

From The Desk of

ARDYCE CZUCHNA

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May 28, 1976

Ms Faye Hansen, librarian
Dewitt Public Library
Dewitt, Michigan 48820

Dear Ms Hansen:

Enclosed is a photo of a clock belonging to Mrs. Fred Kline in Scotts, Michigan.

The clock was left to Mrs. Kline by her grandmother. They understand that the village or city of Dewitt was raising money to promote getting the Capitol of Michigan to be located in Dewitt.

Pat's great grandmother's uncle won the clock on a raffle in connection with this promotion. I'm assuming the raffle was shortly before 1848 as I note that is when the Capitol was moved to Lansing.

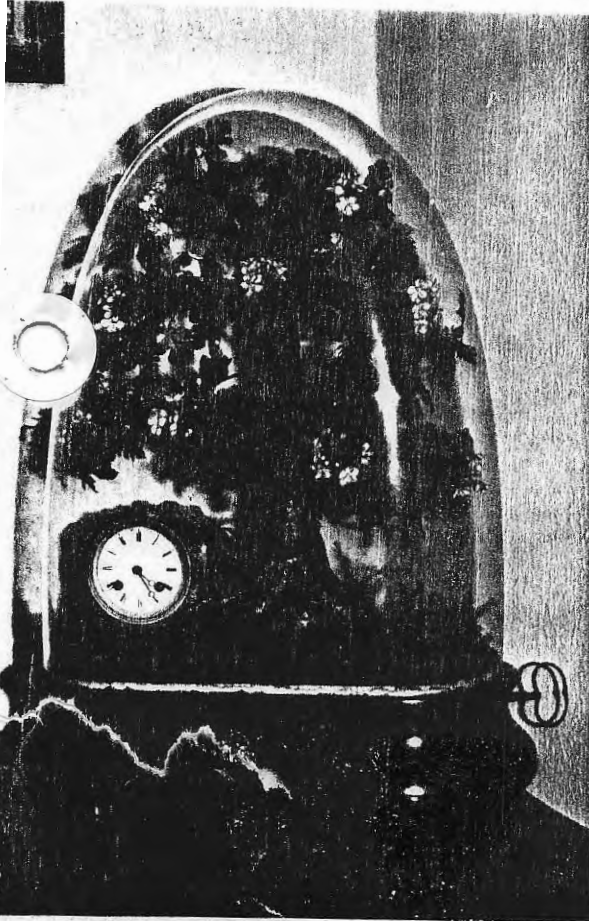
Pat is interested in knowing more history about the clock. She has been told it's probably a valuable clock but can't seem to get any definite information on it. Can you help.

I'm a free lance writer who is interested in the clock from the angle that there may be a story here. Can you help? Enclosed is S.A.S.E. for your reply.

Sincerely,

Ardyce Czuchna
Ardyce Czuchna

Enc. photo and envelope



April 1, 1985

DeWitt's first public school (and the first in all of Clinton County) was located at the Goodrich neighborhood, west of DeWitt. It opened in 1836 on the homestead of Alanson Goodrich, presumably in a log cabin. The exact location of the building has been lost, but it was on the north side of Howe Road near the intersection of Schavey.

During this early period, the Goodrich homestead was on the north side of Howe Road and comprised much of the later Rhine Henning Farm (the house now owned by Ernest Snetting at 3440 W. Howe). This earlier homestead should not be confused with the more historically familiar Goodrich homestead of later years, located on the south side of the Looking Glass River, east and west of Schavey Road, which later generations would know as the Theodore Schoewe (later changed to Schavey) farm.

In 1836, there were few families living at the actual Scott settlement which was to become DeWitt and, when opened, the Goodrich School was more centrally located to the early residents of the area. Most of the early pioneers had chosen homesteads which lay to the west of Scott's.

Among the earliest families living in the neighborhood of Alanson Goodrich were: Sylvester Scott, Franklin Oliver, William W. Webb, Ephriam H. Utley, and Chauncey Ferguson.

This Goodrich School was formally listed as School District No. 1, but it is not known to have been limited to a specific geographic area. In fact, it has been recorded that the school was open to any child "willing" to walk the distance. Some settlers living too far a distance, but determined to provide their children with the best education possible, arranged to have their children live with settlers closer to the school.

As late as 1847, Amori B. Cook of Riley Township mentioned in a letter to his brother in New York that he was then living at the farm of William W. Webb and attending the Goodrich School. By the 1850s, most rural areas had been divided into school districts and the Goodrich School, deemed to be at an impractical location, was eventually discontinued.

The first (and only recorded) teacher at the Goodrich School was Miss Betsey Gooch who lived over five miles away in Watertown Township. Her parents, Benjamin and Lucy (Boynton) Gooch, had come to Clinton County the previous year. Several of Betsey's sisters are known to have been early teachers at other area schools and could possibly have also taught at the Goodrich. Betsey was later married to Dr. Seth P. Marvin, the first physician in Clinton County and later a prominent DeWitt citizen.

No description of this schoolhouse has survived, but it can be assumed that it was similar to the following description of the Simmons School in Riley Township in 1850, recorded by Ella R. Simmons.

"This was built without boards or nails. Logs were fastened together with wooden pins. A shake roof was bound on with poles. The door was made of an old dry-goods box in which the goods were packed when moving to this place. The floor was of split logs with a space in front of the fireplace filled with clay for a hearth. A plank across one side formed a desk and some rude benches served as seats."

William H. H. Knapp recorded of his experiences as a pupil in the first session of the Simmons School in 1846.

"The teacher (Miss Indiana Walton) had no timepiece, but took the time from the sun as it shone through a hole in the roof where there had been a stick chimney; the sun touching certain spots on the floor at a certain time."

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coin

History of schools

Many early histories agree that the first village school in DeWitt was established in 1840. These histories also claim or elude to the fact that the first schoolhouse was built on the site of the present Fuerstenau Building on Washington Street. Several facts have recently come to light which contradict this old theory and thus, rewrite DeWitt's school history.

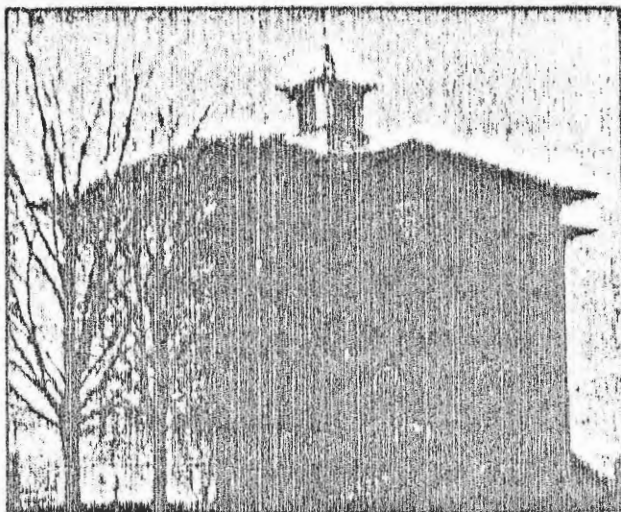
The full block on which the Fuerstenau School is located was designated for a school by Capt. David Scott's original plat of DeWitt in 1841. This block, however, was not donated by the Scott family, but rather sold by them to the DeWitt School District in April 1847 for the sum of \$75, seven years after the first school is said to have been established.

An earlier land transaction was made between the Scott family and the DeWitt School District, dated 1842, whereby a small lot (the east half of lot 374, block No. 48) on the west side of S. Bridge Street was purchased. This lot, currently vacant, is directly north of the old barn (formerly the Coverdale cheese factory) in the 200 block of S. Bridge.

This land record of 1842, while it does not establish where the first school was actually located, does indicate that the earliest village schools were not built on the same location as the present Fuerstenau Building. It might be assumed that the first village school followed the pattern of the early country schools in that it could have been located at various places wherever vacant space was available to be let or rented.

The fate of the Bridge Street School site remains yet unknown. The school district retained ownership of the property even after the "school block" was purchased in 1847 and the former site does not show up on the tax rolls until 1855, then being owned by Dr. Seth P. Marvin. It has been suggested and indeed it is highly possible that this Bridge Street School was the building which the village school district rented to Clinton County from 1847 to 1855 for use as a courthouse rather than the Washington Street School as has been assumed.

It has also been suggested through oral tradition of older residents that this Bridge Street Building was later used as a private school: DeWitt is known to have had several prior to the days of "country normal." These private or "select schools" supplied education beyond the eighth grade limit of the public schools and were actually open to boys and girls alike for a tuition. Some, like that of Mrs. Caroline Bement,



DEWITT UNION SCHOOL was built in 1870, but burned down in 1936. It was located at the site of the present Fuerstenau School on Washington Street.

remained long-running institutions and others, mostly forgotten, were rather short-lived.

The schoolhouse which was built on Washington Street (circa 1847) was a wood frame structure of with no photographs or descriptions that can be located. It served the village until 1870 when a larger schoolhouse was erected in the center of the block. This was a two-story brick structure of Italianate design with a bracketed hip roof topped by an ornate bell tower. It was used until 1936 when it was gutted by fire.

HISTORY OF THE DEWITT SCHOOLS

The early records of the board of school inspectors of the township of DeWitt have not been preserved, and facts regarding its division into school districts and the subsequent progress of the educational interests are not accessible.

The earliest school building was a log structure erected on section 7, upon the farm of Alanson Goodrich and was known as the Goodrich Schoolhouse. The Goodrich farm is now owned by Herman Schultz and is located on Shavey Road. Direct descendants of Alanson Goodrich still living in this community are Mrs. John Henning, Mrs. Leo Henning and Marquerite Goodrich. Miss Betsy Gooch was the first pioneer instructress.

The second school house was built in district no. 2 in the village of DeWitt in the year 1840. Both Dr. Seth P. Marvin and J. H. Adams are given as early teachers, and it is difficult to say which was first. This first building was replaced by one of more extended proportions, in which the sessions of the court were held, it having been at that period the most pretentious structure of the county seat. DeWitt was the first county seat of Clinton Co., the government being moved to St. Johns in 1857.

In 1870 a spacious edifice of brick was erected and was conducted on the graded plan, with Professor Coriel as principal, and Miss Edith Williams as assistant and Miss Josie Holmes in charge of the intermediate department. This building burned in the fall of 1936 and was replaced by the present structure.

The school territory of 1880 in DeWitt was divided into one fractional and five whole districts. The first board of directors was made up of Robert McConkey, James Hath, A. A. Woodruff, Christian Kraus, A. S. Weste and Egar Hurd. The value of school property at that time was \$11,900, embracing one brick and five frame buildings. Three male and eleven female teachers were employed. They had under their care 326 scholars all residents of the township.

In 1896 the ninth grade included in its curriculum U.S. Histroy, complete and revised; government-national and state and Michigan Histroy, Physical Geography, Theory and the Art of teaching, Grammar, Algebra, Orthography-including word analysis and School Law. In the tenth grade Algebra, Physics, General Histroy, Rhetoric, and Studies in Literature were offered.

During both ninth and tenth Elementary drawing, Singing, Calisthenic and Study in Current Events was given.

The course of study was so arranged that pupils completing the ninth grade should be able to obtain a teachers third grade certificate; ~~on~~ a certificate of graduation from school ^{they} ~~and~~ were capable of obtaining a second grade certificate.

Non resident pupils were admitted at \$3.00 a term, payable in advance.

Compiled by Page Hanson in Dec. 1956

LOCAL HISTORY
COLLECTION
FILE
BOX

H I S T O R Y

DeWitt, settled in the mid 1800's began as a retired farmer's town located between St. Johns and Lansing. The first school was built in 1840 on the present site of the C. H. Fuerstenau Junior High School. A two-story, four-room building was built in the 1880's. This building remained standing until 1937.

The present history of the school starts about 1923 when C. H. Fuerstenau first took a position as Superintendent, Principal, and Teacher in the DeWitt 10-grade school. The population of the village was 440 while the enrollment in the school was 140. Part of the ninth and tenth graders came from outlying one-room schools. Four teachers comprised the entire faculty.

The population of the village and the school didn't expand much for several years as the village was still mostly populated by retired farmers. However, there was some growth in the later 1920's and early 1930's. This growth was sufficient to necessitate voting several times for additions to the school building. But most of these votes were in the negative.

In 1935, a vote was passed to add on to the building to take care of the present enrollment, but not to expand the number of grades in the school. In the summer of 1936, at the annual meeting of the school district, the superintendent was asked to add the eleventh grade the following year and to add the twelfth in 1938. This was accomplished and the first twelfth grade graduation was held in the spring of 1939.

Due to lack of room the curriculum was limited to the basics. However, it was a start. The community began to grow now with the addition of a better basic education.

In the winter of 1937, the old part of the school building burned and extensive heat and smoke damage was done to the new part. A bond issue was passed and a complete, modern building was built. In the interim, classes were held in churches and various public buildings...

There now was a continual growth in population and during World War II, two portable wooden buildings were bought and placed next to the main building to take care of the kindergarten. Later, the kindergarten was moved to the Memorial Building; and the wooden building was divided into two rooms to take care of the first and second grades.

Enrollment was continually increasing; and in 1950, an expansion study was made by the board of citizens. Land was purchased at the north end of Wilson Street where a new elementary building (L. J. Griswold) was constructed. Built for less than one hundred thousand dollars, this took care of all the elementary grades. It now looked as if needs were met for the next ten years.

LOCAL HISTORY
COLLECTION
BOX FILE

However, the growth continued at a rapid pace; and the board found it necessary to expand again. The David Scott Elementary School was erected adjacent to the Griswold building in 1956.

The high school was now becoming overcrowded. Also there was a demand for a more varied curriculum. In 1959, an addition was built on the high school. Much needed administrative offices were also included. Business Education, Home Making, and Industrial Arts were added to the curriculum.

Looking forward to accreditation and more improvements in curriculum, the people of DeWitt built a new high school on Herbison Road south of the city in 1965. Occupancy of this building began in February 1966. University of Michigan accreditation was achieved in 1967.

During the late 1960's population was extending out from Lansing to the extent that it was necessary to get mobile units to take care of the increased school population. An addition was built in 1968 on the elementary school. In 1969, there was another addition to the elementary school; and an addition was built on the new senior high school; and construction for the new Middle School was started.

Written by:

C. H. Fuerstenau- 1970

Superintendent 1923-1966

DEWITT MIDDLE SCHOOL BACKGROUND

DeWitt Middle School became a school with its own identification in January 1966 when the new DeWitt High School was completed and grades nine through twelve left the Fuerstenau Building. The Fuerstenau Jr. High School housed grades five through eight for the remainder of the school year. In the fall of 1966 grades six, seven and eight were in the Fuerstenau Jr. High with the fifth grade going back to the elementary schools because of over-crowding. Student population at the time was 275 with a faculty numbering twelve.

Projected growth in 1967 dictated that a new facility would be required to house the Jr. High School age students in the near future. In the spring of 1968 the DeWitt Board of Education made the decision to build a new Middle School which would permanently house the sixth, seventh, eighth grade students. One of the major concerns at the time was the creation of a school program that met the special needs of preadolescent children.

The fall of 1970 saw the Middle School completed and occupied by 400 students. The challenges left are many including the proper uses of the new facility and equipment for which they were designed and the creation or continual adaptation of a program that is meaningful and appropriate for the DeWitt Middle School Students.

Written by:

Jack Enderle - 1970

Middle School Principal 1967-1973

In the seven years since our initial evaluation, DeWitt Middle School has undergone the kinds of changes that would be anticipated with normal growth and time.

Enrollment has increased from 397 to our current 490 although we reached an all-time high with 512 last year. Along with student growth, our faculty numbers have increased from 21 to 25. (Eleven of the 21 original staff members are in the DeWitt system and 10 are still in this building). Building facilities are more than adequately inventoried and outside resources have been developed and utilized completely.

Our philosophy continues to reflect the needs of the transescent youngster in a traditional setting of sound education, student responsibility and reasonable restrictions.

Written by:

Earl A. Roseberry, Principal 1978