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WOOD CREEK SCHOOL

Wood Creek School was built in 1856 according to old records. It was used as a school until 1953 and in its last years was part of the Vernon-Verona-Sherrill school system. Since it was not far from the canal, boat families tied up for the winter in order to send their children here.

For those not familiar with one-room schoolhouses, grades one through eight were in the same room and taught by just one teacher. While the teacher was working with one class in the front of the room, or sitting on the recitation bench with another group, the other students would be working at their desks. The older children helped the younger ones and the little ones learned from hearing the older children perform oral recitations.

Lunch boxes were recycled lard pails and tobacco boxes. In the days before waxed paper and plastic bags, food was wrapped in a cloth napkin; bread and butter, an egg, and maybe a cookie. There was water to drink; the water bucket and dipper are on a shelf in the hall.

The required studies in a school like this were reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar. Algebra, Latin and French were taught in an occasional school; but only if the teacher was competent in these areas. In order to continue their education, students had to travel great distances or board in a town where there was a high school.

Schools were financed through tax monies or tuition, and the length of the school year depended on available monies. When there was a summer session the youngest children usually attended, but the older children were needed for farm chores.

Bells were used to call the children from play and the desk bell was used to attract their attention in the classroom. Recess or playtime was much needed in this era because of the crowded classrooms--there was little space to move around and being outside was a welcome change. There was little play equipment, maybe a ball

or jump rope, but tag and running games were the popular things to do. Children were collectors then too, and the shelf fungi and horse chestnuts may have turned into a science lesson. Our outdoor chain pump provided water for the school bucket.

Our desks are different sizes because the children were different sizes. Some of them are double, which means that you share both seat and desk (note that on some there is a dividing line).

The teacher's desk is cherry with a slant-top writing surface. The box stove with its long stovepipe kept the children warm in winter. Families were asked to contribute to the wood supply. Potatoes could be cooked in the coals for lunch.

A wooden blackboard was found under the slate one when the building was moved. It was blackened with white of egg and charred potatoes. Small slates were used, as paper was very expensive and used sparingly. Dip pens with wood handles and metal nibs were used with the inkwells in the desks. A great deal of effort was spent on penmanship.

Our maps were used in teaching geography. The United States map of 1856, clearly shows the development of the country at the time this school was built.

Singing, elocution, and spelling bees were also part of the school day. If the day was too dark to write or read (there were no lights), these other activities could save the day.

Reading was taught using McGuffey readers, among other things. The first ones were published in 1836 and they were used by many generations of children. Books were not always furnished and family owned books would be handed down from one child to the next. They had few pictures and what they had were black and white. Our library may well have served the parents as well as the children in the days before a village library was available.

This school was donated by Mrs. Gertrude Keller of Verona; coming to the Village on a flat-bed trailer.

We are very fortunate to have received authentic materials; many of the furnishings were donated by retired teachers in this area. Taken as a whole, the interior of this schoolhouse and its contents are truly representative of the 1880's. The painting of George Washington, on the back wall, is the only original piece that still remains in the school.