

# History of McCutchanville School

*From a Manuscript Found in the Willard Library Archives*

Submitted by Patricia Sides, Archivist

*Editor's Note* -- The introductory page to this manuscript, which was signed "Mary A. Johns," reads as follows: *This account of the growth of the McCutchanville School was written for the Home Coming of former pupils and teachers of this school. This reunion was held on the school grounds July 4, 1917. The facts told here were gotten from the oldest pupils who had attended school in these school houses, from some old papers and records kept by old citizens who have passed on. The following persons greatly assisted in this account. Mr. James Erskine Sr., Miss Jane McCutchan, Mrs. Harriet Brown, Mrs. Margaret Hooker, Mrs. Sarah Whitehead, and Mr. Alexander Perry*

## History

The first people who permanently settled here were the Erskine family. In the fall of 1819, Wm. Erskine purchased a small family boat at Pittsburg, Pa. He, together with five members of his family, paddled this way down the Ohio River. The family reached its destination on Christmas day 1819. The weather was so bitterly cold that the river froze over that night. This place was a dense woods, dreary and most uninviting. Only a little cluster of log huts huddled together on the river bank. This was the nucleus of the future Evansville. Mr. Erskine rented one of these log houses and lived there until spring. He then bought the present Erskine farm from the government at \$1.25 per acre. Immediately he set to work to build the old log barn of hickory logs that until recently stood on the brow of the hill just below the house. In this barn the family lived until fall. During the summer of 1820 the old Erskine house was built on the top of the hill above the barn.

This place was not McCutchanville then, in fact there was nothing here to name. The family was alone, they had no neighbors nearer than four or five miles and these were new comers who were living in tents.

Not until 1833 were there enough pioneers within a radius of five or six miles to make it necessary to build a school house. The place to locate it was thoroughly discussed. In that day the ague was a disease most dreaded; as living on low ground was thought to be the cause of it, all early settlers built their houses on the hills. For this reason, to be out of danger, our forefathers placed the new log school on the highest point of land in the community, thus insuring us a most healthful location.

This school house was built in the woods nearly opposite the house in which R. R. Henry now lives. This little log cabin was only about 18' x 20', it nestled up under the big oak and hickory trees nears the old trail that later became the Petersburg Road. There was a little clearing near that served as a playground for the children.

This school house had one six paned window, set high in the end for protection, as it contained the first glass used in the township. A great wooden door was set in the side, and it was hung on clumsy wooden hinges. When the latch became warped the door creaked dismally to and fro when the wind blew.

The floor was made of rough puncheons poorly fitted together. The desks were fasten[ed] along the wall and end of the room; just one long board that sloped a little. They were both of the same height but in case a child was not tall enough to reach the desk a block of wood was placed for him to stand on. Sometime the boy was induced to stand on the round side of the block. This gave a mischievous boy a chance to push it, thus tumbling the writer on the floor creating a roar of laughter.

The seats were placed in the center of the room. They were backless and made of rough puncheons. Two holes were bored in either end into which were inserted rough splintery legs of uneven lengths. The pupils rocked back and forth on the uneven seats as they studied their spelling. The[ir] legs projected an inch or two through the

seats, a rough and tumble scuffle resulted in order to determine who must sit on the ends. These legs also served as hammers for the boys who filled their pockets with hickory nuts while on their way to school.

This school was opened in the fall of 1834 by Alexander McCutchan. It was a subscription school, each pupil paid 30 cents a month. As the teacher lived in the neighborhood he did not board around among the patrons but occasionally a donation of meat, meal, or wood was given him to help pay for his work. One patron gave him five gallons of soft soap.

Instead of grading papers after school as the teacher of today does this teacher's nightly task was to make enough quill pens to supply the pupils the next day; as each family kept geese, the children took turns furnishing the quills for use in school.

The children used small glass bottles for their ink but the school supply was kept in a cow horn bottle that hung on the wall behind the teacher's desk. This was no "boughten" ink either but good home made poke berry juice.

Across the end of the building extend[ed] a log three foot from the wall and the same distance from the floor. On this log and wedged to the wall was built a chimney. The floor had not been laid up to the end but a space of dirt had been left. Directly under the chimney the fire was built. When conditions were favorable the smoke went up the chimney otherwise it circulated freely through the room.

The attendance for that winter was between 20 and 25 pupils ranging from four to twenty year. There was only one four year old, as he lived quite near it was easy for him to attend.

Not infrequently on entering the school room was it unusual to find great heaps of dirt thrown up on the floor by some burrowing animal. However that was a small matter for regular sweeping of the school room was an unheard of performance. When any sweeping was done [it was with] a broom made of buckbrush that is, very fine twigs tied to a stout stick. It was with this kind of a broom that the floor was scratched over occasionally.

In the spring of 1835 Samuel McCutchan bought the land on which the school house stood and the twenty acres east of it. By that transaction the community lost the school house. That winter Alexander McCutchan taught at Stringtown. A number of his pupils went with him on horse back. The little four year old rode behind him. These pupils came four and five miles to this school. The following are the names of six of the younger children who came. Isabel Whitehead Ruston, Susan Ingle Iglehart, John and Charles Whitehead, and James Erskine Sr.

In 1837 a larger and more commodious log school house was built nearly on the spot where Dr. Clippinger's house now stands. Mr. Ring was engaged to build it. John Erskine Sr. directed the cutting of the timber while the other patrons did the hauling. This building was a great improvement over the other one. It had five windows, the fireplace was more modern. The desks were made of pine but they were placed around the room in the same manner. These benches had backs that were not thought necessary in the first building. At one side of the building was a closet filled with wooden pegs on which caps, coats, dinner buckets, and the girls' nubias were hung. At the other side of the chimney the great sticks of wood, used in the fireplace, were stored. This wood was supplied by the patrons of the school.

The winter term began late in November and usually ran three months: closing early enough to allow the bigger boys to begin their spring work and to permit the girls to get their ash hoppers in order preparatory to making soft soap. After the winter term closed a spring term of three months was begun by a woman for a teacher. This school was for the little children who because of cold weather, bad roads, and long distances were unable to attend the winter term. In these pioneer days little attention was given to the health of the child or the spread of contagious disease. On one occasion an attack of itch spread through the school. Seemingly no attempt was made to check it. It lasted the whole winter through. Perhaps they thought as King James of England once did, that "the itch was a disease well worth the having for the satisfaction afforded by scratching."

The pioneer teachers who taught here were Mr. Kern, Wm. Atcheson, Geo. Kenny, Joel Maulby, Jas. Runcie, Jas. Vicery [Vickery?], Mr. Snively, Wm. Iglehart, Mr. Connington, Samuel Gibson, Mary Whittlesee, Sally Skeels, Mary Benjamin, and Annie Yerkes.

In 1852 this log school house was succeeded by a fram[e] building which was built nearly in the same spot. Joel Mills was the architect. This building was better lighted and heated. The old fireplace was replaced by

a stove, in which long sticks of wood were used for fuel. This school house had a black board; there were three rows of seats, the outside rows were placed against the walls. A child setting [sic] near the wall had to crawl over the other two to get out of his seat.

It became necessary at this time to have a primary room added. A very small part of the end was [partitioned] off. This room had no outside door; all the little ones hooped through the big room to get outside.

The following teachers taught in this building: Jas. Johnson, Mr. Hennessay, Wm. Atcheson, Jas. Inwood, R. P. Hooker, J. B. Perry, Ann Erskine Bradley, Anne Headen Erskine, and Wm. Gudgel. In the primary department of the new frame Mrs. Fellows [taught]. In the primary department of the last log building the following teachers taught: Eliza Atcheson Webb, Charlotte Erskine Hargrave, Ella Deising, Julia Rucker Keene, Mary Jane Keegon Allen, Fannie Keegon Hamilton.

In 1873 this old frame building was sold to Mrs. Wm. Inwood. She moved it to a site between her house and barn. For a while it was used by tenants. Dr. Armstead lived there, later it was sold and moved to an oak grove opposite the parsonage. The old building was then remodeled and is now the home of Mrs. Sarah Henry.

In Jan. 1874 the new double brick school house was opened. It stood near the point of this school yard. Here we had blackboards around the entire room and individual seats. A hall was built above the school room by the people of the community. For forty years all the social functions of the community were held here.

Thirty-five teachers have taught in this building from 1874 to 1914. But these five school houses are not the only places where skilled instruction was given. In 1858-59 Miss Ann Erskine taught a high school in the old Division, a large frame building that stood facing the fork of the road north of here. This was a pay school independent of the public school. There were about fifteen regular students who attended.

The first frame church was built in 1848; church services before this were held in the school houses: in this church in 1859 to 61 a second high school was organized by Sanders Hornbrook. Scholarships were sold for \$8.00. There was an attendance of about twenty students. These scholarships were transferable. A student holding one could attend part of the time then he could give it to some one else to use. The third high school was opened in the No. Nine school house near Erskine station in 1900. Levi Erskine Jr. was the teacher. Twenty students attended for two years after which their course was completed at Central high school. Mrs. Mary A. Johns was the teacher.

Aside from these schools from time to time there has [sic] been special classes that had a marked effect on the pupils attending. In the year 1852 Mrs. Ring, a most excellent needle woman, taught a class of twenty girls, two days every week during the summer. Each paid thirty cents a lesson. She taught so well that in the later years many of us have looked at their work with envy.

At about this time Dr. Dean taught a class in French at his home. Just how proficient they became I do not know but ten students attended. On two occasions special writing teachers instructed large classes at night in the first brick school house.

Prof. Tinker taught large singing classes for three years in the McCutchanville Hall. He always closed the term with a concert.

Eighty-three years have passed since the first school was opened here and during that time approximately fifteen hundred boys and girls have attended school here. While none of these have become very rich neither has any of these been poor enough to become a pauper; nor has any one of these served a term in the penitentiary.

These students are scattered over many states. Cards came to us from twenty-three different states. By far the largest number of these boys have become farmers but too, a goodly portion of other professions and trades have been followed. There have gone from this school one hundred and ten school teachers. Twenty-one of them are college graduates. Only in the recent years have our pupils attended the Evansville high school, but twenty have graduated there: of that number four have been val-a-dictorians and one had second honors. This school has sent out into the world twelve young men who became physicians, six who became ministers, five lawyers, four county superintendents, two trained nurses, one who became a writer, one manufacturer, one an inventor, one was elected to the state senate, one who has been noted for the bettering of homes for tenants. Quite a number have followed other trades, engineering, electricians, carpentering, and mail carriers.

This school has not been found lacking in patriotism for from this school have gone thirty-three soldiers

to the ranks of the Civil War. Namely, Robert Brodie, Jas. Brodie, John Clarke, John W. Davidson, La Salle De Bruler, John Hall, Thos. Headen, Robert Headen, Timothy Hogan, Arthur Inwood, John Jones, Joe Keipert, Anthony Korb, Nick Korb, Edward Knowles, Robert Lawrence, Abe Lawrence, Chas. McCuchan, Robert McCutchan, Wm. McCutchan, Peter McAvenue, Robert McJohnson, Arthur McJohnson, John Moffett, Chas. Moffett, Fletcher Moffett, Thos. Reed, Daniel Skeels, John Titzer, John Weitenbaugh, John Bunyan Young, and Wm. Young.

Two enlisted in the Spanish [sic] American War, Will and Walter Klippert. Andrew Kimble has served one term in the navy. Now in this present European War two of our boys have enlisted, Henry Bank in the cavalry and Herndon Doyle in the infantry.

Three years ago this modern school house was built. Now with better roads, better facilities for teaching, a broader curriculum these boys and girls have a decided advantage over us but we have left a good record here, and in the coming eighty-three years, the children who passed from here will doubtless be as far in advance of us as we are today from the little windowed cabin of eighteen thirty-four.

Doctors: W. F. Clippinger, Samuel Hawes, Enoch Keegan, Charles Keegan, Sam Laubscher, John McCutchan, Josephine Paine Herr, Will Stone, Lewis Whitehead

Dentists: Charles Danks, David Reece

Chiropractor: Maud McCutchan Roper

Ministers: Rev. H. S. Headen, Rev. C. Clippinger, Rev. Perry Nugent, Rev. John Webb, Rev. Wm. Ingle, Rev. Henry Onyet, Rev. Robert Headen, Rev. R. P. Hooker

Teachers who taught in the old brick school house from 1874-1914: Wm. Gudgel, L. Youngblood, T. H. Taylor, O. C. Charlton, \_\_\_ Templeton, \_\_\_ Williams, L. W. Gudgel, Eliza Scott, Henry Moll, Anna Headen, Dan Dieg, L. P. Doerr, L. W. Whittinghill, James Ensle, Eliose Wright, Florence Ensle, Wilbur Rough, Sallie Hayhurst, Clara Hornby, Nora Peva, Mary A. Johns, Mrs. Mary Fellows, Kate Reiber, Miss Davidson, Ida Summers, Sallie McCutchan, Mary Brown, Annic Fellows, Elizabeth Lant, Annie Perry, Anne Minton, Mary Henry, Ella McCutchan, Belle Paterson, Margaret McCutchan

[The following names of teachers who taught from 1914-1935 were added later: Lida Henry, Elnora Swope France, Sadie Huebner, Kathryn Swope Riggs, Edna McCutchan, Joyce Bailey, Eileen Connor, Isabella H. Whitehead, Carrie Reudlinger (Rendlinger?), Anna Kuhlenschmidt, Kenneth Lant]

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