

8-1990

## Archival Chronicle: Vol 9 No 2

Bowling Green State University. Center for Archival Collections

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### Recommended Citation

Bowling Green State University. Center for Archival Collections, "Archival Chronicle: Vol 9 No 2" (1990). *Archival Chronicle*. 28.  
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## Archival Chronicle

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August 1990: Volume 9, Number 2

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#### One-Room Schools



American values and history were stressed in one-room schools such as this one in Ottawa County. CAC general photograph collection. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Harold Thomas.

"Our townships were divided into school districts and a one-room schoolhouse was provided for each district. The building in each occupied a small plot of ground near the center of the district. Schoolhouses throughout the region were nearly the same in size and arrangement, many of them substantially built of brick." (Howard Good, *Black Swamp Farm*)

Celebrated in prose, poetry, and art, the one-room country school is among those rare American icons that symbolize such national values as simplicity, equality, and self-reliance.

As educator Fred Schroeder has noted, one-room schoolhouses are also cherished symbols of an all but vanished lifestyle: independent, family-centered, and consciously tied to the soil. In fact, as many scholars have pointed out, the rural public education system was not created or designed according to the curriculum needs of students, but rather by the dictates of a seasonal agricultural clock. The school year was shorter. Older students did not start school until the flurry of fall farm work was over, and the term ended with the onset of spring planting. Children and adults attended school as farm chores permitted.

But aside from the nostalgia conjured up by the one-room schoolhouse, this all-American institution also represents a significant chapter in our country's heritage.

The placement and distribution of schoolhouses have their origins in the legal framework for public education established by the Land Ordinance of 1784 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1785. Thought to be the nation's first example of regional planning, the Ordinance decreed that all land in the Territory was to be surveyed into townships of six square miles. Each township was then subdivided into thirty-six sections. One section in each township was to be reserved for the support of "common schools," and could be leased to raise operating funds. However, the abundance of free land rendered land leases an ineffective source of school financing. Later, much of the land was sold to settlers and speculators at deflated prices, even for the frontier, and this money was often diverted or fraudulently spent. In the end, communities were left to finance schools themselves.

The red brick one-room schoolhouses of the 1870s and 1880s (many of which still dot the landscape of northwest Ohio) probably represent the latest in a series of building replacements and increasingly standardized building design.

As with most frontier buildings, initial settlement schoolhouses were constructed with logs. These were often replaced in a few years by slightly larger frame or brick buildings. However, the form and interior plan of the late nineteenth century rural school was the result of educational reforms that were promoted throughout the century by educational journals and by schoolhouse plan books, books published by manufacturers, state boards of education, and enterprising architects. These reforms, first proposed by William A. Alcott in 1832, included desks with backs and storage space arranged in rows to facilitate instruction and recitation, large windows for light and ventilation, placed high enough to eliminate distractions, wall space for maps and student art, a teacher's desk, and shelves and cabinets for instructional materials.

According to Howard Good, the major event of the year in many schools was the "Last Day," a traditional gala consisting of visits by parents, a student program, athletic events, and a huge community dinner, all given divine blessing by the local minister.

Unfortunately, the "Last Day" may also symbolize the future of many of the region's one-room schoolhouses. Architecturally obsolete and often too small for residential use or other adaptive use solutions, these quaint structures have been reduced to little more than isolated artifacts on the rural landscape. Ironically, even in their abandoned state, one-room schoolhouses continue to educate us about our past.

--Glenn Harper

## Public School Records



*This one-room school now has been restored and serves as the **Educational Memorabilia Center** on the BGSU campus. CAC general photograph collection.*

Public school records are rich in untapped data both for biographical information and for the broader study of public education. Because education was controlled at the local level, the few surviving records may be found in the hands of consolidated school districts, in archives, or even in private hands.

The first law for the organization of public schools was passed by the Ohio General Assembly in 1821. This law allowed township voters to determine the division of the township into school districts and to levy taxes for the support of public schools. Until the 1910s, townships kept records related to school matters. Today, some of these records may be found in township halls or at the CAC.

*Board of Education Minutes* contain a record of business transacted at the meetings, including salary appropriations, contracts, building construction, and any other business which might have come before the board.

*Enumerations of School Age Youth* show the date, school district number, number of youth, name of youth, age, and sometimes the names of parents.

*Records of Teachers Examinations* include the name of teacher, branches of study, test scores, and date.

*Teachers Term Records/School Registers/Pupil Records* contain the school number, term, date, name of pupil, age, attendance record, branches of study pursued, name of teacher, and sometimes grades. Some of these records include a *Visitor's Register* which gives the date, name of visitor, and remarks.

*Personnel and Budgetary Records* include the terms and salaries of school teachers, receipts and disbursements, school tax rates, and maintenance and operation of the school buildings.

During most of the nineteenth century, county government exercised an indirect means of supervision over public schools. In addition to certifying teachers in county schools, the county Board of Examiners gave advice relative to discipline, instruction, and management of schools.

In 1914, the county Board of Education was established. In that same year, the General Assembly reclassified school districts into city, village, rural, and county districts.

Records of the county Board of Education include *Annual Financial and Statistical Reports, Records of Teacher Examinations, Class Registers, Consolidated School District Records, Enumerations of Youth, Minutes, Pupil Records, and School District Maps.*

Records of public schools may be found at the CAC or the local government office originally or currently responsible for their maintenance. Lucky is the county, municipality, or township that has preserved the records of its public education system, for the story of education in Ohio has not fully been told.

—Victor Wagher

### College Student Personnel Collection

Primarily known for its regional collections and university archives, the Center for Archival Collections also holds materials which reflect the graduate programs at Bowling Green State University. The College Student Personnel program at BGSU, considered one of the strongest in the nation, is the type of graduate study for which CAC holdings provide research support.

In 1981, the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors (NAWDAC) selected the CAC as the repository which could best preserve and provide public access to its historical records. Within the next fifteen months, the organizational records of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) were also donated. These three organizations provided the foundation for the special College Student Personnel collection (see [National Student Affairs Archives Bibliography](#)). Since 1982, the collections have grown beyond expectations and now house the historical records of ten national professional organizations and seven regional/state associations, with dates ranging from 1903 to the present. These collections will continue to grow every year as the organizations have agreed to send new materials at regular intervals. Researchers have a tremendous advantage in being able to examine at one location the records of many different organizations participating within and contributing to the field of higher education.

The archives from these seventeen associations provide a rich and detailed history of professional interactions among organized groups and college student personnel leaders throughout periods of economic prosperity and want, World War II, student unrest, and explosive campus growth. Typical of the materials within these collections are executive board minutes, officer files, convention proceedings, and planning files, committee minutes, reports and files, task force and study files, journals, monographs, newsletters, and photographs.

Of special interest to researchers are the papers and formal presentations given at conferences by individuals, which many times become the property of the association. Thus, the CAC is also interested in acquiring the personal collections of those who have been actively involved with the college student personnel field, and therefore, involved with one or more of these associations. All such private collections would be donated on an individual basis and treated as a separate collection under the donor's name; however, cross-references would be made to all other appropriate collections within the College Student Personnel area. For further information about these collections, please contact the CAC.

—Monica Manny