



Historical White Lake

Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmatic

— Part 3 of 3

By Barbara Bedau Brow

White Lake Historical Society

Fruitland District No. 6 – This clapboard school with its octagonal belfry was erected in 1883. The school was built by Thomas Keilor on land donated by John McNeil. Students attended class here from 1883 until May 1948 when Fruitland Township School District consolidated with Whitehall. In 1961 the school was donated to the White Lake Community Club. It was deeded to Fruitland Township in 1990.

In 1895 the state law required there be at least five months of school each year. In 1900 the local school board voted that there be 10 months of school a year. In 1903 a steam heating system was put in the school and coal replaced the many cords of wood previously stacked in the school yard.

As an indication of the wages in those days, the janitor was told he could receive \$300 a year and live in the school basement or could receive \$360 if he wanted to rent a house off of the school grounds.

In 1914, the district built an addition on the east side to eliminate the basement rooms. In 1924 a gymnasium was built and equipped.

The old belfry's weight had finally taken its toll on the attic beams and in 1937 was ordered removed from the building to avoid the possibility that the bell might plunge through the roof. A stage and shower rooms were built in the gymnasium that year.

The first Whitehall High School band was started in 1929 by Louis Peterson of Ludington, who spend one day a week in Whitehall, one in Shelby, etc.

In 1941, Whitehall District No. 1 (Schneider School) united with the Whitehall School to form the Whitehall Township School district. The Whitehall district then had a total of 345 students in all 13 grades.

In 1942, Mrs. Arthur Hall and Mrs. Arnold Panzl, on behalf of the P.T.A., sponsored a hot lunch project designed to serve 125 pupils a day. Wilson School (Fruitland No. 4) and Blue Lake No. 4 and 5 joined Whitehall and the school enrollment was now 419.

Perry D. Chatterton became superintendent in

1943. Lakewood and Sparre school districts joined Whitehall and the name was formally changed to Whitehall Rural Agricultural School.

In 1946, White Lake School joined Whitehall and the wooden Lakewood School building was moved to Whitehall to provide additional space. Conklin district joined Whitehall and enrollment was now at 744.

In December of 1948, the new elementary school was built and opened in 1950 with an enrollment of approximately 900 students. With the rise of population from the expansion at Misco and the Whitehall Leather Company as well as the incoming chemical plants to White Lake, the school began to bulge at the seams almost as soon as the new building opened.

In August 1953, the old school bell was taken down. The bell had not been used for many years and the weight of it was a threat to some of the wooden roof supports. The bell remained as a reminder of the days when the rope extended through the school floors to the basement, and the janitor rang it to convene and dismiss school.

In 1953, Superintendent Wm. D. Munroe campaigned for a \$650,000 bond issue for a new high school. He was successful but died suddenly before work could even get started. The building project was completed under the direction of Superintendent John Jacobs and was again crowded almost before the doors opened.

In 1956, Melvin B. Lubbers succeeded Mr. Jacobs as superintendent and the following year found himself campaigning for a \$2,200,000 bond to permit the building of additions to the elementary and high school buildings, as well as a new building to be used as the senior high school, to handle the total enrollment of 1,800 students.

Dedication of the new high school building took place in May 1960. The former high school building became the junior high and the elementary school housed kindergarten through fourth grade and special education.

With the building of the Elementary School in 1950 and the Senior High School in 1954, the old building became less necessary. So, after serving the area for so many years, was torn down in July 1960.