

The Slate

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Spring 2020

28th Annual MORSA Conference Warner Homestead and Hicks School Brighton, Michigan Saturday May 16, 2020

Tim Bennett, historian and archeologist, will welcome MORSA members to the Hicks School which has been moved to his family homestead, honored with Centennial Farm status, and updated to Sesquicentennial Farm status. We will have an unique opportunity to tour the home, as well as the school which is a “work in progress.” Tim will trace his family’s history, the farm’s history and his plans for future projects with the school.

In addition, the Lyon School will be open for a guided tour by the president of the Brighton

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Hicks School, Brighton Twp.

Chairman’s Report: A Tribute

By Tom M. Johnson

Throughout its 27 years the major strength of MORSA has been its board members. I am a relative newcomer, having joined the board after the 2007 annual meeting in Marshall. I became chair after the 2011 death of William Wingler.

Beginning with this issue, I have decided to feature several of our board members who, in my opinion, have contributed a great deal to this organization during my tenure. The first is Hannah C. Geddes Wright.

Hannah’s interest and involvement with MORSA comes naturally. She attended a one room country school located on her family farm near Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was called the Town Hall School.

Her great-great grandfather, William Geddes, had leased a corner of his property for the use of the school to Pittsfield Township in Washtenaw County at a rate of 6 cents per year for 99 years. Hannah, along with two of her brothers, were the fourth generation of children in her family to attend the school. She began school at four years of age and attended until the

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President's Column: A Tribute

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5th grade when the school was annexed into the Ann Arbor School System and permanently closed (1957). In 1987 the Town Hall School was relocated to the Eastern Michigan University and is now known as the Geddes Town Hall School. We have a wonderful picture of Hannah after the move, sitting in the seat she sat in at the time she attended the school. She wrote and published a History of the Town Hall School called "Down the Myrtle Path: The History and Memories of Town Hall School" which was published in 1996. It is available through our website.

She was present at the first MORSA Conference at EMU in 1993 and joined MORSA later as a board member in 1997/98. She became secretary then. In 2001 Hannah became the associate editor of The Slate, and in 2002 editor. She has continued to produce an excellent publication.

Hannah graduated from the University of Michigan School of Nursing in 1968 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and then worked for seven years as a registered nurse at the University Hospital while her husband attended the University of Michigan Dental School. They moved to Vermont for seven years and while there they had three daughters. They then returned to Michigan, residing in the Jackson, Michigan area. She now has six

grandchildren and she will tell you all about them if you ask. As hobbies, she enjoys gardening, painting, writing and playing hammered dulcimer and other folk instruments.

My professional life was in medical school administration and I would have hired Hannah to work with me in a heartbeat. If I had been hospitalized, I would have loved to have had her as a nurse because of her competency and caring nature. She has been a key player on the board of MORSA as secretary and editor of The Slate, but most of all she has been extremely effective because of her contributions to board discussions. Hannah is calm and low key, but her opinions and input are always well thought out and sage.

MORSA is fortunate to have Hannah as a board member!

Restoration of 1886 Spring Creek School in Three Oaks Township is Underway

by Myrna Grove

The Spring Creek School in Berrien County was built in 1886 on the corner of Donner Road and Three Oaks Road in Three Oaks Township, Michigan. In the 1890s, this schoolhouse in the southwest corner of the state was the center of community life among the area's farmers, merchants and loggers.

The stately brick structure provided an education to area farm children for 52 years from its opening in 1886 to its closing in 1938 due to consolidation. The brick school had replaced a nearby 1844 log school built entirely of cherry wood.

Typical of one-room schools, community events held at Spring Creek were well attended and included spelling bees, celebrations, political meetings and debates. Sunday school classes and prayer meetings were held regularly, and church services were scheduled



55years later...Hannah, grade 4 and her older brother, Chuck, grade 6, seated in their respective desks in 2010.

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Restoration of Spring Creek School

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whenever a preacher was available.

At a fundraiser last fall, former student, Ed Miller, said he attended the school until its closing. He remembers that there were 12-15 children in the school at that time. He stated, "It was a good education because, after I took my lessons, I could listen to the teacher giving lessons to the older students in the classroom."

Ed added, "I remember we were always quick to help each other, just like farmers in the area were always ready to help each other out."

The former student also said that his school adventures included sampling an apple or two from the orchards he passed through to and from school, and a raid on a honeybee hive in a tree. That resulted in many stings, but also the consumption of many sweet honeycombs.

In recent years, Three Oaks Township trustee, Christian Mitchell, has spearheaded community support to enable the restoration of the historic one-room school. Mitchell hopes that the brick school will find new life and educate future generations about 19th century learning when rural students shared a single classroom with a dedicated teacher who taught the lessons.

After being vacant for a long time, the interior of the school was in need of quite a bit of restoration work. However, the structure has retained good bones. To that end, Mitchell has undertaken a grassroots effort to sponsor fundraisers and secure grants from groups as well as individuals. The entire cost of the project will



Spring Creek School, Berien Co., Michigan

be about \$160,000.

The restoration began last October and will be done in stages. Architectural blueprints and renderings of what the building will look like after completion have been done by William O. McCollum of McCollum Architects & Builders in Union Pier.

Phase One will be to secure the structure and provide a second entrance/exit. Mitchell reports that this phase is progressing well. The masons have repaired the stone foundation and have tuck pointed the exterior walls.

Inside, the classroom has a new ceiling, the room is now dry walled and taped, the electric rough in is complete, and framing has been done. Painting the walls and creating a parking area are next. Also, the coal chute needs a door, and the brick outhouse (only one remains) needs work.

Triton Construction estimates that the first phase will be completed by May 2020. After that, Phase Two will include providing water, septic, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning to the school.

Once the building is restored, period appropriate furniture and artifacts will be added. Several items were found in storage at the local library. Among them are the hanging dome light fixtures, the teacher desk, student desks which need repair, student textbooks and a world map from the late 1800s.

One industrious shopper recently found the school's original clock at a rummage sale. And, when the restoration first began, the large, round metal stove still prominently occupied a corner of the room.

The end goal is that the school will offer a visual educational site for students and families who live in the area and a venue for community activities by non-profit organizations. And, it will become part of the Three Oaks Museum exhibit program.

Myrna Grove, author of *Legacy of One-Room Schools*, spoke about early education at a fundraiser for Spring Creek School in Three Oaks Township last October. Myrna is a trustee on the MORSA Board and also a Director for Country School Association of America (CSAA).

Reveries of Christmas Past

By Alicia Patch Oldham

Did you know – my “stage debut”
Took place way back in 1932?
I had just turned five that year –
Now, Christmas time was drawing near.

I was busy as a bee,
Pasting paper “ringlets” for the tree,
Plus – stringing popcorn (that was fun).
A-a-ah! A Merry Christmas had begun!

Then . . . I heard the teacher say:
“Alicia, you will start the play!”
I wondered: “What? How can that be?
“Why did Teacher pick on me??”

She handed me this little poem,
Said: “You practice this – when you get home!”
I practiced – morning, noon and night,
To make double-sure I’d get it right.”

Big moment comes – The curtains part.
(A fleeting flutter of my heart)
I don’t remember being scared
– But –
Today – I wonder – “how I dared??”

I can’t recall much, to this day,
The plot, and such, about the play . . .
Except –
My brother got the lead – And –
“Was I proud? Oh, yes, indeed!”

To me, Al Patch made quite a sight
In bathrobe, slippers – (with a pipe!)
For I was used to see him wear
Just his old long underwear!

A transformation? Yeah, by far.
He looked just like a movie star!
(In fact – I think I’d have to say
He looked a lot like Olivier.)

Next – Teacher needed someone bright,
(But – how to choose one?)– to recite:
“’Twas The Night Before Christmas” –
I knew she’d pick the best there was:

MORSA Spring Conference

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Historical Society, Jim Vichich. He will outline the history of the school, the restoration of the school and update the progress of another of the Historical Society’s projects,— restoration and preservation of headstones in the Old Brighton Cemetery.

Lunch will be served in the Warner Homestead. The program will include time for members to share their stories and network. An auction will be held providing an opportunity to bid on school-related items.

Conference Registration and Membership forms on Pg. 5

“My brother, Vic!”
A hush fell over one and all,
For his voice had power to enthrall.

Why, you could almost see those 8 reindeer
Half ‘spectin’ Santa to appear –
And appear he did – But – understand,
He looked a lot like Ray DeLand!
I now know – ‘twas the general rule
Each Christmas time – at DeLand School!

And we all thought it was just dandy
When he gave each kid some Christmas candy.
But the “highlight” was – no ifs or buts –
A great big orange and a bag of nuts!

Oh – yeah – my poem . . .
“I Saw Teacher Kissing Santa Claus.”
Oh no, that’s not it!
(Teacher would have had a fit!)
Okay, my poem – and it still holds true –
And it’s my wish I wish for each of you:

Poem:

“A kiss for you – and you – and you
(blow kisses in the air)
A big barrel of good cheer.
I wish you all a Merry Christmas
And a Happy New Year!”

MORSA Spring Conference Registration Form

Date of the conference is Saturday, May 16, 2020. It begins at 8:30 am and will end at approximately 3:00 pm. The location is the Warner Homestead/Hicks school located at 4001 Pleasant Valley Road, Brighton Township. Registration Fee is \$35 and includes lunch. Confirmation of your registration will be sent via email to those who supply their email addresses or by USPS.

Name of Attendee/s: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

Please make check payable to MORSA and mail to:
Jane S. Johnson, 4815 Barton Road, Williamston, MI 48895

Membership Application/Renewal Form for 2020 Dues

_____ \$25 Member

_____ \$20 Senior

_____ \$20 Student

_____ Donation (Thank you)

_____ Total

Name of Member: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

Please make check payable to MORSA and mail to:
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COLD FEET!

By Dr. Robert (Bob) Christensen

Pine Township, Montcalm County, Michigan

Bannon School was located on Cannonsville Rd. Dr. Christensen describes the school district as being roughly 4 square miles with Pleasant Hill School being to the north and Langston School being to the south. He attended from 1940 to 1949 and reports that it was closed 4 years after he left and has been razed since.

I grew up on a farm from 1935 to 1954. Winters in central Michigan were always cold and snowy. They still are. My brother, sister, and I walked a mile to our one-room country school. Some kids had to walk up to 2 miles. Parents did not drive their kids to school, especially in the 1940's when gasoline was rationed. Nor was there a school bus.

In those days, the clothing available was nothing like what we have today. The warmest pants, shirts, socks, coats, underwear, gloves, etc. were made from wool. Alternatively, one would wear cotton in layers. Boys wore long underwear with the "drop flap"; I don't know what the girls wore! Insulated coats and footwear had not yet come on the market. As far as we knew only Eskimos had fur lined boots.

Our shoes were leather that had to be slipped inside of "4-buckle rubber arctics". Getting these rubber boots on and off each time was a major tussle for kids, parents, and the school teachers. Men working outdoors often wore felt shoe-liners or pacs which kept feet warm, as long as they were kept dry by being in the rubber boots. No kids that I knew ever wore felt shoes or liners; what we had were heavy socks, heavy shoes, and heavy boots. They were a load for a youngster to carry walking to school or playing in the snow.

Only now do I realize the burden on the teacher represented by the removal and re-clothing of the younger kids on arrival and departure from school as well as before and after the noon and recess breaks. If an emergency trip to the outhouse was called for, that involved yet another hurried

donning of full gear and its removal upon the young student's return. In the case of the very young, this often required that the teacher escort the child as well. Not only must this have been physically exhausting, but also a real challenge to fit in lessons for each of the K through 8 classes the one teacher was expected to present.

The older boys were tough and coveted lace-up high leather boots like those worn by their idols: lumberjacks and Canadian Mounties. (I remember when I got my 15 inch "hi-tops" with rawhide laces all the way up - a day of pride!) Unfortunately, these leather shoes were neither warm nor waterproof. We tried various store-bought and homemade substances that were supposed to waterproof them, but these only worked to a limited degree. The water proofing effect seldom lasted very long.

My method was to melt tallow obtained from the butchering of our beef animal. I'd slather it on the leather, applying greater amounts to the seams. Even then, my feet got wet. This natural organic fatty substance added a redolence to the air of our typically overheated classroom beyond the odors that were normally there.

Wet shoes and wet feet were an invitation for the affliction called "chilblains". To us, chilblains were "frostbite". Visually they first showed as whiter than normal toes and other parts of the feet. Ears and fingers would also get frostbite if exposed too long in below freezing temperatures. They too, became white. Then, as the afflicted areas warmed, they would turn bright red as circulation returned. They would begin to feel very hot.

A bit later, and for several days, these defrosting parts would burn and itch. For a kid in school this became exquisite torture as you sat in your heavy socks and shoes and yearned to scratch the itch. Obviously, taking shoes and socks off while in the classroom was frowned upon by the teacher, as well as other students who were not suffering the same itch. As I recall, recovery from this ailment took several weeks, possibly because of the opportunities for additional chilling to one's footy flesh.

I believe it was around 1960 when the new lightweight insulating technology was developed which is now standard for cold weather footgear. Alas, it came too late for me!

Sex Education in 1928

By Eloise Doster

Back in the days when children were told babies were found in the cabbage patch, the doctor had them in his little black bag, or the stork brought them, I was just a kid. This didn't seem right to me so I decided to ask my mother. She was a lady of true facts, no monkey business.

It was about 1928 and I was 6 years old. My mother had to keep our family fed, clothed and pay for the \$10 a month mortgage on our home. She had proclaimed herself a nurse in our little village. People could not afford doctors so she delivered babies and cared for the sick and dying. She would often stay away a week at a time. Her pay was a calf, pig or chickens. It was all they had to give.

My mother told me as to where babies came from and how they got here. I decided it was time to enlighten our one-room country school kids.

Boy, did that cause an uproar. Parents were ready to skin me alive. Finally they calmed down. I'll bet those kids never forgot the first time they knew what sex was all about and that the stork did not bring babies.

Twenty years later I had a son, Millard, who later became a doctor. To farm kids, breeding animals and having babies were common knowledge. About this time, country kids were sent to the city schools by bus.

Millard ended up in a class with almost all city kids. In first grade they opened the school day with a "show n tell" time by the students. When it was Millard's turn, he told the entire class, and the teacher as well, the facts of life from A to Z.

I received a phone call from his teacher and said I was sorry and that I would speak to him about it. She said, "Oh no. It was a beautiful lesson the way he told it in his truthful, unembarrassed language. It didn't hurt anyone."

Years later, I announced to my dear sweet, prim, proper and sheltered mother-in-law that I was going to a 'sex education

class'. Well, she lost it and almost passed out on the kitchen floor. I guess she had never heard that word before. When she was raised, the storks were still bringing the babies. But she recovered. I'm sure she always liked me anyway even though she thought me a bit too bold, brash, and liberated to be married to her sweet son, George. Our marriage lasted 76 years and the stork left us six children!

Schoolhouse Memories:

I'll tell you one I remember vividly--I was walking to the bathroom down a desk row where a good friend of mine sat. She was a year older and we had gotten in an argument during recess earlier. She said something insulting to me, and I said something like, "So are you!" She jumped up and started fighting me.

I was never an aggressive kid, and pretty shocked. As we were struggling, I felt someone trying to pick up my foot and I looked down to see my brother there, "helping" me kick or stomp on her feet, I guess.

Don't remember much after that, not many repercussions, punishment or trouble from the teacher. It didn't end our friendship, either. Only physical fight I ever had!

I'll bet most women never had one, so I've one-upped most of you.

~Joellen Gilchrist

Tongue Twisters

*She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore.
The shells she sells are sea-shore shells, I'm
sure.*

*For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore
Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.*

By Margaret Wieland

I never felt felt feel flat like that felt
felt.

She stood on the steps inexplicably
mimicking his hiccupping and amica-
bly welcoming him.

The old scold sold the school a coal scuttle.

Summer's season slowly stretches,
Susan Simpson Slocum she—
So she signed some simple sketches
Soul sought so successfully.

The seething sea ceaseth, and
thus the seething sea
recedeth.

Rubber baby buggy bumpers.

The sun shines on shop signs.

**Michigan One-Room
Schoolhouse Association**

2019/2020

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Membership Dues:

\$20 Senior (62+) or Student
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