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ANN ARBOR SCHOOLS
1824-1897

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About the year 1800 the Ohio Surveyor General was delegated to make a survey of Michigan and report to Congress. He reported that Michigan was a mass of lakes connected by swamps, that not one acre in a hundred was fit for cultivation. This opinion was spread abroad and prospective settlers had no desire to come here, although there was great unrest in the New England states because of economic conditions. The increase in immigration from Europe made work scarce in the cities, and in the rural districts the soil was worn out and there seemed no way to redeem it. After the War of 1812, the soldiers who were mustered out at Detroit returned to their homes bringing a different picture of Michigan. Settlers again made plans to seek homes in the "Northwest."

One of these settlers was John Allen, who left his family at home in Virginia and started out alone. In Cleveland, he met and made friends with Elisha Rumsey and his wife, Ann. Allen's enthusiasm influenced them to travel with him. After a long and hazardous journey they reached the spot which is now Ann Arbor in the spring of 1824.

Being men of great vision and resolute character, they platted a village bounded on the west by Allen's Creek, on the north by the Huron River, and on the south and east by what are now Jefferson and Division streets. Other settlers followed, and at the end of the first year there were nine small homes; at the end of the second year the population was more than 100.

A school was needed at once, and John Allen built one on the northwest corner of Ann and Main streets. It was built of logs, had a low, wide door and several small windows, one 8x8" pane of glass in each. The furniture consisted of one chair and a small square table. The children's benches were made from split logs. Miss Monroe, the first teacher, died in 1829. Miss Harriett Parsons next took the school, and later became Mrs. Loren Mills. Then followed Miss Hope Johnson.

*Miss Clinton retired in 1939, after 48 years of continuous primary teaching in Ann Arbor. She knows early Ann Arbor school days as probably no one else in the city. Her mother, as a little girl of two, was brought from Burlington, Vermont, to Ann Arbor in 1834. In this small pioneer community the grandfather and grandmother were "Uncle William and Aunt Mary" (Kearns) to everyone. So that the little Anna grew up well acquainted with all those long-ago school people, either by her own knowledge or by familiar family tales of the generation just passing.

In 1829 a one-story brick school was built on the southwest corner of Old Jail Square, where the Y.W.C.A. stands now. The money for this school was raised by subscription. The next year the Supervisors added a second story to the school. The new room was used as a Court room until the Court House was built in 1834. It was also used for religious meetings until the churches were built.

A frame school was built by Asa Smith, a carpenter who had come to the village in 1824 with his wife and children. This school was on the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Washington Street. This site was later used for a Congregational Church, and now for the Zion Lutheran Church.

A school was held in the old Methodist Church which stood on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Ann Street. The Unitarian Society used the building until their new church was ready, when the old frame building was made into apartments. Later it was torn down to provide a parking lot for persons employed in the City Hall.

In 1846 a site for a Public School was purchased from Nathaniel and Betsey Dwight for \$220. It was on the south side of Kingsley Street (called North Street at that time) about 8 rods east of Detroit Street. The school was built of brick, on two floors, two large rooms on the first floor and one large room on the second. I remember hearing the name of Mary Ann Short as a teacher there. When the new Fourth Ward School was finished in 1868, the old building was sold to St. Thomas Parish for \$2100. After spending \$600 in repairs and \$300 for furniture, Sisters were brought from the Convent in Monroe, and a Catholic School was conducted in the old building until 1884, when their new building on Elizabeth Street was finished. Children were gradually drawn from the public schools until, at the end of the second year, about 200 were enrolled. The old building was converted into a dwelling which is still giving good service.

Private Schools Private schools were the first to offer instruction beyond elementary subjects.. The first of these was conducted by the Rev. L. W. Merrill, in the Goodrich house on what is now Fourth Avenue, directly east of the Court House. He later moved his school to the west side of South Main Street near Washington. He offered instruction in Latin and Greek as well as other advanced subjects. After three years, Rev. Merrill closed his school and moved to Kalamazoo, where he continued teaching.

A second private school, called "The Ann Arbor Academy," was organized by a group of citizens in 1832. Rev. O. C. Thompson was induced to give up his work with the American Sunday School Union and take charge of the school. It was opened in the Presbyterian Church. There was a large enrollment, many students coming from what were then considered long distances. One of the best known was William Woodbridge, who became Governor of Michigan from 1840 to 1841.

In 1836-1837 a school building was erected on the northwest corner of Fourth Avenue and William Street. As soon as it was completed, Rev. Thompson moved his school into the new building, but conducted the school only 3 years longer. In later years this building was known as "The Old Academy."

At this time a private school called the "Manual Labor School" was organized, with Rev. Samuel Hair as Principal. It was a mile or two east of the Court House on the south Ypsilanti Road. John Allen seemed to have great interest in it. At first there were only a few students but after two years was doing very well. The curriculum included not only high school studies but also college subjects. A year's tuition was \$18.00, and as money was scarce many of the boys worked on the farm to pay their way, making it truly a manual-labor school. No girls were enrolled and as the number of boys was never enough to pay expenses, the school closed after all efforts were exhausted. It had done excellent work for about 10 years.

In 1835, Mr. Luke Parsons opened a school called "High School of Oral Instruction." It was located at first in W. C. Pease's store building but moved to the corner of Huron Street and Fourth Avenue. He agreed to teach all common school branches, together with History, Algebra, Chemistry, Rhetoric, Logic, and Natural Philosophy, as well as Latin and Greek. In an announcement of tuition the following was quoted: \$2.50 for Reading and Spelling, \$3.00 for History, Geography, and Grammar, and \$5.00 for Geometry and Greek. Mr. Parsons set forth inducements couched in very learned and high-sounding phrases, but perhaps they didn't "take," for his school soon closed.

During the same time Mr. Parsons' school was operating, another was conducted on the Old Jail Square by Mrs. B. F. Brown. She was spoken of as a very good teacher who insisted on lessons being prepared and when necessary found a ruler a help. She moved her school to the second floor of the Post Office building, on the northwest corner of Fourth Avenue and Ann Street. (A feed store was there when I was a child, the old mail boxes still lining the walls.)

Another school during these same years was opened by Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. Griffin, offering many inducements. They advertised they had a teacher who had had years of experience in "Female Seminaries" in New England, also that Botany and Calisthenics would be taught without extra charge. They carried on this school until 1846, when their daughter and a Miss Johnson continued it. They dropped some of the higher subjects formerly taught and gave more attention to primary studies. These teachers were not popular and the school closed after 11 years of effort.

A school for girls was opened in 1836 by Mr. and Mrs. Gott. That the girls in this school were highly trained in patriotism and power of expression was demonstrated by an essay entitled "Our Country," written and delivered by Miss McCollum at commencement exercises in 1841. The essay is printed in full in O. W. Stephenson's Ann Arbor the First Hundred Years, pages 105-106 (1927).

In 1841 Mr. G. Landreth had a school in the "Old Academy" that lasted only one year. Another that lasted only a year was taught in the basement of St. Andrews Church by Percival C. Milette. He agreed to teach according to the most approved systems followed in European colleges.

The next year, 1842, John Branigan opened a School of Book-keeping in the basement of St. Andrews, for both boys and girls. It was the first school of its kind west of Detroit. It was a very good school, but there was no demand for bookkeepers, as businesses were small and each merchant was his own accountant. So this school closed.

All these private schools had Boards of Visitors who attended the Friday reviews and exercises and reported through the newspapers the quality of the work they had observed. They usually praised the ideals and abilities of the teachers. The schools vied with each other to get members of the newly established University to serve on their Boards of Visitors. That sometimes resulted in one man serving on the Board of several schools at the same time. One can imagine what a tight place he was in, trying to be fair to all without showing partiality.

In 1844, a school similar to Gott's "Female Seminary" was opened by Eliza and Melanie Page with Lavina Moore as assistant. In 1845 the school was in the Old Academy, but later was held in their home. Mrs. Rebecca Hughes taught Music and Drawing, and Adonijah Welch (later to become the first Principal of the new Normal School at Ypsilanti) taught Latin and Mathematics. The term was 22 weeks, with tuition from \$6 to \$12. At one time there were 150 enrolled. Miss Page made a strong plea for higher education for women.

In 1846, the annual exhibition was held in the Presbyterian Church. All the girls were told to wear white dresses with blue sashes draped over the shoulder diagonally, around the waist, and tied in the back. The younger girls were to wear white pantelettes to the ankle. A card showing her marks, good or bad, was pinned to each girl's shoulder, so that the Board of Visitors could note the standing of each. The school prospered until, at the close of the Annual Exhibition in 1851, Miss Moore announced her resignation. Miss Page tried to carry on but found herself unable to do so, and discontinued the school. It is interesting to note the names of the Visitors at this exhibition: Prof. Ten Brook, Prof. D. O. Wheeler, Prof. A. P. Williams, Rev. Reed Curtis, Rev. Comstock, Rev. C. C. Taylor, Hon. Samuel Dexter, Dr. A. M. Ormsby, Alpheus Felch, and Munnis Kenny.

In 1847 a school was conducted in the basement of St. Andrew's Church by Mrs. J. B. Smith and Miss Sally Fields. Mrs. Rebecca Hughes taught Music there. This school was succeeded by one managed by Mrs. Robert Woods; moved to a brick house at the north end of Ingall Street; and lasted only a short time. Some of her girls entered a school opened by Mrs. Cox on Huron Street. Others entered Mrs. Horatio Van Cleve's school in a frame building opposite the Presbyterian Church.

The private school which lasted the longest and considered by many to be the most important was conducted from 1839 to 1875 by the Clark sisters. The four sisters came to Michigan with their father, an Episcopal clergyman, and after a brief stay in Brighton moved to Ann Arbor. The older sisters had been educated at "Miss Willard's School for Girls" in Troy, New York. They modeled their school after Miss Willard's even using the same textbooks. They brought with them the highest ideals and by instruction and example impressed these ideals on their pupils.

Mary was striking in appearance, and the moving power of the school. Chloe was much like Mary in appearance, but a different personality, very popular, though she took less responsibility. Roby was the housekeeper, known as Matron, later called Associate Principal although she took no part in the management of the school. Jessie was a pupil in the school, a great favorite with all the girls and of course a pet of her sisters.

The school was first opened in a brick building on north Main Street known as the Argus Block. Some time after, it was at the northeast corner of Fourth Avenue and Liberty Street. In August, 1841, it moved to the Charles Fuller home, about where Sears, Roebuck & Co.'s store now stands. Next it was at the southeast corner of Huron and Ashley Streets, opposite the bus terminal, in a building used now for many years as a hotel. After 9 years there, the school moved to the Shetterly house on Fourth Avenue, where the sisters made their home.

Miss Clark started the school day by choosing a chapter from the Bible and inviting each of the older girls to read a verse. All knelt while Miss Clark read a prayer and the group recited the Lord's Prayer. The discipline of the school was strict but always dignified. Some of the textbooks used were Willard's Universal History and Republic of America, Burnett's Geography of the Heavens, Abercrombie's Intellectual Powers, and Brocklesly's Meteorology.

The older girls were appointed Monitors. They taught the little children and often helped with the housework. The Clark school gave great attention to the proper dress as well as deportment for different occasions, also the meaning and pronunciation of French words and phrases which the student might meet in society or reading. Miss Clark was greatly interested in Botany, and this interest was reflected in the students who helped her mount specimens and mounted some of the familiar ones for themselves. They gathered rose petals and learned how to make rose bowls, also how to make winter bouquets from seeded grasses from the garden, crystallized with salt and alum. They published a little periodical called The Wildflower, containing some of their compositions, items of interest, and a great deal about their botanical collections. Often in fine weather the class in embroidery or sewing was taken to the garden where the class was conducted under the trees. A great deal of importance was given to memorizing of poems selected by Miss Clark. The students were called upon to recite these when the Board of Visitors was present. My mother often told us how thrilled and happy she was when a member of the Board told her she had done well. She had recited "The Burial

of Sir John Moore," a sad recital, it seems, to bring happiness. One of Miss Clark's habits which led to warm friendly relations with her pupils was that of taking long walks, in the course of which she often stopped at homes of her pupils to have a meal with the family.

The Shetterly home burned on July 4, 1865. The furniture, windows, and doors were saved and used in the new building erected on the northwest corner of Division and Kingsley Streets, the funds for which came from friends and former pupils.

Commencement was held every year. Martha Ladd and Caroline Cummings were the first graduates. Miss Clark and her seniors were attending Commencement exercises in University Hall in 1875 when her final illness came upon her. The school was never opened again after her death. The sisters are buried in Brighton Cemetery, the graves marked by a gray granite stone erected by their former pupils.

One more private school must be mentioned. In 1860, R. H. Dunlap had a Commercial College in the Geer Block, on the west side of north Fourth Avenue, half way between Ann and Catherine Streets.

District Schools In 1846 there were two school districts in the Upper Village of Ann Arbor; no. 11 to the north, no. 12 south. The Old Academy was not profitable as a private school so was sold to District 12 for \$900. It served as a public school until 1862. The last public school held there was under the management of a Mr. Bassett, assisted by several young ladies, associate teachers. District 12 sold the building for \$1400. It was moved to north Fifth Avenue and used as a sash and blind factory. Later it was sold to A. R. Schmidt and moved to the northeast corner of Detroit and Kingsley Streets where it was used as a shop for repair of buggies. After standing idle for some years it was torn down in 1933, and the timbers were salvaged for uses not known to me.

Upper Village Schools After the Detroit and St. Joseph Railroad reached Ann Arbor, the population increased rapidly in both villages and a new interest in public schools developed. A Union High School was voted for the Upper Village. All the citizens realized something must be done but couldn't agree on how the problem should be solved. Many wanted a school in each district, but a strong group headed by John Allen advocated one large school, centrally located, to take care of all the children. He argued that higher salaries could be paid and thus reduce the constant change of teachers. At this meeting he made the following motion, "It is not only the duty but the interest of the community to educate every child who is to become a member of society and thereby we recommend to the next Legislature of this State to pass a law providing for this object."

Many meetings were held and finally a plan for a school in each district was passed in 1847.

A site for the Union High School was purchased from E. W. Morgan for \$2000, the square where the present High School stands. The building, which stood in the center of the block, was begun in 1854 and finished in 1856, at a cost of \$32,000. E. E. Lawrence, a Director, said in a newspaper article, "There will be male and female departments in which young gentlemen may prepare for admission to the University, and young ladies receive such instruction as is afforded in the highest female seminaries." The eighth grade was similarly divided.

The first principal of the Union High School was Mr. L. C. Abbot. Miss Merryless was the Preceptress. Two years later Mr. Abbot and Miss Merryless married and moved to Lansing, where he became president of Michigan Agricultural College. Other early teachers in this school were the Misses Abbie Mize, Nettie Pellham, and Anna Robinson. The school enrolled from first grade through high school, and in less than 10 years the enrollment increased 100%.

Ward Schools Meetings were held and plans made to build schools in each of the Wards, First, Second, Third, and Fourth. The first of these was built in 1862 on the west side of south State Street, a few rods south of William Street. It was a 2-story brick school, and the caretaker lived in the basement. Later a 2-room addition was added to the original four rooms. Some of the teachers there were Miss Kerr, Principal, and the Misses McDwitt, Jewell, Ames, Hall, Eldridge, Gaffney, and Mrs. Plympton who was Principal there before she was transferred to the eighth grade in the High School building. Mrs. Plympton was followed by Miss Carrie Dicken, who went as Principal to Perry School when it was finished in 1904.

After the University acquired the old school property, it was used for classes until it was removed to make room for Betsy Barbour dormitory.

A small brick school was built in Ward II at the corner of west Jefferson and Fourth Streets. Four rooms were added to the original two. Among the early teachers here I remember Miss Mary Mulholland, Principal, Misses Minnie Drake, Julia Howard, Amelia Lutz, Emilie Gundert, and Miss Spoor, and later Miss Gundert was Principal, and teachers under her were Emma Lutz Kirn, Emilie Marshke, Mary Fohey, Minnie Mogk, Augusta Walters, and Julia Kirchofer.

The Marshall Company, that had built the First Ward School, was given a contract in 1866 to build the Third Ward School, for \$6000. It stood on the south side of Miller Avenue a little west of Fountain Street. It was a 4-room brick building, with rooms for the janitor's family in the basement. Sometime after, 2 large rooms were added. Some of the teachers in this building were Mrs. Hattie Boyd Skinner, Principal, Miss Conwell, Miss Lovejoy, Misses Emma Bamfield, Almeda Armstrong; Later, under Mrs. Edson, Principal, were Miss Reade, and Misses Carrie Krause, Pauline Wurster, Mary Schlanderer, Emma Kapp, Inez Crill, Matilda Pfisterer, Anna Mattison, Edith Stretch, Sara Donnelly, Anna Clinton, Ina Wilson, and Mary L. Thompson, with Emma Weitbrecht, later Principal.

The Fourth Ward School was finished in 1868. It was a 6-room, street-level, brick building on north Division Street, on the site of the present Jones School. This also had rooms for the janitor to live in the basement. Miss Lucy Chapin recalled that she and her brother, Volney, were among the first seventh graders to enter the building. The Principals I remember there were Misses Annette Ailes, Matie Goodale, Mae O'Hearn, and Winifred Gibbons, Mrs. Goodell Whitlark, and Mr. Wendell Vreeland.

The Northside had joined with the Upper Village, and after 1861 became Ward V. The Charter of 1867 added a Sixth Ward.

By the time the ward schools were finished, more space was needed, and an addition was built on the Union School in 1870, similar in appearance and size to the original school. The school was then a square building in the center of the block, with the Library in a southwest corner room. Miss Nellie Loving was Librarian. The two south rooms on the third floor housed the eighth grade, under Miss Abbie Pond and Miss Eliza Ladd as teachers. Miss Alice Hunt taught Drawing; Miss Lucy Cole, Music.

In 1883 the Sixth Ward School, covering seven grades, was built on the east side of East University Avenue, halfway between North and South University Avenues. The contract was given to Lucas & Tessmer for \$10,988. Mrs. Downs and Miss Harriet Cook were Principals there, while the Misses McCain, Gunther, Sturgis, Rice, Feiner, Alexander, Mogk, and Matie Cornwall taught there at different times.

In 1889 another addition was added to the High School which was much more attractive in appearance, bringing the building out to Huron Street. At that time we had Walter S. Perry as Superintendent of Schools and Judson G. Pattengill as Principal. The Principal taught Greek and Latin; Lucy A. Chittenden taught Rhetoric and English Literature; Horatio N. Chute, Physical Sciences; Benjamin E. Nichols, Bookkeeping, Commercial Law, Political Economy, and Civil Government; Miss Iris Carr assisted Mr. Nichols; Levi D. Wines taught Higher Mathematics; Alice Porter, Latin; Mary L. Hunt, Natural Science; Mary E. Dickey, German and French; Fred C. Clark, History; Bertha Wright, General English; Louis P. Jocelyn, Mathematics; Ross Cole, Grammar and Composition; and Mrs. H. Trueblood, Elocution.

This school, under the leadership of Mr. Perry and with the assistance of these able teachers, was one of the leading high schools in the country. Its reputation brought families from great distances to Ann Arbor that their children might be prepared for entrance to the University. This helped to make the high school enrollment greater than it would have been otherwise.

Lower Village Schools The Upper and Lower Villages were not yet united when Anson Brown had dreams of promoting the Lower Village to make it the most important part of Ann Arbor. He built a grist mill and the big brick stores on Broadway, had himself appointed Postmaster, and moved the Post Office to his building. He died in 1834, but his dreams carried on.

In 1838, Dr. Holmes conducted a school in the Baptist Church. This was a frame building on the north side of Wall Street about ten rods east of Broadway. This school was called the "District School" and received support from the village.

In 1840, a new brick school was built on the east side of Traver Street near the intersection of the Toledo and Ann Arbor Railroad. It had one story consisting of one large room that could seat about forty pupils. The site was purchased for \$100 from Caleb and Desire Ormsby. Dr. Holmes was the first teacher, and after he resigned Mrs. Anne Mudge took charge. It was said of her that she was very reserved and dignified, that while the children swept and dusted the school she changed from school attire, adjusted her hat very carefully, and drew on long gloves before appearing on the street. (This teacher-attitude toward preciseness of appearance lasted for more than one generation.) The next teacher was Miss Celia Gibson. Early members of the Board of Directors were Josiah Beckley, Robert Davidson, and William R. Perry. This Board sold the school property in 1856 to Jonathan Lund, for \$150. It was converted into a dwelling and is still serving as such.

Soon after the site for a Union High School was purchased in the Upper Village, an agitation began for a Union School in the Lower Village. Land was purchased from David Page and Caleb Ormsby for \$150. It consisted of two village lots on the south side of Wall Street about 12 rods east of Broadway. A 4-room brick school was built in the center of the south line of the property at a cost of \$3700.

Personal Teaching Experiences Back in the 1890's it was not easy to get a position to teach in Ann Arbor schools. The applicant had to interview the members of the Board of Education individually. If she received any encouragement she returned to Superintendent Perry, talked the matter over and waited for the decision of the Board. When the choice was made it was for a position as Cadet. This meant the applicant would serve a year under the supervision of a fine teacher. The grade was decided by Mr. Perry, who placed her in one best suited to her personality. She was given responsibility for one section of the class. She attended 2 one-hour classes each week. Psychology and class-management were taught by Superintendent Perry.

No salary was connected with the position of Cadet. If she proved satisfactory she was given a position as teacher, if and when an opening occurred. There was one salary schedule for all teachers in the Elementary School. They received \$300 the first year, with annual increases of \$25 until the maximum of \$400 was reached.

I was fortunate in being given the first grade in the Fifth Ward, vacated by the resignation of Miss Hattie Haviland. The building was on a low foundation. There was no basement, only a hollow under my room filled with water in summer and ice in winter. At the north side of the building there was a vestibule about 8x20'. On the sill of one of the two windows was a hand-basin and soap, with a roller-towel between window and door. On the other window sill was a water-pail with dipper. From this vestibule a 5-foot stair led to the upper floor. The first grade room was about 24x40' with two south windows, two west windows, and one on the north.

There were two long rows of double seats and two short rows. At the end of the short rows the big round oak stove stood. It was encased in a galvanized jacket, much like a furnace, only it was open on top. Fresh air was tiled in to an opening in the floor under the stove, where it was heated and passed out the top, thus making the temperature more or less even throughout the room. The thermostat was a 25c thermometer with pad and pencil attached. It was suspended from the ceiling in the center of the room. The teacher marked down the temperature each hour, and was privileged to carry in the chunks of wood when necessary to replenish the fire. There were 2 chairs, a small table, and a blackboard. We didn't need much storage room because the only materials furnished by the school were penmanship and drawing paper and letter cards. There were no work books nor supplementary books then.

Last and best of all I found there 55 good-looking, happy, fun-loving children, whose parents were always ready and willing to help me.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
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