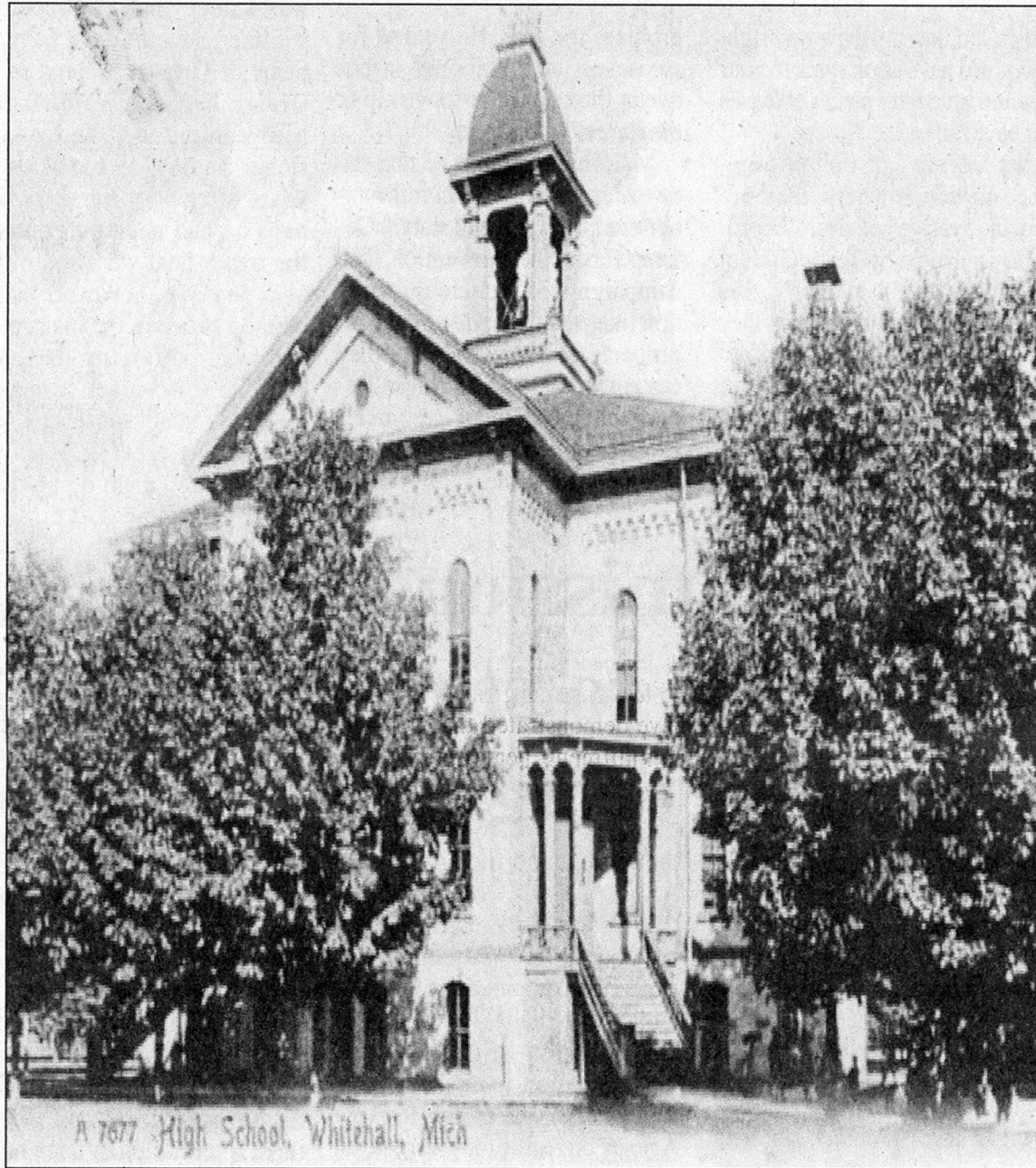


## Historical White Lake



## Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmatic — Part 2 of 3

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White Lake Historical Society

Other schools within the Montague School area included: Gee which was on the corner of Lamos and Meinert Park roads; Sumner which was originally built in 1866; Pine Grove, Flower Creek which was located on the Randall Fordham farm with Don Tower as the first teacher; Green which was dedicated in 1877 and operated for 72 years before burning to the ground in December 1949; Mouth and Rothbury.

Another interesting thing 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 went.

Usually the schools were open only two or three months of the year because of the poverty of the settlers and the need for the help from even the small children to make out in a pioneer community.

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 was searched to find 10 pupils which would make the district eligible for state aid. A room was obtained over a vacant store and Miss Ellen Foley was the teacher. In 1862 the district felt a need to economize and used a log cabin built by Capt. Hanson at the foot of Colby Street.

With public money having been used up in the winter of 1864, the school was closed, but in the spring Miss Phoebe Clark started it back up again. In the summer of 1865 Mr. Slocum gave the school district two lots at the southeast corner of Division and Slocum streets and the White School was built there. The school could accommodate 50 pupils and was crowded the first term, probably due to students coming from miles around.

Three years later the district had to build a sec-

ond school, the Brown School, alongside the first one. The next winter, the district had to take on an office room on North Colby Street to house the extra pupils. In 1869 Brown School added a second story and the school was divided into primary, grammar and high school departments. The staff consisted of a principal and three teachers. In 1870 it was necessary to add a story to the White School.

In 1879 the former junior high school building was completed on the southeast corner of Sophia and Livingston, out in the midst of the oak grubs. At the time, parents complained about the building being so far away from the center of town.

The building of a Central School had been discussed for years, but work did not begin until about June 1, 1878. The 55-by-88 foot building with an addition of 16-by-33 feet was three stories tall including the basement. \$15,000 was earmarked for the construction.

The brick school had a basement and two floors. The first floor consisted of four rooms. The north half of the floor designated for First and Second Intermediate students. Two of the rooms were 28-by-40 and two were 28-by-35. Miss Ida Widoe was in charge of one of the First Intermediate classes and Miss Cora Heald the other. Miss Lillie Ruggles presided over the Second Intermediate students. The second floor was occupied by grammar departments and the high school department and was divided into three rooms. The largest was 55-by-44 feet and was used as a hall with a capacity of 300. The high school was presided over by the Principal A. W. Slayton. The grammar school was presided over by Miss A. E. Ring.

Two rooms were later added in the basement and rooms filled out for the janitor, housing being part of his pay.

Despite the fact the district had a high school department as early as 1869, the rigors of pioneer life showed no one was able to stay in school long enough to graduate. That is until Maggie Thompson, daughter of an early mill owner, became the first and only graduate in 1877. The next year Ida Widoe, daughter of a leading merchant, was the only graduate. In 15 years, up to 1892, there were only 54 high school graduates.

In 1881 the school boards of Whitehall, Dalton, Fruitland and Blue Lake townships met and set up School District No. 2, Whitehall Township. District No. 1 was the Schneider School out near Schneider Lake.