

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS  
IN AND AROUND KING FERRY, NEW YORK

I. The 1800's

"In 1793 Jabez Bradley bought 200 acres on the south side of Lot 3 in Genoa for \$1.25 per acre. He built his log house near the orchard west of S.C. Fessenden's (now Sam and Kathleen Fessenden home, built in 1812) which was known for years as Bradley's Corners" - (Source - Storke's History of Cayuga County 1789-1879, p. 489).

1806 - First (log) school opened on Bradley's Corners. (This statement appears in the 1933 King Ferry School yearbook but source is not cited).

A schoolhouse existed in Five Corners prior to 1831 as Storke's History notes that "the first meetings of the Congregational Church were held in an addition built to the school house at the time of organization." (See Storke, p. 505) A church edifice was built in 1835.

A county survey of 225 one-room schools in 1841 found many of them "to be rudely built and sadly out of repair as to cause the wealthy classes to shun them (for private Select Schools). They were also neglected by the poorer classes who were unable to pay their children's tuition." (See Storke, p. 188).

Free or tax supported schools were first established in 1849, repealed in 1851 with tuition charges again introduced. In 1867 following the Civil War a free school act was again passed. (See Storke, p. 188).

By 1879, the year Storke's History was published, free district Common Schools existed in Northville #2 (formerly Bradley's Corners, now King Ferry), and Five Corners. Tax supported schools were also established in other neighborhoods or districts; namely the Lake Road #1, Bell's Corners #11, or Belltown, and Goodyear's #10.

II. Early 1900's

A 1909 picture post card of the King Ferry Common School in the possession of Kathleen Fessenden shows 23 students. The date it was built is not known. It was located west of the Presbyterian Church and on its property. Directly behind and attached to this building there was a smaller wooden building typical of many one-room schools of the period. Grades 1, 2, and 3 in the smaller building were taught at this time by Florence Dates while grades 4, 5, and 6 were taught by Adelaide Krotts in the larger building. Marion Grooms recalls that the roof leaked and the children huddled in the corners of the room when it rained.

In 1915, under a new school law allowing the consolidation of district schools, within the same township, a new Union Free five-room, two story wooden building was constructed for \$6,000. By 1918 it became a four-year high school as well as a grade school. This was located east of the Common School and west of the Presbyterian Church. It started with 80 students and 4 teachers; R.H. Van Scoik, Misses Montrose, Grey, Farrell and Seymour. The smaller section of the former school was located to the rear of the new building for meetings of the Agricultural Classes. The principal later located his office in a corner of this building. "G.S. Aiken and Arthur King furnished transportation for the scholars from the adjoining districts". (Lake Road and Weeks' Corners). (Source - Genoa Tribune, Oct. 8, 1915). The larger section of the Common School was "moved on the Caldwell property" (later Ellison) where it connected into a home that is now undergoing extensive renovation. In 1923 a one-room library building was located east of the school. This had been a drugstore located on the southeast corner of Routes 34-B and 90 where R.A. Tuttle built a store that year.

As students completed the grade schools in adjoining towns of Ledyard, Venice and Lansing, those living near King Ferry came there to complete high school. The first graduating class of 6 was 1921; Harold Franklin, Dorothy Fessenden, Anna Atwater, Elizabeth Bradley, Elizabeth Atwater and Fred Tuttle.

In 1930 the State Education Dept. began to provide state aid for the construction of centralized school buildings K-12 grades.

In June 1931 over 400 resident taxpayers of the Union Free District and 8 one-room

\* Other sources says the District No. 1 schoolhouse (King school)

school districts (Lake Ridge, Goodyear, Belltown, Five Corners, Tate's Corners, Ledyard, Black Rock and Franklin) packed the Presbyterian Church Hall (Community Hall) and voted 248-86 to centralize these districts with state aid for building, transportation, and teachers' salaries being the major selling points.

In December 1931 another large meeting was called to vote on the bond issue of 170,000 to build the new school with 25% to come from state aid. Three hundred and nineteen votes out of a total of 444 cast (74%) were in favor. "Pandemonium broke loose, friends shook hands, folks cheered and whistled, boys and girls shrieked with joy, rushing from the hall to ring the school bell and sound auto horns. Men who had opposed the issue grasped the hands of those who had worked so hard and dreamed so often of this night. It was a never-to-be-forgotten occasion." (Source - Southern Cayuga Tribune, Dec. 18, 1931). The new Board of Education (Roy Tuttle, E.P. Bradley, H.H. Bradley, Earl Mann, Belltown, and Jesse Cook, Tate's Corners) issued a statement which in part reads, "A house is a home when the combined efforts of all make it a mutually pleasant place to dwell - a settlement is a community when the folks are good friends or neighbors, all striving to make it a better place in which to live. This you have done - you have shown your heart in the love and solicitude of the children of this and of coming generations." (S.C.T. - Dec. 18, 1931).

This was the beginning of a period when a "sense of community" was probably the strongest it ever has been in King Ferry.

In March 1933 the new two story brick building with 35 rooms, 260 pupils (K-12) and 21 teachers opened. Appropriately the address of the commencement speaker that year, a professor from Syracuse University was titled, "This Changing World".

During the 1950's a new one-story combined cafeteria and music room was added to the school and in the early 1960's a separate building for shop course instruction was constructed.

## II. Recent History

In June 1964 the voters of 3 districts that had centralized their high schools and one-room schools in the 1930's now voted to reorganize and form one consolidated district with 997 (out of 2,000 eligible to vote) in favor and 302 against. A major selling point was that a new Junior-Senior High School building would be constructed leaving K-6 schools in King Ferry, Genoa, and Sherwood.

In January 1968 a new Junior-Senior High School opened at Poplar Ridge at a cost of about \$3,200,000 with the state paying all but \$178,000 which was locally financed.

In June 1977 following several years of debate, the King Ferry Elementary building was closed. A declining school census, increasing energy costs, the need for extensive major repairs, and a growing concern about property assessments and taxes were factors that persuaded the Board to close the school.

In 1979, following a committee study of alternative uses for the abandoned school with 10 acres of land, it was sold to the SKM Implement Corp., a local farm machinery sales and repair services for \$28,500. The Genoa Elementary School was likewise closed. Grades 5 and 6 are now located in the Junior-Senior High School with grades K-4 going to Sherwood.

During 1980-81 the Covenant Love Community School at Freeville, at the invitation of the Community Covenant Church (formerly Brethren Church) in King Ferry, established a K-3 school in their church with around 20 children and 3 teachers, 2 of whom live in King Ferry.

A few pre-schoolers attend 3 mornings a week with mothers supervising their activities.

Prepared for the King Ferry School Reunion  
held at King Ferry Firehouse.  
Thanks to Marion Groom, Kathleen Fessenden,  
Donald Robin, Ruth and Roy Tuttle for  
providing information.

Gordon Cummings  
August 1981

If you find mistakes or have additional information about any of the one-room schools such as dates built, closed, or present use, please drop me a note.