



Mouth School - 1850's

## CHAPTER XII

### READIN' RITIN' AND RITHMATIC

Let it not be said of the Montague Area that we neglected the education of our future citizens for even the earliest settlers had their school system.

In the 1850's, Mrs. L. M. Bennett, wife of a Methodist Episcopal minister taught a private school for the children of the Mouth settlement and in 1856, Noah Ferry, a lumber mill operator, built a school building at the Mouth. The first building burned and was rebuilt in 1864 near the present site of the Mouth School. This building burned also and another structure belonging to a German Baptist Church in Maple Grove was moved to this ground. This school is still in existence, even though a few years ago a new building was built just south of the old structure. This school consists of five classrooms, one library-music room, and a gymnasium. The structure is brick and one of the board members is a descendant of the man who sold the first piece of property to the town of Montague in 1851. This man's name was Nathan Sargent.

#### WAYSIDE INN

Cecelia and Arthur Meyer  
Helen and James Jaunese

CITY OF WHITEHALL

There was another schoolhouse built in the early 60's. It was built north of the Mouth, the first classes were held in the John Coors house later known as the Fred Groth home. This school was known as the Germantown School, but the name was later changed to Pershing after the First World War. This was moved to a site about two miles farther north and was in use until it consolidated with Montague School around 1951. The first building of this district was of logs.

The first school in Whitehall was in 1860, the year after the village was platted. "Aunt Polly" Allen had a private school in the house of Daniel Basom, with half a dozen pupils.

The following year District No. 1, Mears, was organized and the countryside scoured to find 10 pupils which would make the district eligible for state aid (people were no different then than now, it seems). A room was obtained over a vacant store and Miss Ellen Foley was teacher. The following year the district felt a need to economize and went back to using the log cabin originally built by Capt. Hanson at the foot of Colby Street.

The Montague Public School System was begun in the year 1864 when a group of men including Mr. D. Leitch, Mr. J. Heald, and Mr. E. Knudson acting as moderator, director, and assessor respectively, started the school board. In September 1865, a tax was levied for a school house to be built on Lot 9, Block 59, (on Sheridan Street between Williams and Knudson) for the City of Montague. Mr. George E. Dowling replaced Mr. Heald at this time on the board, and in 1867 \$600.00 was raised to finish the schoolhouse. In 1873 the school was graded and the next year a special meeting was held and voted to build a larger schoolhouse accommodating 300 pupils. It was also voted to sell the old schoolhouse to the German Methodist Church, which they did.

The new structure was occupied by June 1st, 1875. It was three stories high and built of white brick; it also included a belfry and cupola. The total cost of this was \$16,000. and was situated on the site of the present Knudson Street School. In 1919 this schoolhouse burned and was rebuilt in 1921. During this interval school was held in various churches.

About 1885 another school was built on the North Hill and was known as the Holland School, as so many Holland children attended classes. This was two stories high, consisted of four classrooms and two teachers; but only went to the third grade. The school was used for about 13 years and by 1902 was used for basketball practice only. The price paid for this land on Stanton Blvd. and School Street was \$250.00 and the structure was built in a square of maple trees, some of which still stand. The cost of this school was \$4,000, \$3,650 of which was borrowed at 7% interest and paid

JACK & JILL RANCH  
Seth and Jean Winslow

WEESIES BROTHERS Plant and Celery Farm  
Ben, Edward, John, Larry, Harry, John E.,  
Colvin, Gary Weesies and Casey Timmerman.

by 1891. By 1898 both schools were operating with eight teachers, out of debt, and at a lower cost than one school with six teachers. Non resident pupils were admitted to the High School at a \$1.00 per month tuition. All text books were free and the regular curriculum was taught besides vocal music, which provided to be a very interesting feature. A class of ten graduated from the first class and one of them was Nellie B. O'Connell Chisholm.

Still another schoolhouse was built in the area and called the Trading Post School. This was originally on the side of George Fehrenbach's mill, but was later moved farther west to the site of James Reavey home on Fruitvale Road. One of its early teachers was Nellie B. Chisholm who was 15 years of age at that time. This was her first teaching job after graduating from high school.

In the late "80's", the Maple Grove School was built. This was located on the present Old Channel Trail and Anderson Road. This was the first Standard School in the county. In 1907, while Nellie B. Chisholm was teaching in this school, the first woman ran for office of County School Superintendent. Nellie B. Chisholm was that woman and held that office for many years, during which time she started the P.T.A. in 1924. This school, along with the Trading Post, Mears and the Redding were the first to consolidate with Montague Public School System. The Maple Grove School continued under the firm but loving hand of Mrs. Dolly Flagstead, known to all as "aunt Dolly" until 1921 when the building was moved to the George Lindrup property where it remains today.

The Montague School on Knudsen was the first consolidated school in the County, being under the Smith-Hughes Act, which allowed such subjects as Home Economics, Agriculture, and Manual Training to be taught. It had three buses and about 350 children in all. In 1922, when the main part of the building was built, it cost \$150,000 and had eleven teachers. One thousand dollars was received from the government and \$2,600 each year from the State of Michigan. An addition was later added and in 1956 a new high school was built on the ground where agricultural students had planted many trees as one of its projects. This project began in 1932. This school cost \$600,000 and could accommodate about 400 students. This was also added to, when the need arose, and in 1959 still another school was built as an intermediate and was named the Nellie B. Chisholm and cost \$800,000. This building stands at the Dicey and Stanton Blvd. end of the school property, while the high school is farther west on this same block of ground. The Knudsen school is now called the R. R. Oehrli after the man who was the superintendent for many years. In later years, the Gee, Sumner, Pine Grove, Flower Creek, Green, Pershing, and the most recent Mouth and Rothbury Schools have all consolidated with the Montague

### Public Schools.

Perhaps a last thought about the school system is the unusual way the early teachers were hired, and paid. The teachers were boarded and roomed at each family, and the family with the most children had to keep the teacher the longest. As it was hard to get teachers, the following examination was all that was necessary. First, the one to be hired was asked: How old are you? What is your name? Will you agree not to get married during this term? These were the most important questions. If the teacher answered yes, to the last question, she was hired, but the trouble came the next term, when she was not asked if she would remain single, then there would be a vacancy to be filled. And so it would go.

In 1962, the St. James Catholic School opened for its pupils. This was a licensed nursery school for all who wished its service. For the first few years only the lowest grades were taught, but now higher grades are being offered for the children of the Catholic faith, through the sixth grade.

OSBORNE TRUCK & CRANE SERVICE  
Harold, Bonnie, Ruth & Barbara Osborne  
PORT CITY MACHINE & TOOL

ROESLER'S CITGO SERVICE - Don, Valerie,  
Pam, Dan, Donnie & Dennis Roesler  
RELIABLE SUPPLY CORPORATION