

OLD SANDSTONE SCHOOLHOUSE

Lancaster County goes unchallenged in the claim of having within its borders, the oldest schoolhouse in continuous service found in any section of Pennsylvania. After the abandonment of Durlach School in 1904, following a service extending through one hundred and four years, the distinction rested upon a school found in the opposite direction of the county, old Sandstone School of Strasburg Township. Since 1815, and continuing at the present time, it holds an unbroken record of one hundred and twenty-one years of service to the children of that community.

In the school's paper, known as "The Sandstone Tablet," we glean the following information from articles written by William B. Bishop, a school director for forty and some years, and others:

It may not be amiss, following shortly after the observance of the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the public school system in Pennsylvania, to give honor and thought to Thaddeus Stevens for his noble championship of the system, when the strenuous effort was made for its repeal in the legislative session of 1835. Eminently as he is deserving of praise and gratitude, no less worthy of recognition and gratitude are the men who were instrumental in procuring the enactment of the public school law at the previous session, and it seems appropriate that reference be made to them in connection with this interesting history of old Sandstone.

In the early period of the nineteenth century, no section of the state, apart from Philadelphia, was more noted for its educational opportunities than Strasburg Township and its village, which in 1816 became the borough of Strasburg. It was not only noted for the excellency of its small private schools, scattered in parts of the township, but especially for its institutions of higher learning, located in what is now the borough; such as the theological school of Rev. Nathaniel W. Sample, D.D., established 1790; Dr. George Duffield's, the Strasburg Institute, the Young Ladies' Seminary, and the widely reputed Strasburg Academy, with students enrolled from various states. These evidence the high appreciation and interest felt in education by the people of this locality.

and which interest, no doubt, is responsible for the occurrence of the following established fact. Due to a remark made by George Hoffman, in his store in January, 1831, and the discussion ensuing, a meeting was called of the prominent citizens of township and borough, in the little red schoolhouse on Jackson Street, Strasburg, Pa. From that gathering went the first petition to the Legislature, urging the establishment of public schools.

This resulted in the passage of the act of 1831 appropriating certain funds towards the "establishment of public schools at some future time." So prominent and influential were George Hoffman and James P. McPhail in this movement, that they are entitled to some further notice. Mr. Hoffman was appointed a justice of the peace in 1816 by Governor Snyder, an office he held until 1827, when by a special election in December, 1827, he was elected to the Legislature over the regular Jackson Democratic nominee. Being a supporter of Adams in 1828, he was not re-elected. Mr. McPhail was a justice of the peace for many years, and school director from the establishment of the system until his death in 1870. Also conspicuous in the movement were the Neffs, Brenemans, Mussers and others, former pupils of Old Sandstone.

Being substantially built and commodious, Old Sandstone has withstood the gnawing tooth of time, and stands the sole survivor of the schools of a century ago. And when one contemplates the generations of children that have crossed its threshold, the good accomplished within its massive walls is surely incalculable.

It is not known when the building was taken over by the district as a public school, but it is doubtful if it occurred until some years after the establishment of the system. The public schools in their earlier period were little patronized by families of means, being looked upon as lacking caste, simply the successors of former pauper schools, so private schools and academies continued to flourish until after the period of the Rebellion.

THE FOUNDING OF SANDSTONE

The school is located about one-half mile east of what is now the village of Hessdale, which had been called at various times Leesburg and Martinsville. In the beginning of the nineteenth

century, there were a number of families living in this fertile valley. They had spent busy years establishing their colonial homes. These people knew of hard work, of Indian troubles and of wars. They often thought of the future of their children, and wished that they might receive some sort of schooling. Finally at the time of the close of the second war with England in 1815, an agreement was made between several families. This agreement was signed May 1st, 1815, by the Strohm, Neffs, Brenemans and Musers. David Strohm bought a tract of land from Abraham Huber and his wife, Susanna Huber, December 22nd, 1815. He paid twenty dollars for one-fourth of an acre.

The deed reads, "This tract to be used wholly and solely for the purpose of erecting a schoolhouse thereon for the neighborhood and those subscribers who have signed a certain article of agreement, and subscribed opposite their names a certain sum or sums of money to be for their use or their heirs and to be occupied as aforesaid for no other purpose forever." George Huffman wrote the deed. It was witnessed by Sam Henry. Abraham Huber signed in German.

The building was constructed of sandstone, quarried in an adjoining field and carried to the building site by an oxen team. At that time the school was surrounded by woodland; many of the trees were majestic oaks, some, it was estimated, being two centuries old.

One family, for five generations, had pupils in this school. They were:

Jacob Eshleman, followed by his son
Abraham Eshleman, followed by his daughter
Barbara Eshleman Lefever, followed by her son
Frank Lefever, followed by his son
Charles Lefever.

TEACHERS OF SANDSTONE

The following is a partial list of teachers of Sandstone prior to 1858: Witmer Fritz, Amos Helm, William Smith and Luther Gates.

The school at this time was very large. Mr. E. K. Herr, of Bloomfield, Iowa, was a pupil during 1858-65. He recalls that

the enrollment at this time was between sixty-five and seventy. Some of the names on the roll at that time were: Kurtz, Milton, Musser, Helm, Hoffman, Hoak, Shultz and Breneman.

TEACHERS FROM 1858-1934

- 1858-60—John Hook.
1860-62—John H. Helm.
1862-64—Harry Shultz.
1864-67—Dr. William Wentz.
1867-69—I. L. Whitmyor, Quarryville, Pa. 8 Mo. \$45.
1869-72—John Z. Taylor, Strasburg, Pa. 8 Mo. \$45.
1872-73—B. F. Kreider, Slackwater, Pa. 8 Mo. \$45.
1873-75—Miss Mary Barr, 8 Mo. \$45.
1875-77—T. L. Thompson, Quarryville, Pa. 8 Mo. \$45.
1877-80—H. C. Fickes, New Providence, Pa. 8 Mo. \$45.
1880-81—E. K. Herr, New Bloomfield, Iowa.
1881-85—Harry McMichael.
1885-87—J. P. Herchelrath.
1887-88—John Shoewell.
1888-89—Clarence E. Arnold, now attorney-at-law, Bakersfield Calif.
1889-92—Edith Shaw.
1892-93—Frank Wentz.
1893-95—Anna Hake.
1895-96—Sue Andrews.
1896-98—Miss Goodaw.
1898-1902—Miss Winnie Eckman.
1902-04—Horace Lantz.
1904-06—Willis H. Lantz.
1906-11—Miss Lydia Edwards.
1911-13—William F. Paes, now chief clerk, County Commissioners Office.
1913-18—Miss Winona Eckman, retired, New Providence.
1918-19—Miss Edna Nagle, now a teacher in Lancaster City.
1919-23—Mrs. Helen F. S. Beam.
1923-24—Miss Evelyn D. Shiffer, now Mrs. Elmer J. Zimmerman, Blue Ball, Pa.
1924-28—Miss Nellie McGuigan, now primary teacher at New Providence, Pa.
1928-31—Miss Mary Rohrer, a teacher in Pequea Township.
1931-36—Mrs. Helen F. S. Beam, Lancaster, Pa.