

# PINE LAKE SCHOOL

By Jay Brown

The history of Pine Lake School began many, many years ago. Archeologists say the existence of Indians (Sacs, Hurons, Wyandots, and Ottawas) in the area has been traced back at least 5,000 years. The Ice-Age humans probably inhabited the area as long as 10,000 B.C.

The first white men to set foot in the lake country are believed to have been French fur traders and missionaries. These early trappers, along with government surveyors, who probably never saw the area, but reported everything north of Detroit was too marshy for habitation, were followed by settlers from New York.

John Huff of Orleans County, New York, arrived by some unknown route to the shores of Pine Lake in 1821. He built a log cabin and began clearing the land. Huff died four years later while building a tavern in the town of Pontiac.

Two other New Yorkers, James Herrington and Benjamin Irish, however, became the first settlers of record in 1823. Huff had failed to file a claim on his land.

Herrington claimed the entire southeastern corner of the West Bloomfield area - it was then part of Bloomfield Township - and Irish settled about half a mile west of Walnut Lake. Both men died in 1825, mute testimony to the rigors of pioneering. The government's established price for the land was \$1.25 an acre -land that sells from \$30,000 to \$300,000 an acre today.

Rudiments of book learning were hard to come by in the early days before a township was formed. Children of pioneer families were tutored at home, which probably made them quite happy with this state of affairs. In 1828, a school was established between Walnut and Pine Lake in a log cabin. It was only an elementary school, after the universal pattern of schools in agricultural communities. The terms taught were 4 months each summer and winter. Male teachers received about \$40.00 a month. Females received \$3.50 a week with board at different houses in the district.

More people poured into the area, which officially became West Bloomfield Township in 1833, when Governor Cass broke it off from Bloomfield Township.

The first road was hacked out of the wilderness and traveled along what is now Middlebelt Road. Work on the road stopped in 1823. About five years later, Pontiac and Adrian Roads were begun. In 1910, atoll gate was established near Wilkins Corner (Meating Place Restaurant). In 1831, Commerce Road was laid out. Where there were no roads, the settlers followed the ridge lines or "oak openings". In some cases, these were better than the roads, which skirted the lakes and became quagmires in the spring.

To achieve some semblance of order and maintain progress, the infant township appointed a panel of pioneers as "overseers of roads". One of them, John Ellenwood, was incremental in surveying and laying out most of the roads in West Bloomfield, as well as the major arteries in Bloomfield and Southfield Township.

Another vital communication link to the outside world was the post office. The first one was the "Pine Lake", established in 1831 at the home of the remarkable John Ellenwood. It appears that when Mr. Ellenwood wasn't overseeing the roads, serving as school commissioner, or later representing the township as supervisor, he was busy as postmaster. (He must have had a cooperative wife).

With an ax, a plow, a good horse, and plenty of determination, the West Bloomfield pioneer set to work. Having selected his site near timber stands to insure fertile soil, he erected his cabin, cleared the remaining land of brush and rock, then plowed and planted. His crops were corn, wheat, hay, rye, oats, potatoes and as sorted garden vegetables. His livestock were horses, cows and sheep. In fact, horse breeding was quite popular in the area.

While busily engaged in carving a homestead out of this primitive land, the pioneer family found strength and comfort in communion with the "Almighty". One of their most precious possessions, brought from the East, was the family Bible. They turned to this book in time of turmoil and trouble. Most pioneers could quote it generously, as was reflected in their early correspondence. So, it was with great joy that the settlers welcomed the arrival of Reverend Laban Smith, circuit riding preacher of the Ohio Conference of Methodists, in June 1825.

For the next quarter century, Reverend Smith held meetings of worship in barns, schoolhouses, churches, homes, as well as in the open air. Because of the distances involved, common services were held for Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

As the years went by, farming became more specialized. Of particular importance were the orchards of apples, peaches and cherries. Apples were introduced before the coming of the settlers. During the early 19th century, explorers and surveyors noticed apple trees growing on the beautiful island in the center of Orchard Lake. Over the years, speculation has grown that they may have been planted by the Indians, who obtained seeds from Detroit or from visiting French missionaries. But, the mystery still remains. Peaches were latecomers to the area; being planted in the 1890's. They never enjoyed the popularity of the apples because some were wiped out with blight shortly after the turn of the century.

One of the popular spots to sell produce was the Eastern Market in Detroit. Many an old-timer could recall the six-hour trip with a good walking team and wagon. After selling what he could, the farmer would spend the night in the "big city" and return the next day. Later, a market was established in Royal Oak.

While farming flourished in the formative stages, milling and the mechanical trades did not. Between 1825 and 1836, two saw mills and a gristmill attempted operations. They all failed and the basic reason was lack of water power during the dry season. Several carpenters and cabinetmakers tried to make a go of it during the period of early settlement, but they were not successful either. Even the first dry goods store, operating out of a log cabin, stayed in business only for three years. Of course, blacksmith shops did flourish. Some of the older members of the community can remember such shops on the site of the Tom O'Shanter Country Club and at

Wilkins Corner. Before the Civil War, a local home hid runaway slaves who were traveling between Pontiac and Farmington stops in the Underground Railroad. The house still stands.

Many of the pioneers, who settled here, worked their lands well and were rewarded handsomely. They began to think about better education for their children. They were paying township taxes, and it was recorded that in 1880 the School District #3 received \$38.63 from a dog tax. It was time to build a new school. In October, 1885, Samuel Palmer received the first payment for constructing Pine Lake School #3, at the corner of Middlebelt and Long Lake Roads. January 2, 1886, he received the last amount for a total of \$850. Douglas Harger equipped the room and these items and costs were taken from the ledger:

1 bell and stove and pipe -	\$25. 00
Seats -	75.00
Chalk and broom, dipper-	.45

The first teacher was Mae Edwards at a salary of \$22.00 a month. The school year ran from September to June. Each year there was a different teacher. Occasionally there was a man as in 1887 and 1901, when the salary was raised to \$36.00 per month. It dropped to \$30.00 when Miss Richardson became the teacher (perhaps she had less experience). Four dollars a month was paid to a local resident for starting fires.

Electricity was installed in Pine Lake School in July, 1916. Shades and curtains were bought from Waite Braco, at a cost of \$15.44, in 1921: The teacher's salary was up to \$100 a month.

About this time, the area became a heralded vacation spa for Detroiters. The best way to reach the area from Detroit was by train to Pontiac, and then by horse and buggy the rest of the way. Two hotels opened on Orchard Lake Road which were responsible for construction of a new rail line from Pontiac to the lake region. It was a spur of the Grand Trunk System (called the Air Line Division), and it ran from Detroit every fifteen minutes and stopped at a depot in Orchard Lake. The ride on the excursion steamer, "Dell", for five cents, was another reason for attracting visitors to the area.

It was the motorcar and the Detroit United Railway, an electric streetcar service, that had a profound effect on rural West Bloomfield. Real estate operators saw the opportunity to turn vacationers into residents, and many lots in the area were sold.

The farmer realized the advantages offered by these modes of faster transportation. Now his fruit and dairy products could be shipped to market by Detroit United Railway streetcars. His children could travel to high school in Pontiac at a dollar fare for twenty rides. Detroit was only a twenty-five, cent ride away.

Gradually, the earlier farming and lake summer-home type of community became one of suburban character, with year-round homes, The Depression of the 1930's put a damper on things for awhile. Pine Lake teacher, Lela Wilsey, started doing the janitorial duties also at a salary of \$155, per month. She, and the teachers before her, probably signed a contract similar to this:

#### Rules of Conduct for Teachers -

1. You will not marry during the term of your contract .
2. You are not to keep company with men ,
3. You must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless attending a school function.
4. You may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores.
5. You may not travel beyond the city limits unless you have the permission of the chairman of the board.
6. You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother.
7. You may not smoke cigarets.
8. You may not dress in bright colors.
9. You may under no circumstances dye your hair.
10. You must wear at least two petticoats.
11. Your dresses must not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle.
12. To keep the schoolroom neat and clean, you must: Sweep the floor at least once daily; scrub the floor at least once a week with hot, soapy water; clean the blackboards at east once a day, and start the fire at 7 a.m. so the room will be warm by 8 a.m.

In 1932, a basement was dug under Pine Lake School and bathrooms and a furnace were installed. A sink and glasses were purchased. Mrs. Eva Thompson was hired for the little white clap board school at a salary of \$1, 125. She was the last teacher for the building. She taught 1-8 grades there for 13 years. The annual Christmas play was a highlight in the community. Each year, she would present the graduating pupils a gift bought from her own pocket.

August 10, 1948, the Pine Lake District was annexed to the Bloomfield Hills School District. The school presented a few problems for Bloomfield Hills. Disposal facilities were inadequate and it was discovered that the septic tank wasn't even on school property. The district decided that operating Pine Lake School was too inefficient, and it abandoned the small building after running it for one year. The children were bussed to Vaughan School, and went there until the opening of the new Pine Lake School.

The old Pine Lake School building is still standing. It was used for a time for the congregation of the Episcopal Church of the Advent and a Christian Science Reading Room. Now, it's just a house. The one room school house has become a two bedroom modern residence, complete with an inside balcony overlooking the living room. The bell tower still sits atop the building. The present owner, Mrs. Helen Purdy, purchased it in 1958, had it turned sideways, moved back from the road and put on a new foundation.

The fifteen acres of land, where the present Pine Lake School is situated, belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Callow. They offered the land to Bloomfield Hills School District for a price about one-half the current price of land, asking only that it be used for school purposes. They wanted to avoid subdivision housing close to their home. The architectural firm of Tarapata-MacMahon were awarded the contract for construction.

The first unit of Pine Lake School, consisting of six classrooms, plus an office, library, all purpose room, kitchen and clinic - a cost of \$300,000 was dedicated in the fall of 1958. Also dedicated was a bell tower in the courtyard which housed the bell from the original Pine Lake School. It bears a plaque in recognition of the generosity of Robert and May Callow. It is known as THE CALLOW BELL TOWER.

When school opened in 1958, it had 168 students and a staff of seven teachers:

Kindergarten	-	Elizabeth Morett
First Grade	-	Mildred VanRiper
Second Grade	-	Ann Osborne
Third Grade	-	Pat Benedict
Fourth Grade	-	Marge Thomas
Fifth Grade	-	Bernie Walters
Sixth Grade and Principal	-	Lester Utterback

In September 1961, Lester Utterback became the principal on a full time basis.

In the year 1967-68, the student population reached approximately 700 students. To accommodate the student load, which was in excess of the capacity of the building, six temporary and portable classrooms were utilized. Pine Lake School became the only Bloomfield Hills district school to use portable classrooms and that was for one year only. The next year, the sixth graders were accommodated in the West Hills Junior High School building where space was available. Since then, the present school has served the student population needs.

In 1960, a five acre additional piece of property to the west of the building was purchased. A second land acquisition to the west was made in 1965. In 1974, an egress was made through the woods at the north of the school to allow more children to walk to school from the surrounding subdivisions.

During the years, two additions and one up-dating renovation have been made to the original building. In 1961, six classrooms and a library were added. In 1964, six more classrooms and an office complex for special education and speech therapy were built. In 1972, a major renovation around the library, or media center, evolved. It expanded these facilities by enclosing an adjoining court yard and two former classrooms. Several years ago, the kitchen stopped preparing complete lunches. A satellite program was instituted (lunches prepared for the elementary schools in one area and transported frozen to each school, where they are heated and served).

In 1976, Lester Utterback retired after 18 years with the Bloomfield Hills School District. Dr. Rudolph Armbruster was hired as the new principal.

In 1979, Pine Lake School had a staff of:

- 1 administrator
- 15 full time classroom teachers
- 1 full time physical education teacher
- 1 full time media center specialist
- 5 part time teachers for music, art, instrumental band, instrumental strings, and physical education
- 1 learning disabilities and gifted teachers plus part time personnel
- 1 secretary
- 2 custodians, plus part time personnel
- 1 part time lunch supervisor
- 2 lunch playground supervisors

There have been many changes take place during this span of time. The wage earners now go outside the community for employment. The lakes are filled with motor boats and the roads with cars. Children no longer hunt for arrowheads, but are busy with Scouting and Little Leagues One thing that has not changed is the constant effort to provide quality education for the children of the Pine Lake School area. We assure you this will continue throughout the 20th century.

Editors Note: The following was handwritten at the end of the text

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