

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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During May and June each season, over one thousand students visit the Cobblestone Museum Complex in Childs, N.Y. They come from surrounding counties as well as our local schools to participate in the museum's educational program. One individual who brings alive school life of an earlier era is Janice Barnum Thaine who conducts tours of the Cobblestone School at Childs for the student visitors. Janice is well versed in the history of the Cobblestone School since her mother and also grandfather were teachers there at different times and she, too, attended school there. The photo included with this column was taken back in the 1880's in front of the Cobblestone School showing the students at that time with their teacher Lizzie Balcom. I'd like to share the following article on schools with you which was written by Janice and appeared in the Historic Gaines Jubilee Publication in 1984.



Schools of Gaines

*By Janice Barnum Thaine
Deputy Historian of Gaines*

As families began to settle in Gaines, the need to educate their children was one of utmost concern. In 1813 it was agreed to organize a school. A decision was made to have Orrin Gleason teach the children in a log building on the Gates property near the corner of Eagle Harbor Road. Shortly after, another school was opened at the present Belmont property, between Gaines and Childs, to accommodate children in that area. More and more people came into the town and always one of their first concerns was to provide educational facilities for their children. The schools were simple, just the bare essentials, not even providing privies. Money to pay teachers salaries and to pay for fuel for heating was obtained by taxing the families with children in school.

By 1900 these crude buildings had been replaced by the more substantial structures that are still in existence today. Eventually twelve school districts were established in the town. No longer were the inhabitants of the district able to decide the kind of schooling their children would get. By this time the state set up the school standards. Beginning in the late 1920's, the schools in Gaines were closed one by one as centralization took over. By 1953 the Albion Central School District was completed and the individual schools in Gaines were ready to start a new way of life. Only one school house in the town remained as a school, Eagle Harbor District No. 7. Students continued getting their early education there until 1963.

The fond memories of the thousands of people who attended these 'country schools' can never be completely recorded. Everyone has his or her own special recollections of the friendships made; the teachers; the school picnics; the field trips that were really trips into the fields; the entertainments presented for parents and the whole community at each holiday, especially Christmas; the baseball games; the tests that came twice a year from Albany, and we had to pass in order to be promoted; the teacher asking for our best behavior whenever the District Superintendent appeared at the door; the sharing of school lunches; making May flower baskets; tipping over the neighborhood outhouses on Halloween; riding our bikes, roller skating or walking to and from school each day. Hanging around outside the school while our parents attended the Annual School Meeting, hoping to find out if the present teacher might be replaced next year; trying to get everyone to write in your autograph book; working on the school newspaper and of course, above all, doing our assigned lessons! How did the one-room country school teacher ever accomplish all that was expected?