

SCHOOLS

Pursuing the rather typical development pattern of settlement, it follows almost naturally, that once the land and roads are made clear, thus allowing the satisfaction of physical needs in food production and market availability. And once spiritual needs are attended to in the raising of Churches, the early settlers would turn to the next factor of growing importance, that of educating their children.

SCHOOL SECTION #1 [BETHEL PUBLIC SCHOOL]

The little school named SS #1 had as primitive a start as everything else did in the deep woods of Essex County. In 1862 a log cabin was built across from the property of Nelson Ure on No. 2 Highway, which at that time was located in the Township of Sandwich East, our present township still then non-existent.

Presumably cozy in their wood-stove heated classroom, the students of the early SS#1 had benches for seats and nothing to write on. The girls all sat at the front, and the boys at the back. However, despite the basic nature of the structure, the school served the area for several decades until a new frame structure finally replaced it.

The community this little school served was the same as that mentioned earlier as the one developing around the Bethel United Church. The school itself was located alongside the church, again illustrating the importance the settlers accorded to these two necessary institutions of learning and worship.

In 1905 the teacher of the school, Mrs. Fred Frith, had sixty-nine pupils, 15% of which were black, the latter being descendants of the refugees fleeing persecution in the States, and escaping through the famed 'underground railway'.

Her salary was approximately \$350 to \$400 a year, and her boarding rate would have been from \$1.65 to \$1.75 a week.

In these early years of the new century, the school not only presented itself as a serious place of learning, but was in fact often transformed into something akin to the local community centre. The most notable event favoured by everyone around 1900 was the community spelling bee. Held in the school at frequent regular intervals, the spelling bee became a festive social gathering, usually finishing as a totally non-academic venture with the losers of the bee providing an oyster supper for all present.

Near the Christmas of 1919, the old frame school house burnt down, and by 1920 was replaced by a brick one. In the 1940's the school house was again a place of gathering, but this time it was neither festive nor local, providing instead a station for the Canadian armed forces.

In Feb. of 1961 the brick school house of SS#1 was abandoned in the web of progress and the school was moved to a modern two-room building located on the 8th concession just south of Highway #2. This move was generated by a general updating of the Sandwich South school system, and was effected along with the building of two other modernized schools, and a new sectional system for the area.

In 1965 there were 70 children attending the Bethel school, or SS #1, the same number as had been found there sixty years earlier.

On Jan. 1, 1967 the school was no longer under the jurisdiction of this town-

ship, having been placed instead, under the authority of the Essex County School Board thereafter. And in another few years it was phased out completely.



The old SS #1 school or the Bethel Public School once located on Baseline road just off of the ninth concession but now no longer in existence. This picture shows the class of 1948 when Mr. G.A. Broad was the school's teacher.