

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #28

(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.

Madison Central School

When you travel through the Village of Madison on U.S. Rt. 20, you will see a beautiful school on the north side of the highway. Madison Central School has had a long and distinguished history. Let's take a look at what has become the centerpiece of the community.

Madison school history begins on June 19, 1812 when the State of New York passed legislation requiring each township of the state to be divided into common school districts. The Town of Madison was divided into 17 such districts. When we think of the prevailing means of travel, and the condition of the roads, it is easy to see why so many districts were formed.

The settlers who came to the Town of Madison were from New England and regarded education very highly, not only to learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also to be able to understand the Bible. Districts began to organize in 1813 and schools were being built as early as 1814. These were one-room schools with one teacher hired to instruct all ages.

The first school in Madison was located on what is now Rt. 20, near the current Town Hall. Later, a building that had been used as an armory during the time of the Civil War was converted into a school. This structure was located on South Street, just to the south of what is now Taylor's Auction Service.

By the late 1890's the renovated armory building was found to be insufficient for the growing school population and a new building was constructed on the site of the old in 1902. This new building served the educational needs of the village for a number of years, but the State was proposing the consolidation of the one-room and two-room schools so that more opportunities for children could be offered.

On December 20, 1930 voting took place for a new "central rural school." The current site for Madison Central School was chosen and purchased from Grove Hinman, who has been mentioned in previous "Turnpike Tales" articles. It is interesting to note that the building was constructed during the Great Depression and that the vote in favor of the project was 265 to 53. That says a lot about the dedication of the people to ensure quality education for their children.

The site for the new school provided a panoramic view from the Cherry Valley Turnpike (Rt. 20) and would afford the children a safe hill for play in the front of the school. It is a pleasure to watch kids playing games on the hill or in the "bowl" as it is called, at the base of the hill in the spring and fall, and to see them sliding down the hill during the winter season. This glacial kettle hole has certainly created a lot of memories.

For me personally, it was when the school purchased a dozen toboggans and after we had eaten our lunch, we could put on our winter coats and use the remainder of our lunch time to slide down that wonderful hill. This was the time to play with friends, let off a little excess energy, and get ready for the afternoon classes.

Entering the school property from the west allows you to travel through the main parking lot and continue past the athletic fields (The land was also purchased from Grove Hinman at a later date.) to Madison Lake. The lake was a popular tourist destination from the 1880's to the 1960's. Two hotels were featured and dances, ball games, reunions, and company outings were held there.

The new school building was opened in March of 1932. The architectural style chosen was Greek, featuring red brick and distinctive corner columns. Placed on the top front corners of the school are the mottos: The End Crowns The Work and Let Today Decide Tomorrow. The woodwork of the interior of the school was of oak. It would be very costly today to duplicate the amount of oak used in the doors, moldings, and flooring.

A number of new courses were added. These included Commercial, Homemaking, and Agriculture. A Library and Cafeteria were included in the plans, as well as an Auditorium/Gymnasium. The Auditorium featured a large stage for band concerts, plays, and musicals.

Since a number of former one-room schools were merged to make the new school district, buses were purchased. They were dark green in color and looked like the modern safari vehicles seen in Africa.

Shortly following the opening of the new school, the district purchased a home that was on the east end of the property. It had been the residence of Rolland Baker, a Madison jeweler. The house was to be used as a Principal's home. Mr. John Gannon, a Principal during the 1950's, and his family lived there for a short time. Later, space in the building was used for Home Economics, Mechanical Drawing and for extra classroom space. The building was torn down in 1995.

I have special memories of the "House" as it was called. My elementary class was one of those with larger than normal numbers following WW11. I was lucky enough to be chosen to be in the class in the "House." That may seem odd, but we actually were being taught in a one-room school. All of the specials such as Physical Education, Art, and Music came to us.

Our playground was the kettle hole in front of the school. And best of all we had a great teacher! I was there for grades 5 and 6. It was a great experience and one that I have always treasured.

Some interesting happenings during the first years of our new school were:

- In 1933 a bandstand was removed from the four corners in Madison and placed at the school so that summer concerts could be held there.
- The cafeteria was originally operated by the Home Economics class.
- A school newspaper was started in February of 1935. It was called the "Daze."
- Roller skating was enjoyed by students and adults in the new Auditorium/Gymnasium.
- Christmas parties were given by the faculty during the years of the "Great Depression" to help the needy children of the district.
- The annual Agricultural Cattle Show was held in the Auditorium/Gymnasium.

An interesting story from 1939 relates how the cafeteria managed to feed the students a nutritious lunch, even though the "Great Depression" continued to grip the nation. Various students were assigned to bring in food items from their gardens or farms. Items listed included two quarts of milk from seven students, one peck of potatoes from four students, two students would bring two heads of cabbage each, two would bring one dozen eggs each, one student was assigned to bring one peck of carrots, and one would bring three-quarters of a peck of beets. Quite an idea and a workable concept!

As the school population continued to grow and other neighboring one-room districts were added, additions to the main building became necessary. The first was another two-story addition to the north side of the building. This was completed in 1938 and also featured red brick.

Other additions were completed and can be seen from Rt. 20. On the left side of the building is the 1949 West Wing and on the right side is the 1959 Elementary Wing.

What cannot be seen from the road are the other additions of 1959, 1986, 2002, and 2015. All of these additions have been intended to provide the students of Madison Central with the best possible education. The commitment to education today mirrors that of the first settlers to the township.

So when you travel through Madison to and from the Antiques Show, please slow down and take a look at one of the most beautiful schools in the state. The setting is eye-catching and the new digital signboard in front of the school says it all: WELCOME TO MADISON CENTRAL SCHOOL.