used for washing hands before the noon meal. Another pail of water and dipper were used by all for drinking.
- A coal or wood stove provided heat for the school. Students were sometimes assigned to start the fire in the morning before the day's school session began.
- A school year consisted of 32 weeks of instruction, divided into two 16 week semesters.
- School opened in September for the first semester and in March for the second. A lengthy mid-winter break was given when the snow was at its worst.
- The teacher often stayed with one of the families in the area for a nominal fee.
- In the years before 1900, a teacher often earned \$6.00 per week. By 1910 it had risen to \$8.00 per week.
- Teachers were usually female and unmarried. If they married, they resigned to take care of their family.
- Noon hour provided students with a chance to play ball or use the swings and teeter-totter.
- A flag pole was near the school and proudly displayed the American flag.
- It is the opinion of many Americans that the education given in the one-room schools allowed them to be highly successful in life.

We are well aware that every town and city has similar tales of their local schools, but when reading the historical accounts of the Madison-Bouckville area, the former students seem to have had a great affection and loyalty to the "old school" and the education derived from it.