

Bethinking of Old Orleans

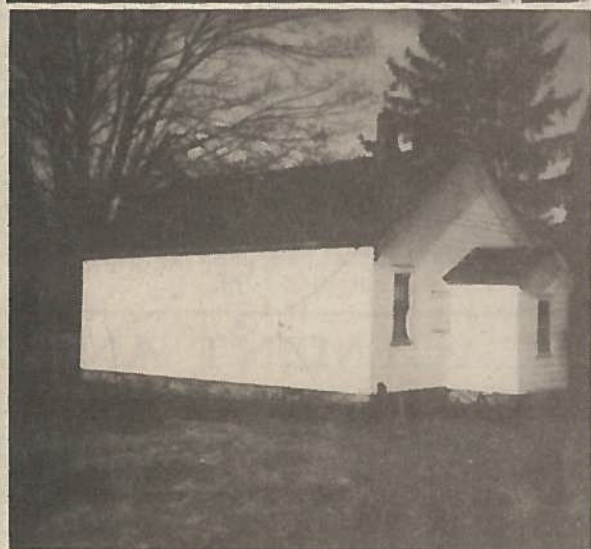
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THE YELLOW SCHOOL HOUSE



If you're under thirty, chances are you've never heard of it. Likewise, if you're over fifty, it may be a meaningful landmark from out of the past. Most district school houses were average or typical utilitarian white clapboard structures. A few were brick, a few stone and some were even cobblestone. But there was only one yellow school house. When we conjure up a nostalgic image of rural education, it's often portrayed with a little red school house. I'm not sure if there were any in Orleans County. And if so, they were all overshadowed by the yellow school. From Brockport and points east to Middleport and points west, almost everyone knew where the yellow school was. It was a point of reference and a unique landmark simply because of its color.

The yellow structure, which still stands, is located on the west side of Transit Road near the intersection of Route 31. For many years this was clearly visible from Route 31 until trees and vegetation have blocked out the view.

Our exterior photo shows the school as it appears (still yellow) today. It was built in 1903 and never had any windows on the south side. The classroom was illuminated mostly by north windows for a more even source of light. Inside, there was also a cloak room and toilet, but never any plumbing. We notice a small door about two feet square on the front where coal was delivered for a room-size furnace which was used to heat the yellow school house.

Like other rural school districts, this one succumbed to centralization and was closed out in the 1940's. Eventually, it was sold, and a Mr. and Mrs. Louis Lopus attached a house trailer to it. However, to this day the interior of the school room remains much the way it was when used for educational pur-

poses but without the furnishings and of course, the pupils.

Speaking of pupils, let's now focus on the other picture. Written on the back side of it is: "Taken Sept. 20, 1935 by Mr. Irwin Neal. Albion Dist. 9 (yellow school house). 1. Catherine Christopher 2. Betty Lou Lewis 3. Frank Christopher 4. Angelo Christopher 5. Carmel Christopher 6. Frank Christopher 7. Lloyd Kuhn Jr. 8. Mary Jane Kuhn." The teacher was Miss Ella Bacon who is standing in the rear near a west window.

But beyond the identification of individuals, the photo tells us a lot about change in our educational system. Imagine today, this ratio of one teacher to only eight students in the class. It would be an educational delight and yes, a taxpayer's nightmare. School furnishings have also noticeably changed a lot. The students are seated here in double desks. Today, this would be a delight to the students and a nightmare for the teacher, while working with a select two or three students, could assign perhaps an older, more proficient student, to sit with, and help a younger one. We notice here, an age range in this school from No. 6, an 8th grader to No. 8, a second grader.

Another thing has also changed, equally as dramatic as all the other things mentioned. That is a prayer written on the blackboard! Indeed, it was customary for most schools to have, as part of their opening exercises every morning, a prayer. Yes indeed, things have changed and as we challenge the Supreme Court and try to interpret the intention of our constitution, we have progressed. It is with this progression that visionaries have attempted to heighten our society's awareness of individual rights and inclusiveness. We haven't always succeeded. Perhaps that is why we can so easily reminisce about the "good old days" when we look at a photo like this.

One student remembers that Miss Bacon would have the boys pick up and keep clean the long Cemetery of eight or ten graves located directly behind the yellow school. He also remembers that she drove a long, blue Oldsmobile car. Another student remembers school plays and that Miss Bacon would bring her mother to see them.

My thanks to Mr. Frank Christopher, No. 6, for his suggestion and help in this article. Also, to Mrs. Mary Jane Kuhn Marek, No. 8, for her loan of the vintage photo and a delightful story with which I'll end.

It seems that when Mrs. Marek's youngest brother was born, Miss Bacon payed a visit to the Kuhn residence. She said to Mrs. Kuhn, something to the effect, "Well, you already have four children. It doesn't seem like you need another." Then Young Mary Jane spoke up and said "Mama will simply bake the pie in the same pan and we'll cut it into smaller pieces."