



Historical White Lake

Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmatic

— Part 1 of 3

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The first Mouth School was originally a log cabin with a dirt floor, built in 1849, and located on the northside of Old Channel Trail near the Lau Road intersection. It caught fire and burned. Pat Powers is listed as the first teacher. A second Mouth School was built on the bluff overlooking the Old Channel Bayou near the Hamilton property. It also burned. Mrs. L. M. Bennet taught in 1855, followed by her sister, Mrs. Agnes Smith in 1856, and Mary Ann Hazelton in 1857. Amy Brown succeeded Ms. Hazelton. The third Mouth School was built in 1864 near the site of the current tennis courts on Indian Bay Road. This building also burned in November 1900. Helga Peterson was the teacher at the time. By January 1901, the fourth Mouth School was built at the same site. In 1957, a new school was built across the road from this building. It was an independent school until 1967 when it was consolidated with Montague. The last building housed elementary pupils through the fifth grade.

There was another schoolhouse built in the early 1860s, north of the Mouth. This school was known as the Germantown School, but the name was changed to Pershing after the First World War. Later it was moved to a site about two miles further north and was used until it consolidated with Montague School around 1951. The White River Township used the school as their township hall for many years. Due to its deteriorating condition, it was determined to be more economical to replace the old school building than to try to repair it. So it was donated to the fire department who used it as a training exercise in 1999 after the present township hall building was built.

Montague Area Public Schools began in 1864 when moderator D. Leitch, director J. Heald and assessor E. Knudsen organized the Board of Education. A tax was levied in September of 1865 that funded the construction of the first school house, which was built on Sheridan Street between Williams and Knudsen Streets.

In 1875, a white brick structure spanning three stories was constructed. The \$16,000 school included a belfry and a cupola. The school was located at the site of Oehrli Elementary School on Knudsen Street. In November 1919, the school burned down, but it was rebuilt in 1921. School was held in various churches during the rebuilding period.

About 1885 another school was built on the North Hill and was known as The Holland School. This building was two stories high, consisted of four classrooms and two teachers; but this school only went to the third grade. It was used for about 13 years and by 1902 was used only for basketball practice. From 1907



to 1910 it was the site of the Empire Knitting Mill.

By 1898, both schools were operating with eight teachers. Nonresident pupils were admitted to the High School at a \$1 per month tuition. All text books were free and a regular curriculum was taught. A class of ten graduated from the first class and one of them was Nellie B. O'Connell Chisholm.

Another schoolhouse was built in the area was called the Trading Post School. Originally on the side of George Fehrenbach's mill, it was later moved farther west to the side of the James Reavey home on Fruitvale Road. One of the early teachers was 15 year old Nellie B. Chisholm. This was her first teaching job after graduating from high school.

In the late 1880s the Maple Grove School was built. It was located on the present Old Channel Trail and Anderson Road. It was the first Standard School in the county. In 1907, while Nellie B. Chisholm was teaching in this school, she became the first woman to run for the office of County School Superintendent. She held that office for many years and started the PTA.

Maple Grove, along with the Trading Post, Mears and the Redding schools 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 property of George Lindrup.

The Montague School on Knudsen was the first consolidated school in the County under the Smith-Hughes Act, which allowed such subjects as Home Economics, Agriculture and Manual training. It had three busses and about 350 students in all. An addition was added and in 1956 a new high school was built. In 1959 still another school was built as an intermediate and was named the Nellie B. Chisholm.

The Knudsen school is now called the R. R. Oehrli Elementary School after Raymond Robert Oehrli who served as superintendent for 36 years. He was hired by Montague Schools in 1929, at the age of 25, when the school system had 285 students and eight teachers. When he retired in 1965, there were over 1,000 students and 55 teachers.