

THE PEACHAM PATRIOT

PEACHAM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Peacham School: 1973–79

Last August, Bill Marshall gave an account of the history of The Peacham School as part a series sponsored by PHA and the library. This article is based on Bill's talk, supplemented by a few other sources.

From 1797 on, the Peacham Academy had provided an outstanding secondary education to area students in its impressive building on the Town Green. The Academy closed its doors in 1971, leaving Peacham without its own high school. Three local educators—Bill Rough, David Magnus, and Bill Marshall—decided to explore the possibility of creating a new independent school based on progressive educational principles.

The founders spent a year researching different models and identifying programs that met their educational goals. They worked with the Vermont Department of Education to obtain certification that would allow the school to receive tuition from area towns. They assembled a board of trustees that included notable Peachamites: Bob Fuehrer, George Kempton, Frank Randall, Thelma White, Bill Lederer, and others.

In March, 1973 they held a meeting at the Peacham Elementary School where they described the program the school proposed to offer and introduced some of the faculty. Over 100 community members attended and gave their support. By the end of the evening 29 families had signed on. Recruitment of students in surrounding areas continued through the spring. The founders obtained grants from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Edward E. Ford Foundation to support initial expenses and the first-year budget. The Peacham School opened in September, 1973 with



Photo courtesy of Peacham Historical Association

Peacham School group photo (back to front): Jay Craven, Brad Noyes, Margie McGandy, Katie Greene, Wendy Philips, Mandy Colon, Annie Kempton, Phyllis McKenzie, Shawn Arnold, Martin Bertolini, Bill Marshall, Larry Skoller, Carl Marcotte, Lance Goodwin.

56 students, ages 12–18, at the former Academy building.

From the start, the school embodied the founders' belief in the inherent curiosity and motivation of teen-agers. Students had a strong voice in the school's affairs. A Select Board of six students and a faculty member considered issues affecting the school and made recommendations at weekly all-school meetings. Students and faculty had equal votes on matters of course offerings, budgeting, rules and regulations.

The wider community and region were as important to learning as the conventional classroom. In addition to a strong emphasis on the "3 R's," students participated in activities outside the school walls: interviewing locals about their lives and work; building a log cabin with tools used by early colonists; hiking in the White Mountains, canoeing on the Connecticut River, and biking in Quebec; visiting their legislators in DC; and performing a variety of community services.

Drama Workshop was a major part of the curriculum. Students produced both original and well-known plays; their production of *Godspell* toured throughout Vermont. Interdisciplinary education was built into the curriculum. When students performed Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, teachers used the play to explore its themes in history, literature and psychology workshops. A weekly film series enriched the interdisciplinary program. Students were able to focus on a particular interest—for example, pottery, improvisation, or chemistry—during in a four-week "semester" in January.

"The New Peacham School," an article by Lindy Hough that appeared in *Vermont Life* in the fall of 1977, described the author's visit to the school:

A drummer is going wild on five different drums with foot-pedaled cymbals and brushes. ... Development director

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LETTER FROM THE PHA PRESIDENT

A Lesson in Humility, and Beautiful Things to Come

It is always a good idea to assume there is much you don't know. This is especially true when you become involved with the association that has a long, distinguished history of collecting, conserving and presenting the history of our town. Some ignorance is inevitable (if not excusable), as time passes and the people involved change. I realized this recently when I began reviewing old copies of the Patriot and discovered that some themes of our recent summer program—quilts and one-room schoolhouses, for example—were explored thoroughly in past years. This has led us to try to understand better what we have, what has been done, and how we can build on the work of the past.

We thought a good way to start would be to focus on our collections. Two things have happened to make our archives ever more fascinating. First, with the move to a much more spacious facility, we can literally see things better and understand more fully the richness of what we have been given. Second, this facility has inspired people to make wonderful new donations, knowing that they will be safe and well cared for.

We propose to use this summer's exhibition in the Historic House to link work done by past archivists and historians with current knowledge in the following way: each member of the board will choose an object from the archives they want the public to be sure to see, objects they think are especially beautiful or interesting, and that have stories to tell about the town. Each person will think how best to present the object, investigating what is known about it, what research has been done on it in the past, and how we might look at it with fresh eyes today. It might be the exquisite graduation dress of a young woman at Peacham Academy; the poignant letter home from a Peacham soldier in the Civil War; a fabulous poster of a play put on by the experimental Peacham School, Inc.; a beautiful tool from one of the industries now long gone from the town. There is a long list of great possibilities.

We are excited about sharing these things with you. Starting July 4, the Historical House exhibition will be open; stop by. We are sure you are going to be intrigued and delighted!

JOHANNA BRANSON



Photo courtesy of Peacham Historical Association

Peacham School continued from p.1

Judy Pransky is collecting her baby from a group of students only too happy to hold it for a minute. A group of students around a study table in the library are reading and doing homework... Bill Marshall is about to conduct a class in Life Styles focusing on alternatives for working women after high school ... The film-making class is about to show the rushes of a film using children from a local day-care center. There are no classes being cut, ... no games between students and teachers involving points for good behavior.

The school was not for everyone. Some students found the loose structure and lack of formal discipline challenging and some transferred to more traditional schools. But most students thrived. A number of alumni attended Bill Marshall's talk and spoke enthusiastically about their experiences.

A combination of factors led to the school's closing in 1979. The Peacham Academy building had been severely damaged in a fire in August, 1976 that left it unusable. Classes were moved to an unused dormitory rented from the Peacham Academy Corporation. The Corporation sold the building to an out-of state-developer for elder housing. Attempts to find alternative space were unsuccessful. Enrollment declined, and the school's financial situation worsened. George Kempton, chairman of the board of trustees, announced the impending closure in late May, 1979. The board declared that the final graduation ceremony would *"be an open celebration of Peacham School in appreciation of the forces of love and human strength that have been the motivating forces behind our school, and to show that those forces ... are now and will continue to be present and strong in our community."* (R.D, May 26, 1979).

JANE ALPER

A Short History of Deweysburg Gore, Part 3: The Way-Phillips Gypsy Camp

Part 1 and 2 in our Deweysburg series explored the settlement and early government of the Deweysburg Gore land tract, its poverty and economic hardships, and the eventual division and annexation of the township into neighboring Peacham and Danville. In part 3 we will now take a look at the history of Abenaki Indians in the Gore.

The book *People of Peacham*, includes a cellar hole map with an area of Deweysburg noted as “The Way-Phillips Gypsy Camp,” Stovepipe Alley, “Rouser Town,” and “Paradise Alley.” Clearly these labels did not denote an affluent area, and by today’s standards, could be considered derisive colloquial names for the local inhabitants. Deweysburg’s “gypsy camp” was located at on the northern edge of Peacham (heading toward West Danville) in an area between the Bayley-Hazen Road and Keiser Pond. “Gypsies,” the term used on the map, referred to nomadic Abenaki Indians who would seasonally camp in this area, and had been doing so for hundreds of years

The northern Vermont Abenaki are known today as the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk-Abenaki, part of the Algonquin Nation. Coosuk is also sometimes spelled as Cowasuck and means “people by the white pines.” The word Abenaki has an Algonquian root meaning “people from the east (or dawn.)” Their native land here in Vermont has traditionally been known as N’dakinna.¹

Estimates show that approximately 10,000 Abenakis lived in Vermont 400 years ago. With the arrival of Europeans, trade developed with the French and English who wanted furs in exchange for metal tools and cloth. Europeans also brought diseases such as small pox, typhus and influenza,² and by the time Deweysburg was settled, only a fraction of the original population remained. It is estimated that fewer than 1000 Abenakis remained in all of Vermont following the American Revolution. Many Abenakis retreated to Quebec or moved west.³

The principal Abenaki village in our region was named Koas (aka Cowass),

located near Newbury, VT. Each year the tribe gathered for the planting season in the meadows of Koas, then at the end of the season, dispersed back throughout N’dakinna. One part of the tribe traveled north along the Connecticut River, utilizing the Bayley-Hazen Road (laid out to follow an early Abenaki trail) to return to Deweysburg. The Abenakis grew corn, beans, and squash, supplemented by hunting, fishing, and the gathering of wild foods. The area near Keiser Pond was a seasonal hunting and fishing area. Buildings consisted of wigwams, but records state that occasionally makeshift, oblong huts were built.

There are few records of the Abenaki settlement in Deweysburg; what we have today are primarily oral accounts. Members of the tribe were often ostracized by the white population, and local settlers who mingled with the tribe were often demeaned. However, one oral account by Beverly Bacon was provided to writer Rita Morse in 1967:

In 1800, during the time that the present Bacon house was built, a tribe of peaceful Indians (Abenakis) inhabited the hilltop. At first, they were reluctant to move, so they stayed in their wigwams on land now the family’s front lawn.

After a while they retreated to nearby Keiser Pond, but occasionally came to the hilltop and sat with their backs against the buildings. Those Indians appeared friendly and would often borrow a small brass kettle and other cooking pans from Mary Ann, Beverly Bacon’s Great Grandmother. Upon returning them they were polished brightly and in the kettle was always a fresh caught fish or chose (sic) piece of venison.



Abenaki wigwam with birch barks covering.
Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

Other oral histories come from the Woodard family of Deweysburg. Descendants of some family members still live in Peacham, but others moved north to Quebec, west to Michigan and to the west coast. The family has several extensive genealogical sites online, and almost every branch of the family, no matter where they ended up, recounts a long family tradition that they have Abenaki lineage. One such story involves Jephtha Woodward who was said to have fathered two children listed in the 1790 census with an Abenaki woman.

These oral histories are quite hotly disputed. The difficulty lies in the fact that intermarriage with Abenakis was scorned, and most records for such liaisons do not exist. Census records do not list these marriages and/or children, and such common-law marriages would not have been reported due to discrimination and prejudice. To date, no DNA evidence has been found to confirm the Woodard family’s Abenaki connection, but an online site to report Woodard DNA results has been established.⁵

Further complicating Abenaki genealogical research is the fact that Jesuit missionaries in northern VT and Canada baptized Indians, and names were changed and Anglicized. Often new biblical surnames replaced the original native names. However, one clue lies with names beginning with “St.” such as “St. John” or “St. Francis,” names commonly given to Indians. Original Abenaki names went underground, or were pronounced phonetically to resemble an English name.⁶ Women did not always take their husband’s surnames, and if an original name survived, it was handed down in secret within a family.⁷

Interestingly, in *People of Peacham*, we have a genealogical listing for “Gypsy Jake Way.” Gypsy Jake was so-named because of his marriage to an Abenaki woman. His family record was not included in the book, nor was his full lineage, as so often happened in these circumstances. But we do have other genealogical records for this man. Jacob Way was born c. 1834 to Nathan Way (b. 1803) and Sally Woodward (b. 1806) of Deweysburg. In July of 1854, he married Diantha M. Smith of Woodbury, an Abenaki woman. We know that she was born in Hardwick

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The Peacham Historical Association lost three long-time friends and supporters over the past few months: Joe Miller, Sue O'Brien, and Beppy Brown. We remember them here.



Beppy Brown
Photo courtesy of Rob Brown



Joe Miller outside the Blacksmith Shop.
Photo by Ed Schneider



Sue O'Brien
Photo by Julie Lang

Beppy Brown

PHA and the town of Peacham lost a good friend last July with the passing of Beppy (Mary Elizabeth) Brown. She and her husband Ed (PHA president from 1979-1991) honeymooned in Peacham in 1948, spent summers here for many years, and when Ed retired in 1976 they moved here. She served on the board of the Peacham Library, as a reading aide at the Peacham School, and as an active member of PHA. Beatrice Ring recalls her hilarious Ghost Walk performances with her great friend, Joan Blankinship, and her rip roaring parties. Martha Ide, Joan Blankinship's daughter, describes Beppy as "very kind, a social creature, smart, well-read, fun to be with, and a great conversationalist." At her funeral last August, her son Rob Brown summed up her legacy in these words:

It's a sad occasion, but make no mistake: this is a celebration. Today is Beppy's 93rd birthday and if she saw all of us gathered together, she'd break into one of her radiant, all-embracing smiles and say "How wonderful. Let's throw a party."

Remembering Joe Miller

A craftsman, one of the guiding lights for the restoration of the Goodenough blacksmith shop.

Death took no holidays in 2017. In July PHA lost a pillar of our efforts to preserve the skills and technologies of Peacham's early days. As he had done for many years, Joe Miller was welcoming visitors to the Ashbel Goodenough Blacksmith Shop on the Fourth of July, even though he came on crutches and had to let other smiths work at the forge and anvil. His devotion to the shop goes back to its acquisition in 1997. At that time, it was essentially a brick shell with a dirt floor; it took a lot of imagination and hard work to redevelop it into the shop we see today.

In addition to the restoration, Joe curated a large collection of metal-working tools. His favorites were the strange ones that we had to guess at just how they were used. In the early days, blacksmiths made wrought iron tools for the community and for themselves

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Susan O'Brien: A Remembrance

For the final twenty years of her life, Susan and I were good friends. I came to admire her as a fellow book-lover devoted to family, friends and community. Our friendship grew during our Peacham Library board term together that ended in 2001 when Becky Lafferty was still librarian. From 2002-2016, Susan, Becky, and I enjoyed an annual autumn tea to reminisce and to talk about books and especially Peacham people and history.

"Sue" (as I called her), came to live in Peacham in 1939 with her parents when she was eleven. Sue's parents bought the historic Watts Farm on East Hill, where they summered for more than two decades. In 1960, Sue and her husband Stuart purchased the farm and raised their five children there.

Sue began absorbing Peacham's rural culture immediately upon her arrival. PHA owns a CD containing an oral history interview with Sue conducted by Jo Chrisman in 2004. It beautifully captures Sue's endearing

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as well. They would adapt existing tools to handle special-purpose projects—the tool became the workpiece as it was bent and formed to better serve the larger task at hand. Thanks to Joe and some generous contributors, we can use our collection to explain and demonstrate the special methods of farriers, wheelwrights, loggers and farmers.

Joe was also a skilled artisan working with wood. We have several benches of his design. They are graceful, comfortable and durable; they reflect the values and skills of the man who built them.

ED SCHNEIDER

Lorna Quimby adds that Joe was her “right-hand man in caring for the Historic House. A great loss!”

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essence and records her tales involving over 40 significant Peacham people, a research treasure for PHA archives.

From 2006 through 2016 in summers, Sue and I served together as docents at the Historical House. She acted in the very first Ghost Walk in 1997, and again in 2001. She participated as a Ghost Walk guide (docent) in several other years.

Sue devoted over four decades to Peacham Library, during which she served variously as board member; bookmobile librarian and driver; co-librarian with Frances “Frank” Randall from 1973-1976; and curator of used books for the library’s book sales. She considered the library a “focal point” of Peacham. She left a fine legacy: her granddaughter Jenny Roy has worked as the Saturday library assistant now for over five years.

JOSETTE LYDERS

Deweysburg continued from p. 3

around 1833, but no additional family records have been found. Their marriage was listed in the Danville North Star as having been officiated by Reverend Archelaus Sias. Gypsy Jake lived in the former Deweysburg close to the area designated as the “gypsy camp.” He and Diantha had 4 four sons and five daughters. Their daughter Helen married into the Nunn family, another daughter married into the Phillip (aka Phillips) family, and a third daughter married into the Hunt family near Keiser Pond. The Nunn and Phillip families were rumored to have had other family ties to Abenakis. It is from these affiliations that the Way-Phillips Gypsy Camp name was established, and it is likely that these families allowed seasonal Indian camping on their property in this area. There are presumed Indian mounds and burials in this vicinity, and artifacts have been retrieved from fields near a known encampment site.

In part 4 we will explore the 1807 VT Governor’s Election and the religious and political divisions that developed between Deweysburg, Peacham and Danville.

Author’s Note: Abenaki history and genealogical work are sensitive. Years of discrimination and the eventual forced sterilization of Vermont Abenakis in the early 20th century have made research very difficult. Additionally, there is controversy surrounding those who claim Abenaki heritage without definitive proof; and remaining secrecy can still be found in Abenaki families. It is not the author’s intent to fuel any controversy over Abenaki lineage.

SUSAN CHANDLER

- 1 Wiseman, Frederick Matthew. *The Voice of the Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation*, 2001
- 2 Vermont Historical Society website-Exploring Abenaki History
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Morse, Rita. *Burlington Free Press* , November 07, 1967, Page 09
- 5 www.mcnerneywinkler.com/Woodward_dna4. New England Group II - Woodward DNA Genealogy6www.nedoba.org. Wabanaki Genealogy -The Problem of Names.
- 7 Calloyway, Colin G., *Western Abenakis of Vermont 1600-1800*, 1994.



Photo by Jack Gill

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Memories of Peacham Congregational Church: A Conversation with Thelma White



Photo: Julie Lang

Editor's note: In January, 2003, Marilyn Magnus spoke with Thelma White about her early memories of the Peacham church. The following are excerpts from their conversation.

Marilyn: Thelma's going to talk about what she first remembers when they moved here and her parents got going to the Congregational Church here in town.

Thelma: It was somewhat different then because you rented the pews. You had your own pew and you rented it. I was only six. They didn't have enough pews at that time, so we had to share one with a lady, Lydia Strobridge. She was a very tiny, short person, even smaller than my mother. She would come in and my dad was courteous enough to let her in and he never got to sit beside his wife. [Lydia] crossed her ankles and swung her legs, and I'd see that and I'd do the same, and get a jab in the ribs for that.

M: Does that mean the whole church was filled?

T: It wasn't completely filled but [the pews] were all spoken for. There were several quite big families: the Cooley

family, the Thresher family, and everybody went to church then with the whole kit and caboodle from the oldest to the youngest of the kids. My parents [admired] Reverend Warner, who was an Irishman. My mother was practically all Irish even though she was seventh generation, and I guess it appealed to her. He was an emotional speaker; he used to cry sometimes. He was here 20 years or more. He married a Quaker lady. She didn't come to the church much.

M: How many hours was the service?

T: The service would be an hour long. For a while they had Sunday school for adults at the same time [as for] the younger people. I remember getting a very weird picture in Sunday school in my mind about communion. You were drinking the blood and it seemed to me frightening. It was like we had become cannibals. I had an awful time getting rid of that picture. I was in awe of my Sunday School teacher, Alice Welch. Later on, when she taught here at East Peacham in the early years of our marriage, she boarded with us and I didn't find her so scary.

I sang my first solo in church when I was ten. I always loved to sing and I wanted to sing in the choir, but you had to wait until you were 16 before they let you into the choir. And I ruined it, my first time singing in the choir.

M: How did you do that?

T: Well, I was a giggler. That winter my dad rented the house where Nancy Bundgus lives, and Phyllis Craig, now Phyllis Graves, lived on the other side of the church. That was the Craig farm. She and I never thought we could get by a weekend without staying overnight either one place or the other. The night before my first time in the choir the bed went down at my house and we giggled all night. Dad jacked it up; we hid in the closet so he wouldn't see us in our night clothes. Well, we stood up for the anthem and I happened to look down and there was Phyllis and her family sitting down near the front, and she began to giggle and I giggled. My mother was furious.

M: How old were you when you joined the church?

T: I was 15. When I joined I was the only one who hadn't been baptized at birth, and I remember being embarrassed because I had to be baptized [at the service.]

M: Did they have a youth group?

T: Reverend Warner was awfully good with the teenage boys. He'd go to their deer camps and so on and so forth. They had a good thing going for teenagers, older teenagers. When I joined the church, we had a very active youth group. We had parties, and sometimes while the Methodist church was going on we had some events with them upstairs in what is now the town hall.

They had what they called the missionary society. I think they did things [to help people.] They used to say that the Methodist people prayed for people in India and the Congregational women sold for the people in India. There was a funny old guy, Jim Clark. He was huge and had his pants tied around him with a string, and his bare skin bulged out over. He went to [the Methodist] church. He gave a long prayer and he said, "Give the poor people of Africa, India, or whatever, a barrel of flour; give them a barrel of salt."

M: When I first worked as a public health nurse in the state of Vermont they still had the Overseer of the Poor. This is before we had welfare. Every town had their Overseer. If you needed to be "on the town," which was the term they used then, if you had a husband, your husband was given work with the road crew or something for the town, and the town would then provide you with some food or whatever it was you needed.

T: Here they had a home. If you had to be taken in by the Overseer of the Poor you moved to that home. I think it was up somewhere near Chandler's. If you were able to work they used you for taking care of the people, because some of them were unable to take care of themselves.

M: What did the church do to help others locally?

T: I think my mother was with the mission group. They knit and sewed and sold them at their bazaar. My folks were always taking food to people when they were sick. I don't know whether that was through the church.

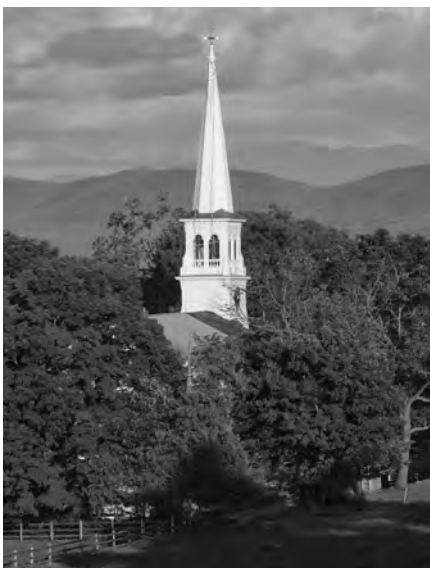
M: Can you remember any interesting anecdotes about the choir?

T: Well I remember one time when Howard Smith was the organist. We stood up to sing and he began playing, and it didn't seem to fit anything we had in front of us. The rector began to look puzzled and went around to look, and come to find out he had the wrong [music].. They were so afraid of speaking out in those days, where now they would speak right out.

M: Do you remember anything—any episodes or anecdotes—about the services?

T: I remember a cat coming up and walking down the aisle one time, which got us all excited in the choir loft. They used to have a lot of trouble, before they got screens, with bats. We had robes with white collars and that seemed to attract them. You heard some little noises that weren't musical sometimes when the bats were swinging around.

M: So what did you do if one got on you?



T: You screamed and you did like this [demonstrating].

M: Do you remember anything about winter services?

T: They used to have the services downstairs in the winter because it was a smaller congregation, and they had it in the Sunday school room. My brother made an altar for downstairs; he was a carpenter. I think that saved some fuel.

M: When did they stop doing that?

T: I think when they got the oil furnace. And they discovered that the cold wasn't good for the organ, so that probably had something to do with it.

There was a pump that had to go up and down all the time while the organ was being played, so they had a pumper. Once in a while the pumper would fall asleep during the sermon. The organist would go to play the last hymn and nothing would come out.

M: Do you remember any weddings in there or funerals?

T: I remember my daughter's wedding. It was one of the really big ones because they had to bring in chairs; she had over 200 guests.

We had one of the first lady ministers around, Ruth Howell: well, her name was Ruth Horseman when she came. The man she married was a math teacher down in McIndoe's Academy. I remember they had children, and one member was fussing because she was now giving more time to her family.

M: How did people take to having a woman minister?

T: They took to that very well. She was a wonderful preacher; she got around and visited and had a meal with you. She was something else!

M: Do you remember any particular controversy that got people all stirred up?

T: I remember we had a minister who had this thing about Russia, and it wasn't an awfully good time to be promoting Russia too much, in church

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anyway. He was called a Red, which was kind of too bad because he had done quite a lot for Bridges for Peace.

M: Yeah, that was Richard Haugh-Ross.

T: One of the things I remember about getting to church was how delightful it was to ride in a sleigh in the wintertime. We had a buffalo robe. On Saturday night we heated stones which we put in a wooden case with slats across the top so heat could come up through both on the feet and hands. So we had those to keep warm.

Each family had their bells, and each was a little different in sound. The Chandlers had Morgan horses, and just as soon as they got out of the village they would race all the way home from church up the corner hill.

M: Church sounds as if it was one of the major social events in the week.

T: Yes, it was. That was where you got to see others, and so it was important to go. I think the church had something to do with what they called the Farmer's Dinner. Once a year they had this big Farmer's Dinner at the church. It was an all-day affair, with a speaker. You never missed that.

We also had a school fair at the church. There were seven schools and each school vied with the others on handcrafts. The kids brought their stuff, including cooking, and there were prizes. Almost anything that was big enough had to be at the church because it was the town hall, you know.

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Pictures from PHA's annual fundraiser last August at the Green Bay schoolhouse (aka Dart Thalman's house).



(left) Dart Thalman, President Johanna Branson, and guest speaker Lois White.

(below) Children playing with old fashioned toys.

Photos courtesy of Johanna Branson

