

SCHOOLHOUSE MUSEUM

The earliest schools in rural America were held in homes and churches. Next came one-room structures built every few miles near country cross roads. In 1812 public school education was authorized in New York State. Teachers were from the locality whenever possible and lived in homes near the school. Within and outside these neighborhood schools, children ages 5 and up, for eight years learned their three R's, and about the natural environment that surrounded them.

This bucolic scene started to change during the early years of the twentieth century. Schools with more and more rooms were built in the larger population centers. Four years of high school were added. The gradual combination of all-season roads with improved snow plows, and school buses gradually brought the enlarged school district movement. In a few short decades came the consolidation of the central schools into larger districts. Bigger was equated by school leaders with better and more cost effective education.

One-room schools have been largely abandoned. Some were torn down for lumber to be used in other buildings. Some were converted on site into houses. Others were moved to become garages, shops, and farm buildings. A few in sparsely populated areas remain. The last one in the Southern Cayuga District remained open until 1962. Several throughout the country have been restored as schoolhouse museums. One is located on State Route 34-B in the hamlet of King Ferry, N.Y., Town of Genoa, Cayuga County.

This particular school was built about 1840 between King Ferry and Aurora. It was abandoned in 1931. In 1987 it was acquired by the Genoa Historical Association. Volunteers moved the 36'L X 24'W X 18'H structure two miles, placed it on a new foundation, restored it inside and out to convert it into a Schoolhouse Museum. The story of its preservation is documented in a photo album entitled HOW DID THEY DO THAT?

Changes in rural schools over the years can be seen in the photo exhibits that line the walls of the Museum. You are invited to take a self-guided tour starting in the small cloak room at the front entrance. Proceed clockwise to view exhibits of schools of yesteryears in Aurora, King Ferry, Genoa, and Sherwood, and the current Southern Cayuga Central School. At each stop are photo albums with brief historical accounts of past school activities.

Fourth grade students visit the Museum where a former one-room school teacher shares experiences of earlier school days. A re-enactment comparing past and present methods of teaching the 3 R's is being planned. The public will be invited to participate. Talk with Gordon Cummings about this idea.