

Celebrating Vestal's 190th Anniversary

1823-2013

No. 4—3 R's in One Room

Town of Union minutes from 1816 indicate there were three one-room school districts on the south side of the Susquehanna River. John Boutch is considered to be the first teacher in Vestal according to French's 1860 Gazetteer. By 1823 when Vestal was established, there were four districts to accommodate 210 children between the ages of five and fifteen.

During the 19th century, school attendance was dependent upon agricultural crops, home responsibilities, and the amount of taxes parents could afford. Back then taxes to maintain the schools were based on the number of days a child attended class so large families paid more, small families less, and those with no children paid nothing. Students walked to their district school, often attending barefoot in warm weather. During the winter months they warmed their lunch on the classroom stove. Recess was played on the grounds surrounding the school...always within hearing distance of the bell that called them back to the classroom. There was little homework as most children had chores to be completed when they got home.

Residency wasn't a requirement to teach in the town schools so teachers taught where there was an opening. Teachers who did not live at home boarded with families in the school district. From the census we see that teachers were as young as 17 when assigned to a school. Mrs. Lulu Wilcox, a teacher at the Ross Corners school, said "I know I was poorly prepared (two years of high school, one year in a training class in Endicott and one week of practice teaching) and too young (18). The two oldest boys in my class knew more about arithmetic than I did so I had to figure out every problem before I handed it out." Pay was as little as \$81.00 for the year in the mid-1800s.

While deeds transferring property to the school district have been found for each of the schools shown on historical maps, the location of the original four mentioned in 1823 and the property transfer for the 1828 school remain a mystery.

School District No. 1 was established in 1844 at Ross Corners. School District No. 2 would encompass five school buildings, all within a stones throw from each other, during the period from 1828 to 1939. Here's what we know about them.

Former pupil and early teacher Ellen Peck describes Vestal's "first" one-room school that was built in 1828 on the east side of Main Street opposite Kimble Road. She described it as approximately 16'x24' in size with a shelf around all four walls that served as desks and seats made of slabs of wood held up by wooden legs. A wood burning stove stood in the center of the room. It was designated as School District No. 2 and for about 32 years served students in the Vestal hamlet.

The year after an 1850 fire destroyed the school, carpenter Ransom Baty Sr. built the second school directly across Main Street, on the west side, near the corner of Kimble Road. The population out grew this small one-room school which then became Vestal's Town Hall before being converted to a home in about 1937.



The third school, built in 1881 by Silas Terwilliger, was located on a lot to the south of the 1851 school. Unlike the others it was a two-story building, having two classrooms on the first floor and a recitation room on the second floor. Too small by the fall of 1921, an annex was purchased from the Endicott school board to alleviate crowding. Grades 1 through 9 were taught at the school until 1924 when the fourth and largest school was completed. School number three was then used as a Community Hall until 1952 when it was torn down and the lumber used for a Boy Scout camp.

The fourth school, which became known as the Intermediate or Red Brick Building, started with much controversy.

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No. 5—3 R's in One Room (continued)

When the owners of the two and one half acres selected as the site for the new school would not set a price for the land, five years of court proceedings began that resulted in a ruling in favor of the school district. The town anxiously awaited the construction of the two-story \$65,000 brick school designed with eight classrooms, capable of accommodating 320 students at 40 per room, a kitchen, and an auditorium. At the time it was being constructed, the plan was to finish four of the rooms and reserve the other four for the future. Vestal students seeking a high school education traveled across the river to Union-Endicott. Tuition was free for those who took vocational classes.

Prior to 1936 Vestal, Binghamton, Maine, and Union were part of the Third Supervisory Rural School District under Superintendent Kasson E. Beilby. Within the four towns were 44 school districts, more than 3000 students and 108 full time teachers plus part time instructors. In the spring of 1936, the structure of the large Third Supervisory Rural School District would change when it became known that by centralizing Vestal's 14 individual districts, the amount of state aid received would be doubled. State aid to Vestal in 1935 amounted to \$41,900.82. Centralization would increase that amount to \$87,810.43. Meetings and petitions from each district culminated in the May 19, 1936 vote of 811 to 474 in favor of centralization. The newly centralized school district officially became "Central School District No. 1 of the Town of Vestal, Broome County".

A close look at the 1866 map of Vestal shows one school district labeled No. 20. A count of those on the map does not total twenty because districts fluctuated to fit needs.



Two schools, Ingraham Hill and Turkey Lane, became Town of Binghamton schools in 1873 when a mile-wide strip of land on our eastern border was annexed to Binghamton. At the time of centralization fourteen districts, West Hill, Lower Tracy Creek, Upper Tracy Creek, East Hill, Vestal Center, Glenwood, Upper Willow Point, Lower Willow Point, Bunn Hill, South Vestal, Ross Corners, Landon Hollow, Vestal, and Rounds Hill. The Fuller Hollow district was closed and students moved to the Binghamton district. By 1940 the era of one-room schools in Vestal was over.



Vestal Center's Two Room School

With centralization came the goal of building a high school...a goal that was realized on January 3, 1939 when the Vestal Central High School opened its doors. This was the fifth school along Main Street. A Public Works Administration (PWA) project, the new high school and new Vestal Center Elementary school designed by architect Truman Lacey of T.I. Lacey and Sons, cost \$773,000 of which the state contributed \$446,000. Vestal's first graduating class of 29 students received their diplomas on June 25, 1940. The 64 room high school was used as a Junior High when the current high school was completed in 1960. The original 1939 building is on the State and National Registries of Historical Places.

On May 21, 1973 the University of the State of New York Education Department changed the district's official name to the "Vestal Central School District".

Sources as well as additional information about all of Vestal's schools can be found at the Historian's office.