

# Recollections of Dansville Schools

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At this time when Dansville is contemplating the building of a new school, it will be especially interesting to recall a few facts in regard to the early history of the public school system in the village.

Thomas Macklen, the first school teacher, was a Scotchman and probably came to Dansville in 1797. He taught ten or twelve scholars in 1798 in the pioneer schoolhouse, which stood about a mile north of the center of the village. Dodsworths' spelling book was then used. He married into the McCurdy family, and taught school here many years. He died in 1822.

The old academy building, used for a district school later, stood just west of the present St. Patrick's church and was built in 1836, and there the older boys and girls of those days received instruction in advanced studies, in its first years, from Prof. J. Lyman Crocker as principal, Prof. Fuller as assistant, and Miss Niles as preceptress. Their more elementary education was obtained at the little school-house close by which was built before the academy, about 1821. In 1882 the late Henry C. Sedgwick, of numerous reminiscences, remembered as surviving early pupils William Mc-Curdy, John McCurdy, J. J. Welch, Hugh McCartney, Alonzo Bradner, G. R. Smith, H. A. Sprague, Calvin Fenstermacher, B. W. Woodruff, H. B. Opp, Mrs. Alex. Edwards, and Mrs. Matthew McNair. It was the time, Mr. Sedgwick said, of Daboll's arithmetic, Browns grammar, Webster's spelling book, and the English reader. The little schoolhouse was moved about half a mile from its former position, and because of dwelling almost opposite the barn of Brightside on William Street, and the academy building was moved across the square and became William H. Dick's shoe factory. Later this building was remodeled by Peter LaForce and is now used as a dwelling house on Church Street.

The old academy on the square had become a district schoolhouse when in 1858, under the auspices of the Methodist Genesee Conference, a seminary school was started in town, and a movement made to build the brick seminary structure on the hillside, which was so far completed as to be occupied in January. 1860. The first annual catalogue, published the previous year, shows an attendance of ninety-eight male and 113 female pupils. The faculty were: Principal Rev. Schuyler Seager, D. D., who was professor of moral philosophy and belles letters; Professor of Mathematics, of Natural Science, Rev. John J. Brown; preceptress, Mrs. Marietta A. Budlong; teacher of drawing and painting. Miss Emma C. Hubbard. The officers of the board of trustees were: President, Rev. A. C. George; secretary, Hon. I. L. Endress; treasurer, B. L. Hovey, M.D. Later principals of the seminary were Rev. John J. Brown, Joseph Jones, Rev. Mr. Crumb, Henry R. Sanford, Albert Lewis, J. E. Foley, W. H. Truesdale, Samuel H. Goodyear, J. B. Hubbell, and Mrs. Susan George Jones.

Many of the present citizens of Dansville, and many more who have died or gone elsewhere, received their higher education in that brick building of picturesque background and extended outlook, and there not a few of them distinguished themselves at examinations and anniversary exercises. In the long delay to secure a good Union school for the village it was of incalculable value to the larger boys and girls as source of instruction and a nursery of laudable ambitions.

The most important of all local public movements during these earlier years was that for a union of districts and a union school with high school department. It was started in 1881, and the union was far effected that in the fall of 1882 the combined schools opened in the old academy building on the square and number two's brick building, with a total registration of 273 pupils. But obstructions came. A basis of union had been agreed upon between district numbers one and two, whereby district number one was to raise \$3,000

by tax as an offset to the greater value of number two's school building. It was afterwards found that such a tax would be illegal, but on August 3, 1883, a union school meeting had been held, a resolution consolidating the two districts adopted, and a board of education elected, consisting of Frank Fielder, W. J. LaRue, James Voorhees, James H. Jackson, William Kramer, Emil C. Klauck, G. Bastian, William Bradley and James M. Edwards, of which aboard G. Bastian was made president. During the year 1883 twenty meetings of the board were held. A suit was brought against them by the trustee and others of district number two to enjoin them from collecting taxes as representatives of the united districts, on the grounds that there had been a breach of contract on the part of district number one in not raising the \$3,000 on which the union of the two districts was based. The temporary injunction was finally vacated by Judge Rumsey, and the board could act with more confidence. The seminary building on the hillside was leased in the fall of 1883, and the union school opened there in December with F. J. Diamond as principal, seven teachers and 287 pupils. The whole number of pupils enrolled during the year was 462. Here the school was conducted afterward until a new building was completed. On December 2, 1884, a meeting of citizens voted almost unanimously to build a new school house on the west side of the public square. In June, 1887, the contract for its construction was given to George W. Phelps, of Mount Morris at the cost of \$21,827.21, and the contract for heating arrangements and dry closets was given to Smead & Northcott of Elmira, for \$2,350. Then came the bank failure whereby the village lost the most of the money that had been raised, and more must be obtained. Fifteen men including the board of education, signed a note for \$4,500 in advance of the annual meeting, which sectioned what they had done.

Work on the building commenced on Friday (a bright, not a black Friday) June 3, 1887. The corner stone was laid Saturday, August 13. The exercises were of a simple character. President Edwards made a few introductory remarks, Rev. Geo. K. Ward offered prayer, the stone was placed in position over a depository of records and and other papers. A. O. Bunnell made a brief reminiscent and congratulatory address, and Rev. Mr. Ward pronounced a benediction. The building was completed with a little delay, and was dedicated on February 7, 1888, when James J. Edwards as president of the board presided and made an introductory address, A. O. Bunnell gave a comprehensive history of the enterprise, and Hon. A. S. Draper, State Superintendent of public Instruction, delivered an able address in which he paid high compliment to citizens and building. Other addresses were made by Dr. Milne of Geneseo Normal School and Dr. James C. Jackson. Thus the era of free school for Dansville in a modern school building of the best type, with abundant room, was auspiciously begun.

The board of education during the critical building period were J. M. Edwards, President; F. Fielder, F. M. Perine, J. J. Bailey, H. F. Dyer, F. W. Noyes, Albert Sweet, William Kramer, W. H. Dick. The entire cost of the union school building and site was \$26,500. Special credit should be given here to the pioneer president of the board, Dr. G. Bastian, who stood like a rock against which the waves of passion and prejudice and antiquated custom dashed in vain until the storm had largely spent itself. Allusion should also be made to the great meetings held in the roller skating rink to decide on the question of re-pairing the old seminary building or erecting a new modern building on a central site, when on meeting nights every street seemed filled with a tide of human being converging at the corner of Exchange and Elizabeth streets there to do battle for their rights after the fashion of the early town meeting of New England, which laid foundations of civil liberty in this country. In all these meetings there was a large proportion of women to whose arduous labors and intelligent influence must be given a great share of the credit for the improved school condition then and there materially advanced.